Yabancı: An Autoethnography of Migration

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Abstract: In this article, I examine my own experience—as a white, American woman, an experienced second language educator, and a novice scholar of forced migration—of becoming an immigrant to Turkey. Approached as a reflexive positionality statement in preparation for my dissertation research with Syrian refugees, I explore my shifting insider and outsider roles and how they inform the evolution of my research design and personal and professional identity. I draw on BOURDIEU's theory of capital and use vignettes from my first year in Turkey to illustrate everyday struggles to navigate interactions through perplexing layers of access and exclusion; to gain social, cultural, and linguistic capital; and, ultimately, to build a life in a new country. In this way, I seek to illuminate the experience of transnational adaptation and integration from the perspective of both a language teacher and learner and a migration scholar and migrant.

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1. Introduction

A beautiful young Syrian woman collects her documents and wheels her much-older Turkish husband out of the waiting room, deftly maneuvering his chair around a corner and into Antioch's chilly, damp winter air. As my own husband exits the interview room, I hear my name called and enter, heart pounding, mouth dry. I glance around at a dozen people, presumably representatives of some government ministry or another, sitting against three walls, some smiling politely or examining me curiously, others visibly bored after two hours of interviews, barely glancing up from their smartphone screens to acknowledge me. I manage a greeting, confirm my identity to the suited man seated behind a large, gleaming desk at the center of the room—evidently the lieutenant governor—and sit daintily on the vinyl couch against the uninhabited wall. [1]

A series of rapid-fire, intrusive questions begin from a bearded man to my right holding my dossier. Although my nerves, manners, and Turkish skills thankfully do not desert me, I fail each of the apparent tests in succession. *No, I haven't converted, but I respect Islam, and after all, Christians have lived here in Antioch for two thousand years. No, I don't usually go to church here. Yes, my mother-in-law accepted me. No, my family hasn't come to visit; it's very expensive, you know. Yes, my siblings were adopted. Yes, it's common in the United States. It's important in our religion to take care of orphans. Isn't that true in Islam too? Yes, I "wanted" them. No, no children of our own yet.* The questions I had anticipated —*Who is Atatürk? Why do you want to be a Turkish citizen? How did you meet your husband? What professional skills and qualifications do you have to offer?*— never come. Simultaneously relieved and incensed, I'm ushered out as unceremoniously as I entered, back into the waiting room full of weary-looking Syrian women wrangling small children. Will I be deemed "Turkish" enough? [2]

I grew up in the working-class suburbs of Philadelphia, a tenacious, down-to-earth city of immigrants past and present, voluntary and involuntary. I am the descendent of German and Swedish immigrants, an experienced second language educator, and a novice scholar of forced migration. I became an immigrant myself on January 1, 2018, moving to the Turkish province of Hatay for my Turkish husband's new job as a university lecturer and my dissertation research about the experiences of the Syrian refugee population living in Turkey. By that time I had taken all the Turkish language courses I could find, watched countless hours of dramas on YouTube to reduce my accent and expand my vocabulary, and spent months attempting to perfect my performance as a *gelin* [bride/daughter-in-law] while spending summers with my in-laws in Ankara. I rolled *sarma* [stuffed grape leaves] and stuffed *mantı* [dumplings] while catching up on the neighborhood gossip with my *kaynana [mother-in-law]*. I monitored the level of tea in guests' glasses and poured Turkish coffee topped with delicate foam. Nine times out of ten, I managed to utter the proper polite phrases when greeting acquaintances, entering a place of business, or hearing good or bad news and to use the appropriate term of address for each person's position and age relative to mine. [3]

Yet as I settled into daily life in Hatay, I found myself feeling increasingly isolated in my transition from busy English instructor and PhD student to—by all appearances—housewife, at the mercy of government bureaucracy, and hopelessly inarticulate in my attempts to express my ideas or explain my research to new friends. Although I could speak with relative ease on familiar topics, I struggled to read even simple news articles or official notices. I became quickly exhausted after extended social interactions, the physiological result of constantly monitoring my body language and wrestling my thoughts into the grammatical structures and vocabulary that I had mastered. Self-sufficient by nature, I suddenly needed help to go to the doctor for routine check-ups, and driving legally would require returning to a driver's education course nearly two decades after I had completed it in the United States. My status as a native English speaker prompted unsolicited job offers, yet I had no work permit, and my diplomas would need to go through a costly, time-intensive equivalence process to be recognized. It seemed I had all the wrong kinds of capital. [4]

In the midst of this transition, I struggled to define exactly what I hoped to research, why it was important, and why I was qualified to investigate it. I felt a kinship with Syrians I encountered in my daily life but remained separated by language, nationality, and residency status. It would be insensitive for me to say that I understood their experiences, yet it would also be disingenuous to claim objectivity when I was struggling with some of the same challenges. This ambiguity led me to consider my positionality more intentionally, to reflect on how I have changed and been changed through the challenges of immigrating (RYAN, 2015), and how this inevitably affects my research. In this article I describe the cultural phenomenon of migration to a country with a complicated history with both migration and diversity, indeed, a country at the center of a global migration crisis (UNHCR, 2019). Through glimpses into one story, vignettes from my first year living in Turkey, I seek both to come to understand my own experience and to help others understand migration in today's world of protracted civil conflict, unprecedented displacement, contentious border politics, and rising xenophobia. [5]

I engage here in critical autoethnography, systematically reflecting on my experiences in navigating a new culture and language in order to better understand the personal and communal aspects of migration. I draw on BOURDIEU's theory of capital (1986) and PÖLLMAN's (2013) intercultural capital to examine the ways my knowledge, dispositions, and behaviors have evolved and adapted. I approach this in an attempt not only to understand the cultural phenomenon of migration from a personal rather than scholarly perspective and to practice reflexivity on my position as a white, American researcher, but also as a fellow immigrant, and to increase intersubjective understanding (CALL-CUMMINGS & ROSS, 2019) with my future participants. [6]

2. Critical Autoethnography

"Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (ELLIS, ADAMS & BOCHNER, 2011, §1).

