

# ANTHROPOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY OF EMOTIONS

Theoretical and Ethnographic  
Perspectives from Turkey and Beyond

Editor

Ramazan Aras



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*Theoretical and Ethnographic Perspectives from Turkey and Beyond*

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Ramazan Aras

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# **Investigating Anti-immigrant Emotions: Discourses of (mis)Trust, Fear, and Hate**

**Merve Reyhan Ekinci\***

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments and accompanying negative emotions has become one of the major challenges facing societies around the world. Emotions such as fear, hatred, and (mis) trust toward immigrants have not only fueled social tensions but have also influenced policy decisions and public discourse. Understanding the triggers and expressions of these emotions is crucial in addressing the underlying issues and developing effective strategies to promote an inclusive and empathetic social life.

This chapter aims to examine the complex interplay of emotions surrounding migration, with a particular focus on fear, hatred, and (mis) trust in the context of Şanlıurfa, a city in the southeastern part of Turkey on the Syrian border. The main question of this research is: What are the factors behind the rise of these emotions and how are they expressed and experienced in the context of anti-immigrant attitudes and behaviors among ordinary local people (Turkish citizens) in Şanlıurfa? Situated at the crossroads of civilizations and sharing a border with Syria, Şanlıurfa attracts a significant number of immigrants due to both cultural and geographical proximity. By analyzing qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews and participant observations in

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2019-2020, this study aims to shed light on the origins of these negative emotions and make recommendations on preventive mechanisms.

Anti-immigrant emotions and behaviors are at the center of the disciplines of psychology, political science, anthropology, and sociology. In the study of emotions, in every field, there are evolutionary and social constructionist perspectives that are widely accepted as a comprehensive understanding of emotions. While fear of the unknown is an instinctive survival mechanism deeply rooted in human evolution, fear of the “other” is a social construct largely shaped by cultural, political, and media influences. Hate as a discourse of pain<sup>1</sup> stems from collective experiences of perceived threats to security, economic stability, and cultural identity.<sup>2</sup> The emotion of mistrust, on the other hand, stems from a lack of familiarity, knowledge, and interaction with immigrants, reinforcing existing fears and negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the boundaries of emotions are not sharp.<sup>3</sup>

It is appropriate to begin the present study by acknowledging that anti-immigrant sentiments are not uniform or absolute. Individuals may hold contradictory views and exhibit both positive and negative attitudes toward immigrants. However, negative emotions such as fear, hatred, and mistrust predominate by contributing to social divisions and hindering social cohesion. To address these issues, it is particularly important for policymakers to adopt a multifaceted approach that focuses on promoting mutual understanding, fostering quality relationships between host and immigrant communities, and dispelling misconceptions through accurate information and education.

The chapter will first provide an introductory overview of the migration experience in Turkey and in particular focus on Şanlıurfa, and then provide information on the methodology of the study. It will then

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- 1 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2014).
  - 2 Mikko Salmela, and Christian von Scheve, “Emotional Roots of Right-Wing Political Populism”, *Social Science Information* 56, no. 4 (October 12, 2017), 567–95.
  - 3 Joanna Bourke. *Fear: A Cultural History* (Emeryville: Shoemaker Hoard 2006), 8.



draw on qualitative data collected through interviews and participant observations to examine the triggers and manifestations of insecurity, fear, and hatred among ordinary Turkish citizens in Şanlıurfa. This study aims to contribute to the development of rights-based strategies that promote social cohesion and inclusion in the face of anti-immigrant sentiments.

Here, it is important to note that I will use the term “immigrant” in this study to refer to Syrian migrants in Şanlıurfa. The reason why I chose this term is that some of those who migrated from Syria due to the war have acquired citizenship and their legal status has changed over the years. Therefore, using the term asylum seeker would not be inclusive enough. It should also be noted that the term refugee, which adopts a rights-based approach, is the term that should normally be used for Syrians instead of migrant, asylum seeker, or “guest.”<sup>4</sup> However, the correct term that is used for describing Syrians in Turkey is Syrians under “Temporary Protection.”<sup>5</sup> The different use of the term both in the literature and among the public stems from Turkey’s position on the Geneva Convention. According to this agreement, the term refugee can only be applied to those coming from European countries.<sup>6</sup> For all these reasons, the word “immigrant” will be used while referring to Syrians in this study.

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4 Pınar Erçoban, “Türkiye’ye Sığınan Suriyeliler Misafir Değil, Mülteci”, Interview by E. C. Dağhoğlu, January 11, 2014, Accessed December 12, 2023: <https://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/6324/turkiyeye-siginan-suriyeliler-misafir-degil-multeci>; Pınar Uyan-Semerci, and Emre Erdoğan, “Guests to Neighbours: The difficulty of Naming Syrians in Turkey.” *Refugee Watch* 48 (2016), 20-34.

5 For further information: Presidency of Migration Management: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/general-information2>

6 “Conditional refugees shall be allowed to reside in Turkey temporarily until they are resettled to a third country. Turkey signed the 1951 Convention with a “geographical restriction” by using its right of choice for place which has been stipulated in Article 1 of the Convention. Accordingly, conditional refugee is a person who as a result of events occurring outside European countries alleges to be subject to conditions which are stated in definition of refugee and applies for international protection in Turkey until he/she is resettled to a third country.” Presidency of Migration Management, Accessed December 12, 2023. <https://en.goc.gov.tr/conditional-refugee>

## Migration in Contemporary Turkey

The establishment of nation-states and nationalist sentiments led to the association of territorial belonging with national identity, leading to exchanges and exiles between states. Examples of this form of migration include the Greco-Turkish Population Exchange in 1922 and 1934<sup>7</sup>, Israel's displacement of Palestinians in 1948<sup>8</sup>, and displacement in Myanmar due to political violence and ethnic cleansing policies.<sup>9</sup> Industrialization also led to increased migration from rural to urban areas, with migration theories emphasizing economic factors, industrialization, and the centrality of the capitalist system. This led to both internal migration movements within countries and migration movements between countries. Industrialized states entered into agreements with countries aiming to optimize their population density by benefiting labor migration opportunities at lower costs. For instance, Germany in the 1960s and 1970s made an agreement with Turkey and other countries for labor.<sup>10</sup>

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- 7 For further information: Ashlı İğsız, "Rethinking the Greco-Turkish Population Exchange in the Civilizationist Present." *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 40, no. 2 (2022), 271-298. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mgs.2022.0022>; Onur Yıldırım, *Diplomacy and Displacement: Reconsidering the Turco-Greek Exchange of Populations, 1922-1934*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
  - 8 For further information: Walid Khalidi, "Selected Documents on the 1948 Palestine War." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 3 (1998), 60-105. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2537835>; Rosemary Sayigh, "On the Exclusion of the Palestinian Nakba from the 'Trauma Genre.'" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 1 (2013), 51-60. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2013.43.1.51>; Diana Allan (ed.), *Voices of the Nakba: A Living History of Palestine*. Pluto Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1z7kgqb>.
  - 9 For further information: Zoltan Barany, "The Rohingya Predicament: Why Myanmar's Army Gets Away with Ethnic Cleansing." *Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*, (2019). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep19683>; Zoltan Barany, "Where Myanmar Went Wrong: From Democratic Awakening to Ethnic Cleansing." *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 3 (2018), 141-54. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44822151>.
  - 10 For further information: Nermin Abadan-Unat. *Turks in Europe: From guest worker to transnational citizen*, Translated by Caterine Champion, New York: Berghahn Books, 2011.; Ahmet İçduygu, "50 Years After the Labour Recruitment Agreement with Germany: The Consequences of Emigration for Turkey." *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 17, no. 2 (July 2012), 11-36.

