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Socio-Economic Integration Within and Through Small-Scale Family Businesses of Turkish-Origin Entrepreneurs in Germany

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Abstract: Migrant entrepreneurship is often discussed as a strategy for adapting to the host country, yet studies frequently overlook the nuanced relationship between higher levels of integration and entrepreneurial activities among individuals with migration backgrounds. This study challenges one-dimensional views of entrepreneurship and integration by analysing the lived experiences of individuals of Turkish descent in Germany. Using an autoethnographic approach, drawn from my work experience at a migrant-owned business, and 23 in-depth interviews with Turkish-origin entrepreneurs, the research investigates underexplored domain of migrant family businesses through the framework of mixed embeddedness theory. Empirically derived findings highlight the significance of upward social mobility, migrant agency, family embeddedness, and work flexibility as key motivations and recourses. These intersect with opportunity structures shaped by belonging, adaptation to local markets, market ghettoization and the rise of new migrant entrepreneurs. Additionally, self-employment decisions are influenced more by socio-economic integration and life objectives than by unemployment. This paper emphasizes the agency of individuals with migration backgrounds in navigating structural challenges. It also sheds light on labour and self-exploitation, and interactions among “Muslim” entrepreneurs, offering a nuanced perspective on migrant entrepreneurship.

Keywords: migrant entrepreneurship; socio-economic integration; family embeddedness; self-exploitation; autoethnography

1 Introduction

Migrant self-employment, particularly in the form of business ownership, offers valuable insights into the migration context, especially regarding the structural

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conditions in the host country and the agency of migrants.¹ The rate of self-employment among migrants has been rising over the past decade.² In Germany, one in six entrepreneurs has a migration background, amounting to approximately three-quarters of a million individuals (ifm (Institut für Mittelstandsforschung der Universität Mannheim) 2020). Among these, Turkish-origin business owners represent the second-largest group (12 %) after entrepreneurs of Polish-origin (14 %) (David et al. 2022, 11). Although the literature on migrant entrepreneurship for Turkish-origin individuals in Germany is extensive, many studies focus exclusively on the economic impacts, often conceptualizing this phenomenon within the framework of ethnic enclave theory. In terms of cultural impacts, there has been interest in exploring products introduced by migrant entrepreneurship, such as the transformation of döner kebab into a globally recognized fast food (Ranta and Ichijo 2022; Möhring 2024). Moreover, significant attention has been paid to aspects such as labor market integration (Brzozowski and Lasek 2019; Coletti and Pasini 2022), the historical background of entrepreneurial growth (Balkır and van Hove 2016), and cultural diversity (Pécoud 2004, 2017). Although empirical research from other countries shows that push factors, such as unemployment in Italy and the UK, have no observable effect on migrant entrepreneurship (Rinaldi et al. 2023), the common argument in the German context is that unemployment is one of the primary drivers of self-employment for Turkish-origin individuals, if not the most critical factor (e.g. Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp 2005; Berner 2016; Hillmann 2021; Kontos 2007; Murshed 2023; Tolciu, Schaland, and El-Cherkeh 2010). However, this paper challenges the notion that this one-dimensional relationship can be generalized. Instead, it seeks to move beyond discussions centred on labor market integration and ethnic niches to explore the complex social interactions evident in the daily operations of small-scale enterprises. These interactions include ethnic embeddedness, family embeddedness, political-institutional embeddedness, belonging, and interethnic contact.

Moreover, studies on migrant entrepreneurship in Germany often overlook the significance of family enterprises (Selçuk and Suwala 2020). Similarly, Hadri et al. (2023) review that the role of families in migration background entrepreneurship remains underexplored, despite families being a significant resource. Through my observations as an insider, I have noted that family businesses within immigrant-background entrepreneurship possess unique dynamics that require a holistic

1 This paper collects a case study with Turkish migration-background residents of Germany. Many of the participants are not immigrants themselves. However, in the literature “migrant entrepreneurship and self-employment” is used interchangeably also with migration-backgrounds. Thereby, I adapt the same language.