2.1 *Auto:* The personal

I have always been drawn to narratives to understand the world: as I child I devoured historical fiction, later moving on to memoirs of travel, migration, and genocide. These stories ultimately led me to a career working with immigrants, refugees, and international students as an English as a second language teacher. In turn, the stories my students shared with me about the difficulties of starting over in a new country compelled me to pursue a doctorate in education in order to learn how to do meaningful research about these challenges. To me, facts lack depth without accompanying stories to illustrate and explain the meanings the facts represent. After all, stories are "complex, constitutive, meaningful phenomena" that teach us to understand other perspectives (§2). [7]

There was never a question whether I would pursue primarily qualitative or quantitative research for my doctoral thesis. During my coursework I conducted a small qualitative pilot study about Saudi women's experiences studying in the US, inspired by trailblazing women I had taught in university-level academic English classes. I found the meaning I sought in thick description (GEERTZ, 1973), in personal narratives that flesh out statistics about markers of student success and wellbeing. I took a position as a graduate research assistant for a qualitative methodologist, which opened up the world of epistemology and reflexivity, of critical and participatory approaches that meshed with my perspectives and personal values. I discovered that in this world it was acceptable—indeed, encouraged—to acknowledge my personal connections to the topics I researched and my stance as an advocate for my participants (FINE & TORRE, 2006; LETIECQ & SCHMALZBAUER, 2012). Yet a clear delineation remained between my potential participants and myself: students and teacher, immigrants and native-born. [8]

As *kısmet* would have it, my husband, a scholar of international relations sent to complete graduate school in the US, was called back to Turkey to begin teaching in a small city in the southeast of the country just as I was identifying a dissertation topic. His assignment, coincidentally, landed us in the region closest to the Syrian border and now home to millions of displaced Syrians living in Turkey under temporary protection (DGMM, 2019). Simultaneously adjusting to life in Turkey and attempting to conceptualize my dissertation study with Syrian refugees, I found definitions and boundaries between refugees and immigrants becoming fuzzier. True, I was not fleeing war or persecution and possessed many unearned advantages due to my US passport and family network in Turkey. But my stance as a critical scholar and refugee advocate compelled me to identify with the refugee population, to recognize the common obstacles we faced in

navigating bureaucracy, adapting to the culture, learning the language, establishing social networks, and continuing our studies, careers, and lives. [9]

I struggled to locate myself within the Turkish migration and scholarly landscape, both an insider and an outsider (BILECEN, 2013; MILED, 2019; NOWICKA & RYAN, 2015; VOLODER & KIRPITCHENKO, 2013), a more-or-less voluntary migrant aligned with those forced to seek safety across national borders (ALATRASH, 2018). This process of reflection began in conversations with a new friend, a Kyrgyz woman living in my city who is also a novice migration scholar married to a Turk. We bonded over cups of coffee, sharing anecdotes about intercultural marriage and venting our frustration with the bewildering residency permit process and the unsurpassable barriers to finding legal work despite our qualifications. We expressed outrage at the attitudes of some Turks in our social circles toward Syrians and the harsh rumors they circulated. Through these conversations, it dawned on me that I had unique access to both groups, local and migrant, a type of dual "insider capital" (VOLODER, 2013, p.1) due to my position as a *yabancı gelin* [foreign bride]. Like my friend, I was more or less accepted as a member of the local population and thus privy to candid views on Turkey's refugee crisis, but I became increasingly conflicted about my conviction to speak up in light of my simultaneous outsider status. These conversations and the lingering ambiguity prompted me to start recording my experiences and reflections in informal memos, which formed the basis of this article. [10]

2.2 *Ethno*: The cultural

Ethnography is the thick description (GEERTZ, 1973) of a foreign or unfamiliar culture's practices, values and beliefs, artifacts, and texts through extensive observation and often participation in that context, typically including forming relationships with members of the society to access their knowledge (VOLODER, 2013). Autoethnography, then, is essentially the study of the researcher's own experience of being a part of that culture (ELLIS et al., 2011). In migration studies, autoethnography can illuminate the experience of *becoming* a part of the culture, providing insights from the perspectives of both a migrant and a researcher. As a method "that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" in which "distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred" (ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000, p.739), it offers an ideal way to explore the complex processes of migration and adaptation. [11]