Despite Turkey's history of diverse migration experiences, it has not had a densely populated migration experience from another country. The years of the Ottoman Empire's rule also witnessed migration dynamics organized through settlement policies and the resettlement of populations from lands lost during and after WWI. Population policies pursued during the establishment of the new Turkish State led to exchanges. The exchange of hundreds of thousands of Thracian Turks with Greeks in Anatolia in 1926 can be given as an example.<sup>11</sup>

Ahmet İçduygu and Kemal Kirişçi<sup>12</sup> consider the two main migration movements between 1923 and 1950, namely the migration of the non-Muslim population within Turkey's borders to abroad and the migration of the Turkish and Muslim population from the former Ottoman territories to Turkey, as the basis of the foundation of nation-state building. The 1934 Settlement Law's legitimization of the migration of "persons of Turkish ancestry and culture" and its exclusion of the migration of "foreigners" reinforced this foundation.<sup>13</sup> In the context of mass asylum movements after the exchanges, Turkey faced two more waves of mass migration: approximately 350,000 from Bulgaria in 1989 and 500,000 from Iraq in 1991.<sup>14</sup>

In the wake of the events that unfolded in Syria in 2011, a considerable number of people have sought asylum in neighboring countries such as Jordan and Turkey. Şanlıurfa has had a high immigrant population since the beginning of the war, both in the camps that were founded in the border cities and in the city center. Şanlıurfa is the second largest city in terms of the number of Syrian immigrants, with 319,522 living

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11 Kemal H. Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler* (İstanbul: Timaş, 2017), 26.

12 Ahmet İçduygu and Kemal Kirişçi, *Land of Diverse Migrations: Challenges of Emigration and Immigration in Turkey* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Press, 2009), 2.

13 Ahmet İçduygu, et al., "Türkiye'de Kitleli Sığınma Hareketleri Üzerine Devlet Politikaları: Bulgaristan (1989), Irak (1991) ve Suriye (2011-2015) Örnekleri." TUBİTAK Projesi Sonuç Raporu, (2018), 21.

14 İçduygu et al., "Türkiye'de Kitleli Sığınma Hareketleri", 2.; İçduygu and Kirişçi, *Land of Diverse Migration*.

outside of camps and 104,809 inside of them according to the AFAD<sup>15</sup> report in 2017.<sup>16</sup> Along with Ceylanpınar, Akçakale, Harran, Viranşehir, and Suruç camps, it has the biggest population of the ten cities, totaling 108,622 in 2014–2015.<sup>17</sup> In 2021, this number reached 424,712 and Şanlıurfa ranks fourth.<sup>18</sup> In 2023, 369,736 of the 3,522,036 Syrians resided in Şanlıurfa.<sup>19</sup> According to the Presidency of Migration Management, “As of September 16, 2020, 59,877 Syrians under temporary protection are hosted in 7 temporary accommodation centers in 5 provinces. Apart from this, 3,559,041 Syrians under temporary protection live outside temporary accommodation centers.”<sup>20</sup> According to the Presidency of Migration Management’s data, dated 21.03.2024, Şanlıurfa is the 3rd province with 277,443 Syrians under Temporary Protection. Istanbul ranks first and Gaziantep ranks second in this ranking. In some periods, the ranking of these three provinces has witnessed changes. In the country, as a whole, this number has increased rapidly since 2013 and reached the highest figures with 3,737,369 people in 2021. According to the data dated 21.03.2024, there are 3,130,768 Syrians under temporary protection in our country today.<sup>21</sup> In light of this information, the region is important for the current research as it is one of the places where migration has been felt very intensely since the first years of the arrival of Syrian immigrants.

15 “Disaster and Emergency Management Authority, an institution working to prevent disasters and minimize disaster-related damages, plan and coordinate post-disaster response, and promote cooperation among various government agencies.” Accessed April 10, 2024. <https://en.afad.gov.tr/about-us>

16 Afet, T. İ. İ. B., & Başkanlığı, A. D. *Türkiye’deki Suriyelilerin Demografik Görünümü, Yaşam Koşulları ve Gelecek Beklentilerine Yönelik Saha Araştırması* (Ankara: AFAD, 2017), 19.

17 The Presidency of Migration Management, *Türkiye Göç Raporu* (Ankara, 2015), 88.

18 Presidency of Migration Management, “Temporary Protection Statistics.” <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>, Accessed October 21, 2021.

19 Presidency of Migration Management, “Temporary Protection Statistics.” <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>, Accessed January 22, 2023.

20 The Presidency of Migration Management, “Temporary Protection.” Accessed March 20, 2024. <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>.

21 The Presidency of Migration Management, “Temporary Protection.” Accessed March 22, 2024. <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>.

## Methodological Concerns

The present study is grounded on primary data collected during fieldwork conducted in 2019-2020 as part of my master's thesis titled "An Examination on Attitudes and Behaviors Toward Migrants: The Case of Şanlıurfa."<sup>22</sup> Adopting a qualitative approach enabled the study to investigate mechanisms that are deeply connected to identity and personal life experiences, suggesting that interviews would offer a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the attitudes and behaviors toward immigrants in Şanlıurfa, compared to conventional surveys. The case study design is a widely employed methodology in qualitative research where the study subject can be both the object and product of research, and "the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals."<sup>23</sup>

For this research, a single instrumental case study design was selected, and an appropriate location for the study was chosen based on the "richness of data, unfamiliarity, and suitability."<sup>24</sup> The selected city, Şanlıurfa, has had an intense migratory experience since the first days of migration due to its border location with Syria, which has many similarities between immigrants and the host population. Located on the Turkish-Syrian borderland, Şanlıurfa attracts immigrants due to diverse factors such as physical proximity, shared culture, language (Kurdish, Arabic), and existing family and kin ties between both sides of the political border. As a result, Şanlıurfa is consistently at the forefront in terms of migration patterns. Despite the shared ethnicities (Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmens) with many local people, concerns about cultural degradation among the host population have led to increased anxiety and threats to their existence in recent times. Additionally, the city has experienced

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22 This thesis was written under the supervision of Talha Köse between 2019-2021 at Ibn Haldun University. As mentioned above, the field research of the thesis was conducted in Şanlıurfa in 2019-2020.

23 John W Creswell, and J. David, Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles, Sage, 2018), 51.

24 W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Boston: Pearson, 2014), 441.

significant rural-urban and forced migrations internally in the previous decades due to ongoing conflicts between the Kurdish leftist-nationalist movement (PKK) and the state forces particularly in the 1990s. Marginalized and stigmatized groups in Turkey, notably Kurds and “Easterners”, have been found to face similar challenges to those that Syrian immigrants face today.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the selection of Şanlıurfa city contributes a distinct dimension to the study, given that the studied population has already been marginalized as the “other”<sup>26</sup> by the mainstream Turkish population and the official state discourses. These factors make Şanlıurfa an ideal setting to investigate emotions associated with anti-immigrant sentiments among local people. To conclude, Şanlıurfa province was chosen because it meets the conditions of “richness of data, unfamiliarity, and suitability”<sup>27</sup> required for the selection of a location for field research, and a total of 18 people (men and women), 6 Turkish, 6 Kurdish and 6 Arab<sup>28</sup>, were interviewed during the fieldwork.