2 According to the OECD and European Commission (2021), the self-employment rate among migrants born outside of the EU has risen by 198 % and 190 % for self-employed individuals and employees, respectively, between 2006 and 2020.

examination. The interaction between family life and work introduces a new perspective for understanding the motivations and resources that drive these enterprises. As Krueger et al. (2021) demonstrate, the micro, meso, and macro layers of context shape the embeddedness framework of family businesses, highlighting the need for context-sensitive research. Drawing from self-reflective research and fieldwork, this study aims to explore the role of small-scale Turkish-origin family businesses in the socio-economic integration processes in Germany.

Socio-economic integration is emphasized in this study because it facilitates the analysis of various social interactions, including ethnic relations, group networks, and sense of belonging. The key advantage of this framework is its capacity to reveal generational shifts through employment practices. The historical transition from guest workers to migrant entrepreneurs can be re-examined in light of the contemporary social positions of individuals with Turkish migration backgrounds, as explored by Çağlar (1995) in her seminal “McDöner” study. While the first generation of Turkish migrants in Germany primarily consisted of guestworkers employed in factories, mines, and construction, subsequent generations have experienced markedly different social trajectories. Born or arrived in Germany at an early age, these later generations have been raised and educated within the German system, leading to distinct social positions compared to their predecessors. Key differences include the absence of personal migration experiences, varied legal statuses, particularly regarding citizenship, superior language proficiency, and more opportunities for higher education. A recent study by Weber et al. (2024) reveals that German residents of Turkish and Kurdish descent exhibit high levels of balanced dual identities. Additionally, these generations benefit from different social networks, reflecting a broader integration into German society. For instance, Bağcı and Franz (2025) demonstrate that stronger territorial embeddedness among Turkish grocery retailers enhances their ability to adapt to structural changes in Germany. Filiz (2015) notes that the cultural image of Turkish immigrants has evolved from that of guest workers to entrepreneurs. Similarly, Eroğlu (2018) finds that recent generations of Turkish-origin are increasingly inclined toward entrepreneurship compared to their first-generation parents. These shifts require analysis from the socio-economic integration perspective, considering the different positions of new generations, to uncover the complex drivers behind these changes, as pointed out by Hillmann (2018). By doing so, we can engage in a comparative discussion of migrant entrepreneurship, moving beyond the conventional assumptions of ethnic economy theories. Addressing the role of family in these processes also highlights an overlooked aspect: the utilization of labor power within the opportunity structure.

Studies have highlighted how migrant enterprises often emerge as adaptation strategies, as demonstrated by Aldrich and Waldinger (1990). When combined with the concept of embeddedness – originally developed by Granovetter (1985) following

Polanyi ([1944] 1957) – this adaptation argument paved the way for the mixed embeddedness theory (Kloosterman, Van der Leun, and Rath 1999). The mixed embeddedness approach posits that migrants' motivations and resources, in relation to the job market and employment opportunities, can influence their decision to pursue self-employment, which is frequently seen as an adaptation strategy (Ram and Jones 2008). In this regard, a study analysing nearly 40 years of data shows that structural changes affect employment practices for native and migrant Turkish men differently, placing the latter at a disadvantage (Wiedner and Giesecke 2022). This paper builds on that adaptation perspective by viewing migrant entrepreneurship as an interplay with socio-cultural and institutional frameworks within urban economies (Kloosterman, Van der Leun, and Rath 1999; Kloosterman and Rath 2006; Ram, Jones, and Villares-Varela 2017). By examining the intersection of migration history, family dynamics, work, ethnicity, and political-institutional structures, mixed embeddedness is utilized to investigate the multiple motivations and resources that emerge.