My research site, after all, is also my home, and my access to the cultural field is both facilitated and limited by my migrant status. I can neither exit the field nor maintain an objective distance from it, as ethnographers traditionally have sought to do (VOLODER, 2013) and positivist research claims is necessary (ATKINSON, 1997; DELAMONT, 2009). In other words, I cannot set aside my own experience of immigrating to Turkey in order to conduct neutral, unbiased research on others' experiences of immigrating to Turkey. Fittingly, autoethnography is an approach that "acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research" (ELLIS et al., 2011, §4). In the process, I

seek to practice reflexivity, "listening to and for the silences and stories we can't tell—not fully, not clearly, not yet" (ADAMS & JONES, 2011, p.111). It is not (yet) my place to tell others' stories; first, I need to tell my own, and through telling, come to understand. [12]

The gap between my home culture and the one in which I am finding my footing is arguably much wider than that which Syrians encounter. In fact, the new-and-improved Turkish asylum policy rolled out during the Syrian crisis (DGMM, 2013, 2014) and ensuing state discourse (KARAKOÇ & DOĞRUEL, 2015; MEMISOĞLU & ILGIT, 2016) both emphasized the cultural ties between the two neighboring nations in an effort to encourage "harmonization" between locals and their so-called "guests" (DGMM, 2013, p.97). Such discourse appealing to the cultural value of hospitality, humanitarian duty, and the presumed brotherhood between the Sunni majorities of both countries has, however, led to resentment among the public and exacerbated religious, ethnic, and political sectarianism (AKCAPAR & SIMSEK, 2018; MEMISOĞLU & ILGIT, 2016). Meanwhile, international debates rage over countries' obligations, quotas, and the treatment of asylum seekers (CHIACU & ALLEN, 2019; IOM, 2019). Within this larger sociopolitical context, we—Syrian refugees and I—face the same challenges of learning the language and demystifying the ancient nuances of Turkish social norms, body language, and gender relations in day-to-day interactions, not to mention navigating the Republic's infamous bureaucracy. [13]

Modern Turkey is full of contradictions: a bridge between Europe and the Middle East, a relatively stable democracy in a region roiled by decades of conflict, its domestic politics dominated by polarization between Islamist and nationalist factions. Turkish culture is both collectivist and hierarchical; from Istanbul's skyscrapers to Anatolian villages and Mediterranean resorts, Turks traditionally value interdependence and harmony but hold elders and leaders in high regard; relationships take precedence over productivity, tradition often prevails over progress, and rituals order daily life and interactions (HOFSTEDE INSIGHTS, 2019). Syrian culture is similar in many ways, emphasizing respect for authority, collective identity rooted in family relationships, and adherence to social and religious norms (ibid.). In contrast, my home culture values personal rights, responsibility, and achievement and prioritizes societal progress over tradition (ibid.). These cultural values also reflect gendered nuances in each society, with Turkish and Syrian cultures ostensibly retaining more traditional gender roles. In formal markers of gender quality, Turkey has, indeed, made impressive progress in recent years, for example, reaching parity in schooling and offering female workers generous maternity leave, yet traditional gendered norms still govern daily life, labor participation, and leadership positions to a great extent (AYDAGÜL, 2019; YÜKSEL, STETTER & WALTER, 2016). [14]

This clash of cultures is often vexing, forcing me to constantly negotiate the extent to which I will adapt or dig in my heels; it is perhaps most noticeable in how I inhabit gendered roles in my extended family and the place that work takes in my daily life. As an educated American woman who has joined a traditional, devout Turkish Muslim family, I navigate nebulous expectations about which

spaces I occupy and how, the duties I take on in the home and the workplace, and the identities I embody (*Don't you want to convert? No babies yet?*). Yet my foreignness and cultural faux pas are easily forgiven, my religion an object of curiosity rather than judgment (*Those Syrians don't even go to Friday prayers at the mosque! They force their women to cover head to toe!*), and my limited language skills praised by the same relatives and acquaintances who grumble about Syrians "refusing" to learn Turkish. [15]

2.3 *Graphy*: The process

As I now know all too well, crafting an authoethnography demands purposeful introspection and vulnerability, but along the way, it can reward such efforts with rich insights that illuminate both personal and communal experience (ADAMS & JONES, 2011; ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000). The documentation process is often prompted by periods of profound change or moments of crisis or realization (ELLIS et al., 2011), but just as well can include the everyday and the mundane. The reflection and analysis of experience results in a unique window into that culture, and the narrative style makes it potentially accessible to a wider audience than traditional research manuscripts (ibid.). [16]

In this article I draw on personal memories of particularly poignant experiences, some of which were recorded shortly after the events in memos or informally in messages to friends or family and others reconstructed from memory. Through this process I am seeking to practice reflexivity on my status as an insider—ways in which my experiences may be similar to those of other migrants to Turkey, including Syrian refugees—and as an outsider by virtue of assorted categories: nationality, language, religion, education, profession, and marriage to a Turkish citizen, to name a few. In this way I am "troubling the persistent dichotomies of insider versus outsider, distance versus familiarity, objective observer versus participant, and individual versus culture" (REED-DANAHAY, 2017, p.145). I join a small but growing number of scholars from multiple disciplines critically reflecting on the possibilities of insider research on migration as well as embedded issues of representation, ethics, and positionality, whose work informs my practice (e.g., BHATTACHARYA, 2018; BILECEN, 2013; MILED, 2019; NOWICKA & RYAN, 2015; VOLODER & KIRPITCHENKO, 2013). [17]