### **The Triangle of Anti-Immigrant Emotions: (mis)Trust, Fear, and Hate**

This section will focus on feelings of mistrust, fear, and hate in the context of the phenomenon of anti-immigrant emotions. Undoubtedly, anti-immigration and marginalization contain many other emotions such as disgust, love (for the nation),<sup>29</sup> and compassion or lack of compassion within their own contexts. Especially in Turkey, until recent years, there have been many examples of felt emotions such as mercy and solidarity towards immigrants. However, the racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric of the far-right and fascist movements, which has gained dominance in many parts of the world, has also found a response in Tur-

25 M. Sertaç Tümtaş, *Nöbetleşe Dışlanma: Göç ve Sosyal Dışlanma Döngüsü* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2020).

26 Cenk Saraçoğlu, “İzmirli Orta Sınıfta Kürt Algısı: Mekân, Sınıf ve Kentsel Yaşam.” *Praksis* 21, no. 3 (2009), 17–46.

27 Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 441.

28 It should be noted that all the interviews were conducted in Turkish, and all the interviewers are Turkish Citizens.

29 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 43.

key and has taken root. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that underlying factors such as economic uncertainty, misinformation, and historical conflicts significantly contribute to feelings of insecurity and resentment, which are often expressed in anti-immigrant sentiments. Within the flow of the chapter, firstly, the sense of mistrust will be focused on and examples from the field on the “uncanny” deeming of the migrant as the other will be discussed with references to the related literature. Then, examples will be mentioned in the context of “insecurity” towards migrants leading to a sense of fear and the transformation of these two emotions into a social hatred will be examined.

Emotions and the perceptions derived from them can vary across different centuries and cultures. While the emotions themselves may appear similar, the subjects and objects of these emotions may diverge.<sup>30</sup> In 2006, Joanna Bourke claimed that there is a shortage of literature on emotions: “Although fear, hate, joy, and love have always been at the very heart of human experience, in historical scholarship they still tend to be regarded as by-products.”<sup>31</sup> Regarding the recent developments in the field, Lively and Weed make the following statements: “Over the last 10 years, we have seen the introduction of broad theoretical frames large enough to invite, promote, and incorporate interdisciplinary inquiry in the study of emotions.”<sup>32</sup>

Today, many humanitarian crises in different parts of the world are still ongoing. While no change has been observed in Syria since 2011, after October 7, 2024, the terrorist state of Israel added genocide to the crimes against humanity, and major Western countries continue to maintain their hypocrisy on this issue as before. Amid all these events, the importance of a holistic sociological, anthropological, psychological, and political approach to emotions and the importance of studies that focus on the actual subjects of emotions rather than a Eurocentric,

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30 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion.*; Bourke, Fear.

31 Bourke, Fear, 6.

32 Kathryn J. Lively, and Emi A. Weed, “The Sociology of Emotion.” *Handbook of Emotions Fourth Edition*, Ed. By Lisa Feldman Barrett, Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones (London: The Guilford Press, 2016), 76.

orientalist, or purely positivist perspective has once again become clear. With the words of Buchowski, “In the current sociocultural-political context in Europe, anthropologists should use all their expertise to act against any form of discrimination.”<sup>33</sup> In this study, it should be noted that although the focus will be on emotions of distrust, fear, and hate, it is inevitable to find examples of love, understanding, altruism, and hope in this culture as well.

There is a well-known truth in the literature of anti-immigrant attitudes, xenophobia, and otherizing that is scapegoating. According to Wahl<sup>34</sup>, the radical right especially uses scapegoating for turning hate, anger, fear, and aggression toward immigrants. Blaming immigrants for every negative event in society also causes distrust among the host society. Every day, in every news report and daily conversation, the belief that ‘they are the reason for our situation’ is spreading increasingly. Thus, in the following section, I will focus on these emotions and the relation of these emotions with anti-immigrant attitudes and behaviors.

### ***The Gambling on Trust***

How do we learn to trust? What is trust? George Simmel argues that trust is a hypothesis about future behavior and lies somewhere between knowledge and ignorance about a person.<sup>35</sup> Like Simmel, Jack Barbalet also stated that trust “is by nature future orientated”<sup>36</sup>, and Piotr Sztompka adds, “trust is intimately linked with uncertainty of the fu-

33 Michal Buchowski, “Making Anthropology Matter in the Heyday of Islamophobia and the ‘Refugee Crisis’: The Case of Poland / Význam antropologie v době vzestupu islamofobie a „uprchlické krize”: případ Polska.” *Český Lid* 103, no. 1 (2016), 63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26426157>

34 Katharine Wahl, “Fear, Hate, and Hope: A Biopsychosociological Model of the Radical Right.” In *The Radical Right*, 17-38 (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25131-4\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25131-4_2).

35 George Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. & ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), 318.

36 Jack Barbalet, “The Experience of Trust: Its Content and Basis.” In *Trust in Contemporary Society*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 14. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004390430\\_003](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004390430_003)



ture.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, trust happens “between two individuals”<sup>38</sup>, and “trust must be vested in people, rather than natural objects or events.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, in this “uncontrollability of the future”,<sup>40</sup> trust becomes a crucial factor in societal encounters, as in these confrontations, the strangers “are potentially untrustworthy.”<sup>41</sup> In addition to that, Carey’s explanation of the differentiation between mistrust and distrust also explains the reason why mistrust is much more suitable for this study: “distrust is more likely to be based on a specific past experience, whereas mistrust describes a general sense of the unreliability of a person or thing.”<sup>42</sup> During the field, many people stated that even though they have no experience with immigrants, they still do not trust them and do not want to meet or encounter them. In this context, the notion of (mis) trust and Zygmunt Bauman’s views on xenophobia are deeply related:

Refugees have knocked on other people’s doors since the beginning of modern times. For people behind those doors, they were always – as they are now – strangers. Strangers tend to cause anxiety precisely because of being ‘strange’ – and so, fearsomely unpredictable, unlike the people with whom we interact daily and from whom we believe we know what to expect; for all we know, the massive influx of strangers might have destroyed the things we cherished – and intend to maim or wipe out our consolingly familiar way of life. ... Of strangers, however, we know much too little to be able to read properly their gambits and compose our fitting responses – to guess what their intentions might be and what they will do next. ... is a major cause of anxiety and fear.<sup>43</sup>

In my opinion “knowing much too little about them” is one of the major causes of anti-immigrant emotions. However, rather than

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37 Piotr Sztompka, *Trust: A Sociological Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20.

38 Barbalet, “The Experience of Trust”, 13

39 Sztompka, *Trust: A Sociological Theory*, 19

40 Sztompka, *Trust: A Sociological Theory*, 21

41 Matthew Carey, *Mistrust: An Ethnographic Theory* (Chicago: Hau Books, 2017), 23

42 Carey, *Mistrust: An Ethnographic Theory* 23

43 Zygmunt Bauman, *Strangers at Our Door* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 13.

attempting to understand each other, both the host society and immigrants are ignoring this, as evidenced by the findings of this research. Due to mistrust, misunderstandings, and misinformation, people have been known to deliberately avoid contact with immigrants, according to my interlocutors. This lack of familiarity encourages suspicion and exacerbates the already present fear of the unknown.