With this objective, I offer an empirically grounded analysis to address several gaps: the scarcity of studies that move beyond ethnic enclave discussions, particularly concerning second and third generations; the limited conceptualization of migrant agency in terms of attachment to the receiving country and aspirations for upward social mobility; the lack of understanding regarding the internal dynamics of migrant businesses and their positioning within the opportunity structure; and the need to reconsider family migrant businesses through empirically supported discussions. Through ethnographic analysis, the concept of integration is operationalized based on the lived experiences and self-definitions of Turkish-origin individuals, rather than relying on dominant narratives. Agency, on the other hand, is operationalized within the framework of mixed embeddedness theory. I use the term migrant agency to refer to the capability of individuals with migration backgrounds to pursue their desired economic activities.

This study involves participant observation and in-depth interviews with 23 Turkish-origin family business owners. Thematic analysis of interview narratives and observations reveals that, despite increased socio-economic integration, the political-institutional context can still be discriminatory based on migration background. I build my arguments on this finding and demonstrate that, contrary to many existing studies, self-employment does not necessarily arise from unemployment. Instead, it can also be a response to a discriminatory opportunity structure, primarily motivated by individual agency and the labour power provided by the family. In the following section, this paper's theoretical framework is discussed. In Section 3, the paper presents the historical and contemporary realities of Turkish-origin entrepreneurs in Germany as well as the research design. In Section 4, the findings and the multi-dimensional relationship between mixed embeddedness of small-scale

family business ownership in socio-economic integration processes are shown. Finally, the discussion offers a comprehensive summary of the study, highlighting how it relates to the literature and suggesting avenues for future research.

2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Mixed Embeddedness

The theoretical framework of this paper is grounded in mixed embeddedness. This approach analyses changes and transformations in socio-cultural relations, institutions, and urban labor markets to understand the rise of migrant entrepreneurship (Kloosterman, Van der Leun, and Rath 1999). It is a “versatile framework” that addresses key questions related to the resources that migrants utilize for entrepreneurship (Kloosterman and Rath 2018). Unlike ethnic enclave theory, mixed embeddedness situates individuals with migration backgrounds beyond their ethnic communities, expanding the focus to include the political-institutional structure and social embeddedness within the receiving country (Panayiotopoulos 2008).

The concept of embeddedness into multiple social dimensions moves beyond classic understanding of ethnic enclaves as arising out of necessity, since migrants are often excluded from the labor market, making entrepreneurship a response to high unemployment rates, as reviewed by Balkır and van Hove (2016). In contrast, mixed embeddedness offers an understanding of the interplay between structure and agency within the migration context (Gomez et al. 2020). It considers migrant agency and opportunity structures through an interactionist lens (Rath 2000; Kloosterman 2010; Mitchell 2015). In this paper, structural factors are interpreted as economic and political-institutional opportunities and conditions, as formulated within the mixed embeddedness framework (Solano, Schutjens, and Rath 2022). More specifically, the opportunity structure refers to the notion that “opportunities for businesses in capitalist societies emerge through markets. Markets and all forms of economic action are always and everywhere embedded in larger social and cultural contexts as well as in institutional and regulatory frameworks” (Kloosterman and Rath 2018, 107).

This perspective is also valuable for moving beyond the “ethnic group paradigm,” which often views migrant entrepreneurship solely through the lens of ethnic relations, framing it as part of either an assimilationist trajectory or a more pluralistic development (Kloosterman and Rath 2018, 106). In this paper, ethnic relations within the theoretical framework are understood as social and cultural factors that are also shaped by the opportunity structure. Thereby, I employ an analysis based on mixed embeddedness theory that focuses on motivations and resources,

incorporating ethnic relations into the approach. The motivations and resources of migrant entrepreneurship often appear as interconnected aspects. As Apitzsch (2003) discusses, “motivational resources” can significantly influence the decision of individuals with immigrant backgrounds to establish businesses. Beyond motivations, experiences also play a crucial role in shaping what we recognize as resources (Kontos 2003). Access to social, cultural, and economic capital, specific skills and knowledge, ethnic networks, and even ethnic identity itself can serve as both motivations and resources, depending on migrant agency and the opportunity structure.