I write this as an attempt to make sense of my world, which is, after all, the world which we share, and I do so in a way that is "self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free" (ELLIS et al., 2011, §3, citing BOCHNER, 1994). BOYLORN and ORBE (2014) describe *critical* autoethnography as incorporating three aspects of critical theory: "to understand the lived experience of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination" (p.20). I make no attempt to hide my agenda, my desire to "bear witness" (ADAMS & JONES, 2011, p.111) and use my research to work for change in a field fraught with conflict and injustice. I embrace the ways that critical autoethnography pushes the boundaries of traditional research by recasting personal stories as political acts (ADAMS & JONES, 2011). [18]

Furthermore, I engage in this reflexive exercise in preparation for research, to locate myself in my research setting and in relationship to my future participants (RYAN, 2015). In so doing, I am well aware of the ways that my cultural and social capital (BOURDIEU, 1986; LETIECQ & SCHMALZBAUER, 2012) make me less vulnerable in the migration context than my future participants; both the impetus for my migration and the conditions of my settlement are vastly different (REED-DANAHAY, 2017). This distinction prompts me to consider the ways in which I structure and approach my research in order to avoid further jeopardizing my participants' tenuous legal status and exacerbating the layered vulnerabilities they experience (CLARK-KAZAK, 2017). [19]

By claiming this space and illuminating the difficulties I, a white, highly educated American, have encountered in finding a sense of identity and belonging in my new country, I also want to challenge colonial, hegemonic ideas about migration (BHATTACHARYA, 2018). Perhaps the most persistent of these ideas is the primarily class- and race-based division between *expat* and *immigrant* that presumes choice and social and geographic mobility based on my passport (BELFORD & LAHIRI-ROY, 2018). Indeed, my choice to define myself as an immigrant rather than an expat is an explicitly political one informed by my identification as an immigrant advocate. Likewise, the strategic decision to become American-Turkish through dual citizenship is rooted in a critical epistemology and a desire to retain aspects of my identity while allowing it to shift and gain layers, and my choice to record it in this way is a recognition of "identities and experiences as uncertain, fluid, open to interpretation, and able to be revised" (ADAMS & JONES, 2011, p.110). [20]

3. (Inter) Cultural Capital

In order to construct this reflexive analysis, I draw on BOURDIEU's theory of cultural capital. BOURDIEU considers culture a resource to be gained and used in power relations, consisting of "the kinds of knowledge, dispositions, and educational qualifications that are highly valued in a particular social milieu" (KANNO & VARGHESE, 2010, p.313). The cultural capital that a society values facilitates access to resources and other types of capital, primarily economic, symbolic, and social capital (BOURDIEU, 1986), while unequal distribution of this power leads to exclusion (SKROBANEK & JOBST, 2010). After all,

> "Capital is a way to actively construct difference and express distinction. People who possess it use it to distinguish themselves from nonowners and thereby elevate their status and congeal their privilege, while people who lack access to it can be excluded and subordinated" (BAUDER, 2008, p.318). [21]

Immigrants, whose cultural capital typically has less value in the society, are often at a disadvantage and thus accumulate less symbolic capital; in other words, they occupy positions of lower status (KANNO & VARGHESE, 2010; SKROBANEK & JOBST, 2010). There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization, for example, skilled workers whose qualifications provide access to high-status jobs. Despite their diverse educational, professional, and class backgrounds, forced

migrants in particular face structural barriers to entering the formal labor force, such as having their prior qualifications recognized and obtaining work permission (GERICKE, BURMEISTER, LÖWE, DELLER & PUNDT, 2018; MORRICE, 2013). These obstacles, along with limited language proficiency, trap many migrants into low-wage and informal work, even those with professional backgrounds (McWILLIAMS & BONET, 2016), with women particularly constrained by gendered labor, family, and social roles (KOYAMA, 2015; MAHBUB, 2019; RIAÑO & BAGHDADI, 2007). Conforming to the dominant culture (e.g., learning the dominant language) can help newcomers cultivate capital, build social networks, and navigate the system, but this often contributes to the devaluation of their own cultural capital (AL-DEEN & WINDLE, 2015; SKROBANEK & JOBST, 2010). [22]

BOURDIEU (1986) outlines three main types of cultural capital: *embodied*, *objectified*, and *institutionalized*. Embodied capital consists of knowledge and behaviors or "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (p.243). These culturally esteemed patterns and codes are cultivated over time and through personal effort, typically within families or institutions like schools, and cannot be instantaneously transmitted. Objectified capital takes physical form in material objects that represent embodied capital, like books or works of art; unlike embodied capital, this form is transferrable and often has monetary value (BOURDIEU, 1986). Institutionalized capital is an official certification of cultural capital, such as an academic qualification or citizenship status (BAUDER, 2008; BOURDIEU, 1986). This form has the power to grant access to economic capital through employment and reinforces a hierarchical system related to the scarcity of various types of capital (BOURDIEU, 1986). Furthermore, as a powerful form of institutionalized capital, citizenship is operational "not only in constructions of identity and belonging, struggles over recognition, and the politics of participation and contribution, but also in regulating access to scarce resources and institutionalizing difference" (BAUDER, 2008, p.316). [23]