The case of Şanlıurfa contradicts the findings of the research conducted by Veronica Pellegrini and others.<sup>44</sup> In their studies, they claim that “Because of the lack of shared factors (e.g. norms, values, beliefs) upon which to build interpersonal trust, individuals from different ethnic groups are typically perceived negatively by natives.”<sup>45</sup> However, the people of Urfa (Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens) and Syrian migrants, who are also composed of Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens, share the same or similar norms, values, religion, and ethnicity. Then, how do we explain the politics of otherization and marginalization of immigrants in this particular locality? One of the reasons can be the nation-state ideology and discourses. In general, people tend to feel they are different and raise the trust issue for a person who came from the “other” side of the border.

According to Weber and Carter, the establishment of trust is dependent upon three essential expectations: social order, competence in one’s assigned function, and the conviction that others would put the good of the group above their interests.<sup>46</sup> These expectations lay the groundwork for trust by creating a broad expectation of stability and order in daily encounters. However, if these expectations are not realized, mistrust could develop, encouraging unfavorable perceptions of immigrants. Feeling a sense of order and stability is also important for cultivating trust.<sup>47</sup>

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44 Veronica Pellegrini, et al, “Social Exclusion and Anti-Immigration Attitudes in Europe: The Mediating Role of Interpersonal Trust.” *Social Indicators Research* 155 (2021), 697–724. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-021-02618-6>.

45 Pellegrini, et al, “Social Exclusion and Anti-Immigration Attitudes in Europe”, 719.

46 Linda R. Weber and Allison I. Carter, *The Social Construction of Trust* (New York: Springer, 2003)

47 Weber and Carter, *The Social Construction of Trust*, 1.

Trust focuses on individual behavior, impacting both the behavioral and emotional dimensions. It seeks certainty in the behavior of others despite the unavoidable uncertainty present in all interactions.<sup>48</sup> This means that trust can be built based on the consistent behavior of individuals even in the face of potential risks and unfamiliarity. However, in the absence of such certainty - and there can never be such certainty - prejudices, and stereotypes often arise. These stereotypes, prevalent in societies, create mistrust towards certain groups such as local Turkish citizen Arabs, Kurds, or recent Syrian immigrants without any personal interaction or relationship.<sup>49</sup> One statement made by Mehmet shows us how trust is shaken by a negative experience and awakens the historical stereotypes for Arabs in general such as “untrustworthy”, “backstabber”<sup>50</sup>:

The weakest point of the state is the emotional ones, sister. We are very emotional, we are very compassionate. It's not like that, you know; we pity, but there are many people who are not in a position to be pitied. That's the trick of the job. How can I put it? He has a house in Urfa, look, he has a house in Urfa, he has his own personal house, but he was entering and leaving the camp so that he could not leave the camp.<sup>51</sup>

Mehmet's distrust for the Syrian immigrant who has a house to stay in the city but still trying to get benefit from the facilities on the camp, however, cannot be generated although he had this tendency in his narration. As Weber and Carter stated trust is an “orientation between self

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48 Weber and Carter, *The Social Construction of Trust*.

49 Hatice Çoban Keneş, *Yeni Irkçılığın Kirliliği Ötekileri: Kürtler, Aleviler, Ermeniler* (Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları, 2014).; Pınar Uyan-Semerci, Emre Erdoğan & Elif Sandal Önal, E. S, “Biz”Ligin Aynasından Yansıyanlar: Türkiye Gençliğinde Kimlikler ve Ötekileştirme (İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2017); Tümtaş, *Nöbetleşe Dışlanma*.

50 Unfortunately, and surprisingly, “there is not enough work on the Middle East stereotypes literature, especially regarding prejudice in academia” (Özlem Tür Küçükkaya, and Meryem Gökyar. 2023, “Stereotyping of the Middle East by Turkish Academics: How Does Middle East Studies Education Work.” *YDÜ Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 16 (2) 258.). However, these kinds of stereotypes are ingrained in society.

51 Mehmet, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinçi, October 15, 2020, Şanlıurfa.

and other whose object is the relationship.”<sup>52</sup> So how do we feel distrust of someone with whom we do not have any interaction or relationship? In that part, prejudice, and stereotype enter the floor. These types of stereotypes can be traced in society in every aspect such as Kurds are like that, Turks are like that, and for the last ten years generally, the same claims and accusations have been used for Syrians. The socially constructed mistrust towards Arabs and Kurds in Turkish society is now particularly directed at Syrian migrants. There is one example related to this matter. Ömer, a shopkeeper in the main old city center who was around his thirties, said:

I mean, Arabs, as far as I know, they are not people who keep their word. They are always after pleasure, always after excitement... They have weak friendships—not all of them, of course, there are some strong ones. But generally, their friendships are weak... We have the same, but Arabs have a little bit more.<sup>53</sup>

Another issue about the feeling of trust is familiarity. As Weber and Carter have indicated, “Trust moves from a form primarily based on emotion, familiarity, and known others to a very rational, system-oriented form that is based upon the appearance of people and resultant institutional forms.”<sup>54</sup> They add, “Familiarity is a precondition for trust (as well as distrust) even in the modern world.”<sup>55</sup> During my fieldwork, I often heard that the people of Urfa consciously avoid or do not start any dialogue with immigrants because of fear, gossip, and the language barrier. Some of my interviewees said that “I have a neighbor, but I do not want to interact with them because of what we hear”, referring to the immigrants, and because they are not familiar with them.

Regarding the impact and reception of Syrian immigrants when they first arrived, an interviewee narrated that “We were afraid and hesitant, but now it is not like that, they are like one of us. They have nothing

S2 Weber and Carter, *The Social Construction of Trust*, 3.

S3 Ömer, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinci, February 05, 2020, Şanlıurfa.

S4 Weber and Carter, *The Social Construction of Trust*, 6.

S5 Weber and Carter, *The Social Construction of Trust*, 7.

to do with us.”<sup>56</sup> This statement supports the idea that fear and timidity are the first emotions felt about another society that is foreign to the host society. When asked about the integration of Syrian immigrants into the city and the state of social relations, one interviewee said, “They are on their own, but we cannot go to Topçu Square alone, their men do not look at us, but we are afraid.”<sup>57</sup> With these sentences, it can be understood that even though years have passed, and they are ‘like one of them’, there is still dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and the perception of ‘uncanny’ still prevails in the host community.

As a result, the complex relationship between insecurity and xenophobia underscores the multifaceted nature of anti-immigrant sentiments. Bauman’s attention to the portrayal of refugees as permanent strangers coincides with the persistent anxiety that arises from the unfamiliarity and unpredictability associated with newcomers. Lack of recognition breeds suspicion and can exacerbate fears of the unknown, perpetuating a cycle of insecurity. Surprisingly, even in contexts of shared norms and values, as in Şanlıurfa, the nation-state’s nationalist ideology and exclusionary discourses can artificially reinforce perceived differences, fueling mistrust. As Weber and Carter have argued, trust is based on expectations of social order, competence and community well-being. When these expectations are not met, mistrust develops and is often supported by historical stereotypes and prejudices. Mehmet’s narrative exemplifies how negative experiences can reinforce such stereotypes and further erode trust. Prejudices and stereotypes deeply embedded in society create barriers to trust, preventing genuine interaction and understanding between different groups. While familiarity emerges as a crucial factor in building trust, barriers such as fear, gossip, and language differences also prevent the development of meaningful relationships between two communities. Despite some progress

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56 Here, the interviewee uses a word “ta’de” (in Kurdish) means problems, hardship, ““ilk geldiklerinde korktuk çekindik, şimdi öyle değil, bizden biri gibiler. Bize bi ta’deleri yohtur.” Hacer, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinci, December 24, 2019, Şanlıurfa.