Globalization and increased transnational migration have complicated these notions, however. This has led to the emergence of the concept of *intercultural capital*, which transcends the boundaries of "the field in which it was produced and reproduced" (BOURDIEU, 1984 [1979], p.113) and can even gain value in the process due to supply and demand (PÖLLMAN, 2013). As a result, certain types of embodied capital, perhaps most prominently language skills, unlock economic and social advantages across borders, and migrants' personal use of agency plays an important role in the validation, transfer, and adaptation of skills and knowledge (EREL, 2010; LAN, 2011). Still, redeeming this capital in the formal labor market typically requires institutional certification recognized in the host country, and a thinly veiled socioeconomic and ethno-racial hierarchy governs *whose* capital is most desirable (LAN, 2011; PÖLLMAN, 2013). For example, my status as a White American and native English speaker in a corner of Turkey with few "expats" but millions of less desirable foreigners automatically confers increased symbolic capital. At the same time, I am subjected to higher levels of institutional scrutiny to reveal what agenda I could possibly have to pursue dual Turkish citizenship (*Which is she, a spy or a missionary?*), as

indicated by the focus of my interview, when my existing nationality bestows higher prestige. [24]

In addition, immigrants must acquire *navigational capital*, which VESELY, LETIECQ and GOODMAN (2017) define as "the cultural strategies and individual agency used to maneuver various systems in the face of institutional constraints" (p.99). Other types of capital, such as language proficiency and social networks, aid immigrants in gaining and exercising this capital, just as various barriers, like a lack of childcare during language classes, can impede the process (VESELY et al., 2017). Turkish institutions are notoriously complex, and laws and procedures change frequently; furthermore, although policies are officially highly centralized, provincial ministry branches often implement them differently. This requires a highly nuanced, flexible, and relational form of navigational capital, to the extent that many Turks depend on personal contacts within an institution to provide guidance or to move paperwork along. This requires me to depend largely on my husband's knowledge of Turkish institutions and the norms governing them and on his status as a citizen. However, the procedures of obtaining my residency and later applying for citizenship have often exceeded his navigational capital as a native. My language skills as well as gendered social norms that typically leave official tasks to men leave me feeling limited, more or less reduced to the position of a dependent child. [25]

In the following section, I examine illustrative examples from my own first year of living as an immigrant woman in Turkey. I start by setting the political context into which I migrated and then chronologically and thematically trace my experiences as I lost and then began to build and cash in cultural, social, and navigational capital, although admittedly in a non-linear and unresolved way. Throughout my findings I highlight limitations that I have encountered as well as aspects of relative privilege received due to my nationality and status. In this way, I aim to draw attention to some of the ongoing, disparate challenges and injustices of migration in today's world. [26]

4. Findings: Migrating to the Borderlands

Hatay province juts below Anatolia, nestled against the Mediterranean gulf of Alexandretta and bordering Syria's embattled Afrin and Idlib provinces. Contested territory that historically belonged to the Syrian kingdom, Hatay joined the Turkish Republic in 1939 but retains a richly diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious fabric distinct from most of the country and strong economic and social ties to Syria (LUNDGREN JÖRUM, 2014; YÜKSEL et al., 2016). When the Syrian conflict quickly escalated in spring 2011, displaced residents of Idlib, Afrin, and Aleppo began fleeing to Hatay's border crossings, prompting the implementation of an open door policy followed by the creation of temporary protection status in 2014 (BABAN, ILCAN & RYGIEL, 2017). While Turkey provided crucial protection (notably *not* refugee status) and admirable emergency services, including healthcare and temporary education centers, for the ever-increasing numbers of Syrians taking refuge here, the protracted nature of the crisis required more long-term provisions (ibid.). In fact, as the war dragged on and the 25 camps

constructed along the Turkish-Syrian border became increasingly crowded, the vast majority of Syrians moved into Turkish communities to find work and more stable schooling for their children (DGMM, 2019; YAYLACI & KARAKUŞ, 2015). Eventually, a path to legal employment and even citizenship was approved; some Syrians under temporary protection have taken advantage of these options, but numerous barriers have made this difficult. [27]

Citizenship is a significant marker, as it "cater[s] to the particular historical context, political agendas, and economic needs of nation-states" (BAUDER, 2008, p.320). Unlike me, Syrians must renounce their native citizenship in order to become Turkish, a difficult and potentially permanent choice, but it opens up access to the labor market, educational opportunities, and a more stable future in Turkey. This is a crucial form of institutionalized capital that facilitates the accumulation and reproduction of economic and objectified capital (BAUDER, 2008), but naturalized citizens often face expectations of informal citizenship as well—involving "cultural practices and constructions of identities" (p.326) in order to prove that they belong. [28]

4.1 Spring: Foreign everywhere

The plan was for me to focus on my PhD rather than getting a teaching job. I had arranged to complete my last few doctoral courses via independent study and then to conduct my dissertation research in Turkey. However, this meant that my life suddenly had no structure, no clear purpose; I had no office to go to, students to teach, colleagues or classmates to chat with. Through my husband's friend, I met the only other known American living in my city, a middle-aged woman teaching English at a private school. She was also married to a Turk, had been here for 25 years, and held dual citizenship. *Don't bother learning Turkish*, she advised me, unaware of my prior efforts, *You can get by without it*. But I didn't want to get by; I needed to be able to create a life nearly from scratch and to find a sense of belonging in my new home. I needed to buy groceries, use public transit, go to the doctor, make friends, build a professional network, navigate research procedures, and eventually get a job at a university. I needed to become integrated, as I had sought to help my students do in in the US. [29]