57 Ayşe, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinci, March 10, 2020, Şanlıurfa.

in co-existing, the persistence of 'us' and 'them' dynamics underscores the enduring perception of 'otherness' in the host community. Consequently, addressing xenophobia requires replacing existing discourses with new ones, encouraging genuine interactions and promoting empathy and understanding between communities. Only through such efforts can societies move towards a future characterized by mutual trust, respect, and inclusion.

### *An Ambiguous Fear*

How do we learn whom to fear? How do we explain the fear? Kevin S. LaBar explains fear as "a negatively valenced emotion elicited in response to an impending threat that motivates a defensive reaction to protect the organism."<sup>58</sup> These threats can be "realistic" or perceived and can be constructed by culture - or state - like our emotions. Deeply connected to the present paper's subject, fear is also very much connected to the concept of xenophobia. Considering it "as a form of anti-immigrant prejudice",<sup>59</sup> xenophobia means "fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign."<sup>60</sup>

Fear plays an important role in anti-immigrant attitudes and behaviors. Bauman's<sup>61</sup> definition of migrants as a symbol of the collapse of social order emphasizes the irrational fears associated with migration. In the same vein, our research also revealed perceived threats to culture, economy, welfare, family dynamics, and public health as causes of fear.<sup>62</sup> While fear can be a reasonable response to vulnerability, act-

58 Kevin S. LaBar, "Fear and Anxiety", in *Handbook of Emotions Fourth Edition*, Ed. By Lisa Feldman Barrett, Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones, 66-82 (London: The Guilford Press, 2016), 751.

59 Oksana Yakushko, *Modern-Day Xenophobia* (London: Macmillan, 2018), 12.

60 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v, "xenophobia", accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/xenophobia>.

61 Bauman, *Strangers at Our Door*.

62 Also see: Cenk Saraçoğlu, and Daniele L. Belanger, "Mekân, Yer ve Şehir: Türkiye'de Suriye Karşılığının Kentteki Görünümleri." *Eğitim Bilim Toplum* 16, no. 62 (2018), 46-73.; Gökhan Arslantürk, "Sosyal Medyada Göçmen Karşıtı Tutumlar: Bütünleşik Tehdit Kuramı Çerçevesinde Bir İnceleme." *Psikoloji Araştırmaları*,

ing on misguided fears can perpetuate harmful stereotypes. As Bourke states, “humanity was plagued by the fear of others.”<sup>63</sup> Based on that, in this section, I specifically address the fear of the unknown because “the unknown carries the potential risk.” A notable aspect of this study lies in its exploration of paradoxical dynamics. Despite a common basis of religion and culture between immigrants and the host community, a phenomenon of ‘othering’ persists towards Syrian immigrants. While kinship and tribal ties constitute an inclusive situation, those outside the shared ethnicity and tribe are considered “foreigners” and thus not part of the “common culture.”<sup>64</sup> The different cultural and ethnic structure within the Syrian society goes beyond shared religion and significantly contributes to the paradoxical perception of immigrants as ‘foreigners’ and ‘others.’ Moreover, following the demarcation of borders, individuals from the two countries are often perceived as different entities despite their common religious and ethnic affiliations. Furthermore, even within this common faith, differences in religious practices can be used as a catalyst for marginalization.

According to Wahl<sup>65</sup>, the radical right especially tries to awaken fear and anxiety. Wahl explains the issue by stating, “It is the anxiety of those left behind in the progress of wealth that they will remain in their bad positions. It is the fear of those who are well off but worry about future competition with immigrants,”<sup>66</sup> and adds, “fear and anxiety are perhaps the oldest and most influential of all emotions shaping humans’ feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.”<sup>67</sup> These expressions reflect the perception in the eyes of the host population that migration disrupts the

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4(7). 2019), 17-27.; Celal İnce. *Uluslararası Göç Bağlamında Türkiye’deki Suriyeli Göçmenlerin Mekânsal Yoğunlaşması*. Adıyaman: İksad Yayınları, 2018; Burcu Toğral Koca, “Syrian Refugees in Turkey: From ‘Guests’ to ‘Enemies?’” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 54 (2016), 55–75. <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2016.4>.

63 Bourke, Fear, 2.

64 Murat Erdoğan, *Türkiye’deki Suriyeliler: Toplumsal Kabul ve Uyum* (İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2018).

65 Wahl, “Fear, Hate, and Hope”,

66 Wahl, “Fear, Hate, and Hope”, 23.

67 Wahl, “Fear, Hate, and Hope”, 23.

established social order. Such sentiments can stem from the perception that the city or country will be invaded, leading to a sense of “occupation.” Media discourse and inflammatory statements by politicians often reinforce this perception and increase concerns among ordinary people. Mehmet, one of my interlocutors who was previously working as a security guard in one of the immigrant camps under Temporary Protection, described the feeling of suffocation in Southeastern Anatolia due to the influx of immigrants. In his words:

The way I see it right now, the city is suffocated, the city is suffocated. For example, when I walk on the road, 7 out of 10 people are Syrians, and 2 or 3 people are Turkish, that’s what I see. I don’t go out much, I don’t go out much with people, how can I put it, I don’t go out much because of this pandemic. The images I am aware of are that Syrians currently have the most workplaces in Urfa. I see Syrians in certain places, at certain points. Topçu Square, wherever else, I mean, I think Topçu Square has the most weight. As far as I can see, I know other places like Süleymaniye, Devteşti. There are quite a lot of them in Bağlarbaşı... It was a raid. It doesn’t only apply to Urfa. It applies to all provinces bordering Syria. Antep is like this, Nizip is like this, Kilis is like this, I think Hatay is like this, and there is the Kamışlı side of Mardin, Nusaybin. In my opinion, it is the same there. They drowned them. It was suffocated. Southeastern Anatolia drowned.<sup>68</sup>

Similar to Mehmet’s narrative, a similar discourse was expressed by Gülbahar, a sociology student who was born and raised in Urfa: “For example, they say that there are Syrians everywhere. My aunt says they are like that.”<sup>69</sup>

Even though the percentage of immigrants is 11.14% in the city, in the eyes of members of the host society, “they are everywhere.” This idea and discourse stems from the perceived threat to culture and the economy, seeing immigrants as a burden to the state. Sara Ahmed explains that by saying “it suggests that the asylum seeker is ‘stealing’ something from

68 Mehmet, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinci, October 15, 2020, Şanlıurfa.

69 Gülbahar, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinci, September 28, 2020, Şanlıurfa.



the nation.”<sup>70</sup> This idea of invasion or perceived size of immigrants is not unique to Şanlıurfa. Like in the study of Marc Hooghe and Thomas de Vroome,<sup>71</sup> the proportions of ethnic minority groups are exaggerated. According to Bauman again, “the migrants are embodiments of the collapse of the order”<sup>72</sup> or can be seen as “the ghost of scrapping”<sup>73</sup> in the eyes of host society members. In the study of Celal İnce<sup>74</sup> in Şanlıurfa, immigrants are seen as those who disrupt a certain order. This perceived size of the “outgroup” also reminds the host society that they can be like them, and their order can collapse someday as well.