After just a few months in Turkey I traveled to Chicago to present a few papers at the annual TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) convention. During my flight transfer in Munich, the first language I heard as I stepped off the plane was not German, which I speak fluently, but an airport worker's phone conversation in Turkish. Chuckling to myself, I headed for security control to transit to my second flight. The agent at the metal detector, presumably noticing my clearly Germanic features, instructed me in German to remove my shoes. I responded by asking if I should also take out my laptop and was stunned to hear not German but Turkish emerge from my lips. Eight hours later, I emerged at Chicago O'Hare airport, my brain suddenly flooded by a constant din of words I could understand with no effort. It felt like the world was shouting at me. [30]

Skimming the conference program the next day, I noticed several Turkish names and felt an odd sense of connection: I am not Turkish, but I am also not *not* Turkish. While chatting with English teachers from around the world, however, I struggled to explain what I did. This was the first time in over a decade that I could not honestly define myself as a teacher. What was I then? A researcher? Not quite. A PhD student? Yes, but not in Turkey. A housewife? Technically, but not just that. How could I define myself and explain my presence in a country where I had no job, no apparent purpose, and limited social ties? Though this presents no particular quandary in Turkish society—after all, barely a third of women work outside the home (WORLD BANK, 2019)—for an American of my generation and social class, work is central to one's identity. I could easily pass for a housewife in Turkey without provoking questions, but I *was* working, quite hard, on my coursework and assistantship duties, and friendly neighbors seemed mildly insulted that I did not often take the time to visit for a leisurely afternoon coffee. My work was deeply important to me, especially having struggled to overcome the gendered expectation of my Evangelical upbringing that I would value home and family above a career. Moreover, I value being productive, often to a fault: I felt pressure to finish my doctoral program so I could re-enter the formal workforce and *do something*. [31]

Learning the language has created new categories in my mind, reorganized my world, and made English feel strangely insufficient. After the conference I traveled "home" to Philadelphia to celebrate Easter with my family, taking the opportunity to visit a friend who had a new baby. I felt compelled to say *Mashallah,* wishing protection from the evil eye, but stopped myself. When mentioning my aunt to another friend, I felt it necessary to specify that she was my mother's sister—my *teyze*—rather than my father's sister—my *hala*. I found that I had absorbed different mannerisms and habits; I felt distinctly uncomfortable not removing my shoes when I entered my parents' home despite having done so thousands of times before. I struggled to explain my daily life, the significance of places, practices, and people and in terms they would understand. I live now in a personal world of hybrid languages, cultures, cuisines, and religions. I have woven together behaviors and perspectives from two cultures, some recently and painstakingly acquired through observation and imitation yet as natural to me now as those engrained since birth. And I no longer fit into the world I had left. [32]

4.2 Summer: Battling bureaucracy

Having completed the minimum three years of marriage to a Turkish citizen, I dutifully gathered the required paperwork and biometric photographs for my dual citizenship application. My husband and I traveled to the capital of our province, the ancient city of Antioch, an hour's drive through a winding mountain pass and endless olive groves stretching across the plain toward the Syrian border. *Keşke suriyeli olsaydınız*, remarked the dispassionate official checking our paperwork at the governorate, *If only you were Syrian*. Gesturing towards the waiting families and raising her eyebrows meaningfully, she informed us that Syrians pay only a fraction of the application fee we would and provide far less documentation. I bit

my tongue, knowing that those who had fled regime mortar attacks or Daesh advances likely could not produce documents that were difficult even for me to obtain and that the usual 100 lira fee was equal to a week's wages for many. [33]

Although many "expats" live for years or even decades in Turkey on residence permits, which require significant paperwork and hefty fees, I chose to apply for dual citizenship in order to symbolize my commitment to Turkey; to open up future opportunities for work, research, and advocacy; and not least, to have the *right* to live in the same country as my spouse at a time when my homeland was roiling with xenophobic politics and seeing increased Islamophobic hate crimes (SPLC, n.d.). As a Turkish citizen, moreover, I would have a right, an obligation even, to speak up and potentially influence policy and practice that I lack as a *yabancı* [foreigner]. I was also, of course, doing so at a time when my adopted country was coping with the influx of nearly 4 million asylum seekers from Syria alone (DGMM, 2019), pushing the cherished Turkish value of hospitality to its limits. [34]

In classic Turkish bureaucratic form, we were instructed to produce several additional types of documentation not listed in the official guidelines, including a birth certificate issued by the US federal government, as my Pennsylvania birth certificate was deemed inadequate. Since such a thing does not exist, we finally succeeded in convincing the nearest US consulate in Adana to produce and rubber-stamp a letter (*everything* must be rubber stamped in Turkey) confirming the validity of my documentation—quite literally, of my identity. With what I found to be poignant symbolism, we finally managed to satisfy the demands and complete my dossier on my 35th birthday. Unannounced visits to our home from police officers and ministry representatives punctuated the rest of the summer, confirming with neighbors that we truly lived there together, demanding to see our wedding invitation and family photographs, and probing the limits of my language skills and composure. Then the waiting began. [35]