Furthermore, the worry over diseases linked to immigrants is another growing concern. Although there is no proof to back up this fear, it permeates society, and feeds concerns. Sara Ahmed<sup>75</sup> emphasizes how misreading is often reciprocated through the other’s fear, demonstrating how fear is frequently reciprocated. While talking about this issue during the fieldwork, Yusuf narrated:

Let me give you a very simple example. Four diseases disappeared in Urfa: malaria, tuberculosis, oriental boils, and polio before the arrival of Syrians here. This germ, according to the experts, this germ has become stronger with the new germ. I am explaining in simple language; to explain it in biological language, I cannot explain it, I am already incompetent in that regard and now, there are oriental boils in Urfa, there is tuberculosis. Tuberculosis was completely over, oriental boils were very few, there is malaria, polio has risen again.<sup>76</sup>

70 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 48.

71 Marc Hooghe and Thomas de Vroome, “The Perception of Ethnic Diversity and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments: A Multilevel Analysis of Local Communities in Belgium.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 1 (2015), 38–56. doi:10.1080/01419870.2013.800572.

72 Bauman, *Strangers at Our Door*, 19.

73 Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcast* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

74 İnce, *Uluslararası Göç Bağlamında Türkiye’deki Suriyeli Göçmenlerin Mekânsal Yoğunlaşması*, 320.

75 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

76 Yusuf, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinci, December 13, 2019, Şanlıurfa.

Although there is a grain of truth in this information, it is important to note that it is not the migrants themselves, but the living conditions offered to them that have led to this situation. According to the World Health Organization, there is no systematic link between migration and infectious diseases; infectious diseases are related to poverty status independent of migration.<sup>77</sup> In the context of the issue of threat, according to Karasu's research, "locals in Şanlıurfa blame asylum-seekers for the increase in crime rates, rent increases, moral deterioration, begging, over-crowded cities and noise, increased number of diverse forms of conflicts in everyday life, etc. 79% of the respondents think that the city is now less safe due to asylum-seekers. 37.1% of locals are worried about Syrians."<sup>78</sup>

On the other hand, another common worry among local women is the fear of "Syrian women." It is claimed that these immigrant women are going to "take their husbands" or "break down their families." It is believed that immigrants constitute a threat to the social order and family stability, which gives rise to this dread. One of the interviewees stated that:

Second marriages started to happen because of Syrian women. They don't ask for a dowry because they don't have this tradition. They were deceived by their appearance. Some of them wanted people to say "Wow, that person married a Syrian." Inevitably there was a breakdown in their homes, inevitably local women started to react against them. That's why no one looked favorably.<sup>79</sup>

In addition, many of the female interviewees stated that, as women from Şanlıurfa, they are not interested in make-up; instead, they devote

77 World Health Organization, "10 Things to Know about the Health of Refugees and Migrants", January 21, 2019. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/10-things-to-know-about-the-health-of-refugees-and-migrants>. Accessed March 20, 2024.

78 Mithat Arman Karasu, "Şanlıurfa'da Yaşayan Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Kentle Uyum Sorunu." *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 21, no. 3 (2016), 344, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/sduiibfd/issue/24697/261200>.

79 Hacer, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinci, October 16, 2020, Şanlıurfa.

themselves to their homes and children. However, there is a prevailing view that immigrant women “steal” or will “steal” the men of the host community by taking care of themselves and applying makeup. Fethi, a merchant, described how some people carry resentment towards immigrant women, expressing their fear and hate that they may influence local women or local women might imitate immigrant women to protect their marriages, potentially harming their marriages.<sup>80</sup> As Sara Ahmed states, “Fear sticks to some bodies and not others.”<sup>81</sup> In the Şanlıurfa example and perhaps extending to all Middle Eastern societies, fear sticks for all identities of the Orient<sup>82</sup> in different ways. Both the migrant and host society members, as a part of the Orient, always carry the “emotional vulnerability.”<sup>83</sup> To put the matter in perspective, there are differences between the clothing styles of women in Şanlıurfa - and in Turkey in general - and the clothing and make-up styles of immigrant women. Thus, the emotional vulnerability of immigrant women extends to their appearance. In particular, it was observed during the fieldwork that some Syrian women have gradually started to dress according to Turkish style in the society. In this context, the act of changing one’s style can become a self-protection and coping mechanism in a society marked by fear and uncertainty, as fear clings to their bodies.

Like Bourke<sup>84</sup> and Ahmed<sup>85</sup>, I also consider fear not just instinctive but also constructed through history and culture. As Ahmed<sup>86</sup> refers to Freud, “fear as mechanism for the defense of the ego against danger” can also be a survival mechanism necessary for protection in any condition of our lives. Ahmed stated that “fear could be viewed as a ‘reasonable response’ to vulnerability.”<sup>87</sup> However, the problem arises when we succumb to our fears and act based on misinterpretations,

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80 Fathi, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinçi, January 02, 2020, Şanlıurfa.

81 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 377.

82 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1979).

83 Bourke, Fear.

84 Bourke, Fear.

85 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

86 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 66.

87 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 68.

potentially causing harm to others. We cannot simply rely on gossips to guide our actions.

As a result, as illustrated by Bauman's<sup>88</sup> perspective, which portrays migrants as symbols of the collapse of social order, fear emerges as a significant driving force behind anti-immigrant sentiments, and actions. This irrational fear, observed during the fieldwork and via narratives of interviewees, results from locals' perception of immigrants as threats to their culture, family dynamics, and public health. While fear can be a natural response to vulnerability, acting on misguided fears perpetuates harmful stereotypes. The phenomenon of 'othering', particularly evident in the treatment of Syrian migrants despite shared religion and culture, underscores the paradoxical dynamics at play. The portrayal of migrants as disruptors of the established social order by the media and politicians exacerbates these fears, as illustrated by interviewers' concerns about family stability and the suffocating atmosphere they describe. In addition, fear of illnesses and local women's fears about immigrant women 'stealing' their husbands emphasize the constructed nature of fear through historical, cultural, and media influences. Contrary to the idea that fear is independent of social construction, scholars such as Ahmed<sup>89</sup> and Bourke<sup>90</sup> emphasize the construction of fear and the need to distinguish between reasonable responses to vulnerability and misjudged anxieties. As Barın<sup>91</sup> states, preventing prejudice and fear and developing cultural interactions and dialogue are crucial for fostering a culture of living together. For this reason, it is important to first understand fear and its causes and roots. At the same time, the feeling of hatred, which is generated from fear and insecurity, is another concept that is important to examine in this context. Therefore, in the following section, the feeling of hatred will

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88 Bauman, *Strangers at Our Door*.

89 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 43

90 Bourke, *Fear*.

91 Hilal Barın, "Geçici Misafirlikten Kalıcı Yerleşmeye Evrilen Süreçte Türkiye'deki Suriyelilerin Yaşadıkları Sorunları Yeniden Tartışmak." *Liberal Düşünce Dergisi* 110, (2023), 174. <https://doi.org/10.36484/liberal.129885>.

be analyzed through its place in the literature and how it surfaces in the anti-immigrant discourses of the host community in Şanlıurfa.

### *The Vicious Circle of Hate*

Sara Ahmed's<sup>92</sup> analysis of hate as a discourse of suffering provides insights into how hate is collectively constructed. In the context of migration, hatred stems from fear of insecurity, economic instability, and loss of cultural identity. The present study's fieldwork showed that immigrants are often perceived as a burden to the state, and threats to national security, welfare, and job opportunities, leading to feelings of resentment and hostility.<sup>93</sup> Hate in this case brings together individuals who perceive a common threat and see immigrants as responsible for their present losses.