4.3 Fall: Leveraging capital

When the nearly unbearable heat of Hatay's "second sun" had mercifully receded and my husband started teaching fall classes, frustration with my social isolation and plateauing Turkish proficiency prompted me to stop by the municipal adult education center in our city. My first objective, to ask about advanced level Turkish classes, quickly met a dead end. Introductory level classes, held primarily for Syrians, were seen as sufficient for work and daily life. Although I was well beyond that level, I still felt restricted—stupid, actually—in social interactions because of my simple grammatical constructions and limited active vocabulary, and I certainly did not possess the professional proficiency necessary to find skilled work in Turkey. [36]

Luckily, my profession depends on my native language: I mentioned that I was an English teacher interested in working at the center. After all, I had always taught adults, preferably in non-formal education, and as a scholar, I wanted to learn about the inner workings of the national system tasked with providing language

education for immigrants and refugees throughout Turkey. I was promptly sent to the assistant director's office, where I introduced myself and briefly discussed my credentials and experience. The assistant director nodded eagerly and confirmed that they would love to have a native English teacher, but they would need to see my *denklik* [equivalency certificates]. [37]

Despite more than a decade of teaching English to immigrants, refugees, and international students, my experience and qualifications no longer counted. Getting my diplomas validated would require as much as a year of translating, notarizing, and submitting documents as evidence of my high school, undergraduate, and then master's degrees in succession, to the higher education commission. The process would cost thousands of liras and could result in denial. My native speaker status however, offered me an alternate route, as evidence of pedagogical knowledge (or, it turned out, of oral proficiency) was not required. I could take the national foreign language exam, the *Yabancı Dil Sinavı* (YDS), to prove my English knowledge; in combination with my US passport, that would satisfy institutional requirements. The nearest center offering the exam in the next few months was in Ankara, 600 kilometers away, and registration would cost more than a week's rent. Curious about the exam from a pedagogical perspective and the adult education center from a scholarly and personal one, I registered for an exam date that coincided with a conference I wanted to attend in Ankara, bought a plane ticket, and let my in-laws know I was coming for a visit. I managed —not without effort—to get a sufficient score on the exam, an intense battery of 80 intricate reading comprehension, grammar, and translation questions. [38]

The next hurdle was the work permit. The adult education center administrators had never hired a foreigner before, so I had to investigate and explain the application process, which involves them proving that I was more qualified than a Turk for the job, filling out complex forms, and paying a hefty fee. Ultimately, they decided to wait a while for my citizenship to come through, deterred by the intimidating process. I had the luxury of waiting, which many do not. I was not desperate for income since my part-time graduate research assistantship stipend from the US equates to a full-time teacher salary in Turkey, and my husband has a good job with medical insurance for us both. But the isolation and lack of purpose were getting to me. [39]

4.4 Winter: Two names, one identity

Allah nasip ederse—if God ordains—I will soon carry two passports and two names, one to enter the land of my birth, and one to return to the country I have made my home. We joke among friends that I married my husband to get a Turkish passport in the way that immigrants to the US notoriously marry American citizens to qualify for a green card. I daydream about the visa-free trips we'll take to see soaring Persian architecture and the ruggedly beautiful landscapes of Central Asia pictured in the library books that I had pored over as a pre-teen. On a pragmatic level, though, it is important to me to have the rights and obligations of a citizen in the country I now call home, where I am (re)building my career. [40]

My US passport carries the surname of my great-grandfather Frederick, who left his village in Baden-Württemberg and sailed across the Atlantic to start a new life. My Turkish one will display the new identity I have chosen for myself as a member of my husband's family and nation and my ticket to a simpler daily life in Turkey. My given name comes from the Greek word for honeybee, evoking a busy, industrious creature; I like to think this image suits me well. My name is common in Turkey, albeit with one fewer "s" and referring to the lemon balm plant, which is used to make herbal tea and to entice honeybees to gather pollen. Upon meeting me, many Turks ask me if I have Turkish heritage [*Türklük yok mu?*] because of this remarkable *tesadüf* [coincidence]. [41]

When I applied for citizenship, I had the chance to choose a Turkish name, which of course would have been an easy change, just removing one letter. Despite my husband's encouragement to take the easy route, I stubbornly kept the second "s." I selected instead a new middle name, Meryem, in homage to my grandmother, Miriam, and to Mary, a woman whose honored status as the mother of Jesus/*İsa* links my faith to my husband's. In the end, I do not want to "pass" for Turkish. I have come to terms with the fact that my foreign origin will be revealed as soon as my Germanic features are recognized, as soon as I open my mouth to speak. As my ancestors chose the New World, I chose the Old World to make my home, but this is not the full story of my identity. [42]

A Syrian friend, who has obtained Turkish citizenship and decided to make Turkey her permanent home, recently shared how her Arabic family name marked her as foreign despite her Turkish identification card and fluency in the language and had often made her the target of xenophobic remarks. She had already changed the spelling of her first name, which is common in both Arabic and Turkish, from the typical transliteration of the Arabic on her now-defunct Syrian passport—Aisha[1]—to the Turkish version—Ayşe—for this reason. Although Syrian women do not typically change their family names when marrying, Ayşe explained that she and her fiancé both planned to take a Turkish surname to symbolically embrace the land they had not chosen but that had given them refuge. This would, they hoped, improve their chances for a good future here. I had the luxury of choosing to keep the second "s" in my name to retain the second meaning, to retain that part of my transnational, multi-cultural identity. Although this choice will forever mark me as a *yabancı*, I want to keep that part of myself, which will rarely leave me at a disadvantage as it would my friend. [43]