When it comes to migration and the perception of threat, one of the most emphasized perceptions of threat is the threat to culture and the fear that the culture of the host community will be invaded. As the duration of migration increases and the number of immigrants increases, the host community perceives that they are under "occupation" and this perception is supported by nationalist and right-wing media discourses and provocative outbursts by certain politicians. One interviewee addresses this issue on the basis of population change but emphasizes that the perpetrators of this "occupation" do so unconsciously. In Yusuf's words:

At the moment, there is a change between 400,000 and 450,000 population in the province of Urfa, Siverek, Viranşehir. So, when you look at this, this is an official occupation of a city with a population of 1,900 - 1 million 900,000. What is an occupation? it is a cultural occupation, but this cultural occupation is seen as something that can be used from time to time by chauvinists and even

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92 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 43.

93 See also: Sedef Turper, "Fearing What? Vignette Experiments on Anti-immigrant Sentiments." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43, no. 11 (2017), 1792–1812.

by foreign powers, which I don't believe in at all. So, this ethnicity can completely change the population in the future. This is my point of view. It is not a fascist point of view. So, when you look at it now, from time to time, when the internal conflicts that come due to migrations enter into collective things, when they are mobilized, for example, when two people died in Syria, or excuse me, two people from the locals died, the city stood up as it was. We tried to stand up against those who stood up. I mean, as an intellectual of a city, we tried to stand up, because they don't know that the people who come here are unwitting invaders.<sup>94</sup>

The first issue to be focused on in these lines is that this perception of occupation is triggered by certain events in certain periods. As the host community sees more of what they perceive as "foreign" on the main street, in the city and bazaar center, and in other busy areas of the city, instead of getting used to them and finding a middle ground, they feel under occupation and increase their perception of threat. Many interviewees indirectly reflect this phenomenon of occupation by making statements such as, "Their signs are everywhere, in the bazaar, Topçu Square now belongs to Syrians, young people look up to them." Another issue is the time when two members of the host community were killed and then days of social violence against Syrians erupted, which constitutes one of the main focal points of our study. Instead of focusing on calming the feelings between the host community and the immigrant community, the use of inflammatory discourse can lead to the transformation of mistrust and fear into hatred and then violence. On the issue of foreigners, according to some studies conducted in the city, 20.9 % of Şanlıurfa people perceive migrants as foreigners<sup>95</sup> and a threat.<sup>96</sup> Mehmet Ali, one of the interviewees, explains this idea of "foreign" with these words:

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94 Yusuf, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinci, December 13, 2019, Şanlıurfa.

95 Karasu, "Şanlıurfa'da Yaşayan Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Kentle Uyum Sorunu", 344.

96 Hakan Bucak, "Factors Determining Public Behaviours Towards Refugees: Şanlıurfa Case." (Master's thesis, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2019), 68.

Okay, when they come, they speak Arabic. They can get along, but they still see them as foreigners. This is a completely different issue, you know, imagine that you speak the same language with the people who come, you get along with them, but you still see them as foreigners. Culture is like that...<sup>97</sup>

Gezici Yalçın and others stated, “Despite an enduring ethnocultural and historical tie, renewed encounter with ingroup members as refugees adds a new layer to the intergroup hierarchy of “we” and “they”, which is complicated in the liminal space created by the border and the colonization process.”<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Erdoğan and Yetkin Aker also discuss this issue in their work and claim that:

Although Şanlıurfa is one of the most significant cities in Turkey, where cultural similarities are very high between Syrians and residents, unlike what is expected, Şanlıurfa Barometer 2018 shows that even in Şanlıurfa, residents are distant to Syrians ... the number of Syrian migrants in Şanlıurfa is more important than their cultural similarities with the residents. Cultural similarities are meaningful where the number of migrants is low in a country, and anxieties among the residents related to, for instance, loss of identity or unemployment might not exist or be ineffective. However, when the number of migrants is high, then the effect of cultural similarities would diminish, and social cohesion would be damaged because of social distance related to anxieties and concerns.<sup>99</sup>

İnce also points out that although there is historical commonality, kinship relations, common language and religion, and cultural similarities between the two societies, a part of the host society focuses on the

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97 Mehmet Ali, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinçi, January 02, 2020, Şanlıurfa.

98 Meltem Gezici Yalçın, Cem Coşkan, Muhammet Batu, Özgür Kan, and Nazan Yılmaz, ““Syrian” Refugees at the Gaze of Kurds and Arabs in Mardin: Understanding Social Representations and Acculturation Expectations from a Decolonial Approach.” In *Examining Complex Intergroup Relations: Through the Lens of Turkey*, ed. by Hakan Çakal and Serkan Husnu, (London: Routledge, 2023), 217

99 Murat M. Erdoğan, and Deniz Yetkin Aker, “Beyond the Social Distance and Cultural Similarities: Turkish Citizens and Syrians in Şanlıurfa.” *Migration and Diversity* 2, no. 1 (2023), 2. <https://doi.org/10.33182/md.v2i1.2964>.

differences, which are in the minority compared to the similarities.<sup>100</sup> When considering the mentioned factors contributing to the issue, this understanding of “other” shows the seeds of hatred. Sometimes this hatred can further cause dehumanization of immigrants. During the interviews, some people said that “they are like a herd” referring to the number of their children, or another person said, “they are savage.” It should be emphasized that the same sentences were used for the population migrating from Şanlıurfa and other Southeastern and Eastern provinces to the West of Turkey within Turkey’s internal migration experience before the arrival of Syrian immigrants.<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately, this example is not peculiar to Şanlıurfa and there are many other studies from different parts of the world which touch upon this critical issue.<sup>102</sup>

It is clear from these recent cases that there is disagreement on sharing the host country’s financial sources. According to Coser, the social conflict is “a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize injure or eliminate their rivals.”<sup>103</sup> Even if it only covered a portion of the aspect or had just one dimension—conflict—it nonetheless provided insight into our study. In this context, Mehmet claims:

Also, the state offered them jobs in public institutions; maybe you are aware of this. They work in schools, they work as teachers, they work in state hospitals, they work in different institutions.

100 İnce, *Uluslararası Göç Bağlamında Türkiye’deki Suriyeli Göçmenlerin Mekânsal Yoğunlaşması*, 325.

101 Saraçoğlu, “İzmirli Orta Sınıfta Kürt Algısı.”; Tümtaş, *Nöbetleşe Dışlanma*.

102 See also: Stephen M. Utych, “How Dehumanization Influences Attitudes toward Immigrants.” *Political Research Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2018), 440–452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912917744897>; Yakushko, *Modern-Day Xenophobia*; Turp-er, “Fearing What? Vignette Experiments on Anti-immigrant Sentiments.”; Fabio Perocco, “Anti-migrant Islamophobia in Europe. Social roots, mechanisms and actors.” *REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana* 26, (2018) 25–40. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1980-85852503880005303>,; Jens Hainmueller and Daniel J. Hopkins, “Public Attitudes Toward Immigration.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 17, no. 1 (May 11, 2014), 225–49. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-102512-194818>.

103 Coser, 1956, 8.



For example, for 6 months by İŞKUR (Turkish Labor Institution). This, what do you think happened here? What happened? Not in terms of jobs. We are now seen as second-class citizens; they are seen as first-class citizens.<sup>104</sup>

Pellegrini and others<sup>105</sup> found that people who feel socially excluded tend to feel hostile feelings toward immigrants in their studies. During my fieldwork in Şanlıurfa, I frequently heard discourses like Mehmet's. For instance, in a Qur'ân teaching center, I met a woman who said, "Am I not a brother/sister of Erdoğan? He always says that immigrants are our brothers and sisters, but my daughter is homeless because of raising rent." These concerns are highly related to economic threats, also known as "realistic threats."<sup>106</sup> Yakushko<sup>107</sup> highlighted that these threats (and also the theories on the threat) attributed to migrants are more the imagination of a biased prejudice than reality. It is emphasized that the threat perceptions that cause fear among citizens in host countries have few real-life counterparts.<sup>108</sup>

As a result of all these negative emotions and discourses of scapegoating and dehumanization which I observed and heard during my fieldwork, it was not surprising to hear some people saying that "Even though war still continues, I do not want them in my city or country anymore." Today, Syrians under "Temporary Protection" are facing a new state regulation to be sent to Syria as a "Voluntary, Safe and Dignified Return."<sup>109</sup> However, when the war still continues, how is it possible to talk about sending them back? or how can this return be named as a

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104 Mehmet, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinci, October 15, 2020, Şanlıurfa.

105 Pellegrini, et al, "Social Exclusion and Anti-Immigration Attitudes in Europe."

106 Stephan, Walter G. Ybarra, Oscar Rios, Kimberly, "Intergroup Threat Theory." In *Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination*, edited by Todd D. Nelson, 255–278. New York and London: Psychology Press, 2016.

107 Yakushko, *Modern-Day Xenophobia*, 68.

108 Joel S. Fetzer, *Public Attitudes Toward Immigration in The United States, France, and Germany*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

109 The Presidency of Migration Management, "Voluntary, Safe, and Dignified Return", Accessed March 20, 2024. <https://en.goc.gov.tr/voluntary-safe-and-dignified-return>

“dignified” one for both sides?<sup>110</sup> Elif Yazıcı Başer stated, “The absence of a ‘voluntary character’ of the repatriation and the lack of the ‘safety and dignity’ condition in the country of origin, which together puts one million refugees at risk.”<sup>111</sup> This is also a result of the idea that the “Syrians” are “guests” which led people of host country to think they will turn back one day as if they do not have any right to stay.<sup>112</sup> In the contexts of the discussions on the rights of immigrants, Bekir Berat Özipek also emphasizes the importance of a rights-based approach by stating that:

The fact that asylum-seekers contribute positively to the economy and are a burden, as some believe, does not change the need for a rights-based approach towards them. Asylum-seekers, regardless of their language, religion or “identity”, are individuals with equal rights and deserve basic legal and humanitarian guarantees.<sup>113</sup>

Although a portion of the local community emphasized a rights-based approach and reminded us of the importance of the humanitarian aspect of the issue, this group stood against all marginalization. They based their stance on the belief, referencing Islam, that both communities are “Ansar (helper) and Muhajirin (those who migrated).” However, in the larger context, anti-immigrant emotions and behaviors are a challenging issue with roots in social, historical, economic and cultural contexts that cannot be separated. As stated at the beginning, these feel-

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110 For further information about forced but “voluntary” return: Human Rights Watch, “Turkey: Hundreds of Refugees Deported to Syria”, October 26, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/24/turkey-hundreds-refugees-deported-syria>.; Salem, Hosam, “Fear among Syrian Refugees over Turkey ‘Voluntary Return’ Plan.” Al Jazeera, July 20, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/20/fear-among-syrian-refugees-over-turkey-voluntary-return-plan>.

111 Elif Yazıcı Başer, “How Safe Is the Zone, and How Voluntarily Are the Returnees? Turkey’s Project for a ‘Safe and Dignified’ Voluntary Repatriation of Syrian Refugees and the Potential Implementation of R2P on Behalf of Returnees.” *The International Journal of Human Rights*, (2024), 26. doi:10.1080/13642987.2024.2334789.

112 Uyan-Semerci, and Erdoğan, “Guests to Neighbours.”

113 Bekir Berat Özipek, “Ekonomi Temelli Ayrımcılık ve Önyargı Karşıtı Argümantasyona Katkı: “Suriyeli Sığınmacılar ve Türkiye Ekonomisi” Raporu.” *Liberal Düşünce Dergisi*, 23(90), (2018), 126.

ings cannot be separated by sharp borders. Thus, I would like to finalize the chapter with the words of one of the interviewees:

They are in a dilemma; people are experiencing confusion of emotions. Because it is like this: every community has good and bad ones. When we came here, both the good and the bad came here as well. Therefore, those who encounter the bad one in everyday life talk about the bad one, and those who encounter the good one talk about the good one. So, you see both emotions.<sup>114</sup>

## Conclusion

This study is an attempt to investigate and analyze reasons that generate anti-immigrant emotions and discourses and how they are circulated in the society, with a particular focus on emotions of (mis)trust, fear, and hatred in the context of Şanlıurfa. The findings highlight the complex nature of these emotions and emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach to address anti-immigrant attitudes, emotions, and discourses. By focusing on understanding the roots of these negative emotions, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on understanding and solving diverse issues and problems of immigrants and paves the way for the possibility of building a more inclusive and empathetic society. In addition to this, the findings demonstrate that there are both favorable and negative opinions regarding immigrants; these attitudes are not always consistent or absolute. However, negative feelings like fear, mistrust and hate predominate in the context of Şanlıurfa. It is essential to foster understanding and enhance the caliber of connections between host and immigrant communities in order to prevent or reduce these unpleasant feelings and their possible destructive outcomes. Dispelling myths and halting the spread of misleading information can be accomplished by fostering trust and disseminating true information through educational programs and community involvement. To foster a climate of trust and empathy, political figures and media outlets must also assume responsibility for their messaging.

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114 Ayşe, interview by Merve Reyhan Ekinci, October 13, 2020, Şanlıurfa.

Although this study focuses on the host community, it should be noted that feelings of fear, anxiety, uneasiness, and insecurity are valid and mutual for the individuals of both societies, albeit for different reasons. An example of this can be illustrated by narration of an incident that took place during the days I spent in the fieldwork. The person who narrated the incident to us stated that a pregnant Syrian woman sitting on a public bus with her children, while chatting with a member of the host community, felt the need to mention that she was a widow, had married a Turkish widow man, and was not a second wife. The informant added that he witnessed her hesitation and fear while stating this and that she probably felt in a constant state of feeling bad and needing to explain. It would be appropriate to repeat here the statement made by one of the interviewees above that "forcing someone to explain is fascism." Because of the feeling of being constantly under suspicion, having eyes on you, attributing the events witnessed individually to the whole society, as in the incident mentioned above, it is the initial stage of a reaction against a marginalization mechanism. It can be argued that a society can elicit xenophobia or politics of marginalization and exclusion in any situation, regardless of the characteristics of the other society.

After more than ten years of living together with positive and negative feelings, one of the points to be considered today is the urgent necessity for both decision-makers and scholars working on this subject matter to address the issue in an interdisciplinary and solution-oriented manner for a better social order and a healthier society. Especially in the local communities such as Şanlıurfa, which carries both traditional codes and modern urban concerns, the points that are important for both societies should be identified and solution mechanisms should be established where opinion leaders, community leaders, policymakers, local governors, and educators must work together.

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