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1   Pseudonym

5. Discussion: Positioning Myself in at the Boundaries

Over the course of my first year living in Turkey, I navigated a number of personal challenges and institutional barriers, building and drawing on reserves of cultural capital in the process. My deeply rooted identification with migrants made it no less difficult to lose the aspects that had, to a great extent, defined my identity in my prior life as a teacher or to navigate creating a new life from scratch and crafting a new, fluid, personal and professional identity from what remains. Even as I sought to position myself as a fellow immigrant and faced, in some cases, even more stringent logistical and institutional hurdles than Syrian community members, my nationality and mother tongue have bestowed undeniable intercultural symbolic capital and preferential treatment (LAN, 2011; PÖLLMAN, 2013). [44]

I have seen, up close and personal, the obstacles that immigrants face to working in their field of expertise. As BAUDER (2008) puts it,

> "Instead of gaining access to occupations that reflect their education and training once they upgrade their language skills—as human capital theory would predict— many migrants categorically lack access to the upper labor-market segments or to the formal labor market altogether" (p.318). [45]

It is no wonder so many Syrians work in the informal labor market for low wages; employers have little to gain by jumping through these hoops to hire them legally (BABAN et al., 2017). Even with my institutionalized capital—well beyond the adult education center's hiring requirements—and economic resources to pay for the exam registration and travel costs, I have not managed to secure a job in my field due to the institutional barriers in place. [46]

The most significant endeavor, applying for dual citizenship, required me to leverage linguistic and cultural knowledge, to prove the legitimacy of my identity and marriage, to navigate seemingly endless bureaucratic procedures, and to endure intrusive examination. Ultimately, I have embraced my in-between identity, my enduring "Americanness" as well as my hard-won "Turkishness." Because of my privileged position, I have the luxury of deciding how Turkish to become, and which dispositions, behaviors, and skills (BOURDIEU, 1986) from my cultural repertoire to shed, retain, or adapt and how to re-create my identity as a migrant woman (EREL, 2010). And perhaps this privilege can be leveraged to advocate for more equitable treatment of my refugee friends, neighbors, and future research participants who are "excluded and subordinated" (BAUDER, 2008, p.318) in our sociopolitical landscape. [47]

6. Conclusions: Critical Ethnography as Advocacy

I choose to maintain my mixed status as teacher-learner, insider-outsider, and migrant-migration researcher to do work that is explicitly grounded in my personal values and that is informed and enriched by my experience of migrating. In this way, I hope to contest prevailing hegemonies and policies governing migration and access in both of my countries (NOWICKA & RYAN, 2015; REED-DANAHAY, 2017; RYAN, 2015). *Inshallah* [God willing]*,* as an American-Turkish scholar, I will have both the formal and informal intercultural capital (BAUDER, 2008; PÖLLMAN, 2013) to engage in critical, reflexive research that bears witness to injustice and pushes for change (ADAMS & JONES, 2011; LETIECQ & SCHMALZBAUER, 2012). I believe in the potential of this type of inquiry to bring to light hidden or disregarded experiences, to correct misrepresentations, and to ultimately foster a more empathetic understanding in myself and others towards (im)migrants (ALATRASH, 2018; ELLIS & BOCHNER, 2000; ELLIS et al., 2011). [48]

Exploring my own experience as a migrant to Turkey has provided valuable insights into how I need to approach my future research. In my dissertation study and beyond, I plan to engage in critical ethnography to gather stories and meanings that communicate personal experiences of forced migration. Despite sharing some challenges with Syrians living in Turkey as a migrant myself, it will be crucial to remain aware of how my distinct experiences, sources of capital, and roles in society may affect power relations with participants and color my interpretations. I have found critical ethnographic methods compatible with my epistemology and my duty as a scholar-advocate, allowing me to acknowledge my stance and, hopefully, use my research to expose and contest injustice and inequity (FINE & TORRE, 2006; LETIECQ & SCHMALZBAUER, 2012). This approach pushes me to interact authentically and ethically with my participants and engage reflexively with my data (BEACH, BAGLEY & SILVA, 2018; MADISON, 2005) through explicit recognition of my insider-outsider status and personal ties to the research (BILECEN, 2013; MILED, 2019; NOWICKA & RYAN, 2015). I believe that refugees' stories need to be told, and I have an obligation and a unique position to bring them to light. [49]

7. Coda: New Beginnings

As Hatay's winter rains finally ceased, leaving behind promising bouquets of bright green fig leaves, fuchsia pomegranate blooms, and fragrant lemon blossoms, we received word that my citizenship application had made it through to the last stage, waiting for final approval from the ministry of internal affairs and the president. Just a few weeks of my doctoral courses remained, and a job at the adult education center was waiting for me. I would be relieved to officially belong to this beautiful, hospitable, and complicated country, but in many ways my journey to belonging was just beginning. [50]

Acknowledgments

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