Social capital, a multifaceted construct, is closely tied to the capacity of the migrant community (Tata and Prasad 2015). Cultural and ethnic resources are often thought to drive entrepreneurship among individuals with migration backgrounds, as they possess knowledge about the specific demands for services and products within their communities (Tata and Prasad 2015). For example, Şahin, Nijkamp, and Baycan-Levent (2007) demonstrate that Turkish-origin entrepreneurs in the Netherlands leveraged their understanding of their community’s demand for halal foods. Ethnic solidarity and support have also been argued to function as ethnic resources that facilitate migrant entrepreneurship (Thomas and Zhou 2022; Berghoff 2020). Additionally, biographical narratives can significantly impact business establishment. The role of migrant agency is particularly evident in individual efforts, the use of personal resources, and the ability to seize opportunities (Brettell and Alstatt 2007). Characteristics such as decisiveness, risk-taking behaviour, market knowledge, and communication skills are often cited as positive contributors to migrant entrepreneurship (Constant, Shachmurove, and Zimmermann 2005; Batista and Umblijs 2014; Hagos, Izak, and Scott 2019). However, the analysis of agency in business ownership requires more attention, particularly regarding how and to what extent agency reflects integration levels. While common narratives of agency emphasize individual characteristics, the attachment to the receiving country and its influence on agency are often overlooked.

In the scope of the mixed embeddedness literature, structural factors refer to both motivations and resources. These factors primarily encompass conditions within the political-institutional context of the receiving country as they pertain to individuals with migration backgrounds (Davids and Van Houte 2008; Kloosterman 2010; Ram, Jones, and Villares-Varela 2017). The lack of generational knowledge and networks, language barriers, discrimination and racism against migrants, and a hostile political environment are all identified as motivations for pursuing self-employment (Selçuk and Suwala 2020; Hack-Polay, Igwe, and Madichie 2020; Chen and Hu 2021). Ram and colleagues describe these impacts of the opportunity structure as being shaped by “migrancy,” referring to the dislocation of immigrants within an alien “commercial, legal, and social environment” where they have yet to

acquire “linguistic and experiential skills” (Ram et al. 2013, 338). Anti-Muslim attitudes represent another form of structural discrimination that affects individuals with immigrant backgrounds in the labor market. These “Muslim others” are often perceived as taking jobs from natives, which can result in highly unequal opportunities within the opportunity structure (Essers and Tedmanson 2014). Additionally, poor wages in post-industrial societies drive the growth of self-employment, as noted by Portes and Böröcz (1989). In such conditions, as many studies discuss, individuals with migration backgrounds may be compelled to pursue self-employment and entrepreneurship as pathways to upward economic mobility (Faist 2010; Kloosterman 2010; Tata and Prasad 2015; Kim 2020; Villares-Varela 2018; Rath, Solano, and Schutjens 2020). Ethnic enclaves, in these terms, are often seen as transitional stages; subsequent generations demonstrate higher levels of assimilation and upward mobility, effectively challenging the notion of “parallel societies” (Esser 2010, 21). However, the reasons behind the aspiration for upward mobility among individuals with migration backgrounds require further exploration, particularly in terms of motivations beyond economic gains.

The mixed embeddedness approach does not view migrant entrepreneurship merely as the creation of ethnic niches or enclaves marginalized from mainstream markets. Instead, it offers a more flexible perspective that also considers the concept of “ethnic break-outs” (Ram and Hillin 1994). This approach acknowledges that not all migrant businesses are shaped solely by the cultural demands of their ethnic communities. While religious and culturally specific enterprises – such as halal businesses, boutiques, souvenir shops, and hairdressers – are common (Tolciu, Schaland, and El-Cherkeh 2010), migrant entrepreneurship extends beyond these areas. Some migrant businesses, as evidenced by the diversity of their product offerings and customer profiles, demonstrate a break-out from ethnic niches, reflecting a deeper level of social embeddedness within the host country (Edwards et al. 2016; Parzer 2016).

The primary objective of this paper is to explore the role of socio-economic integration in migrant family enterprises, necessitating a deeper examination of family dynamics within these businesses. Family embeddedness, as conceptualized in the mixed embeddedness approach, is often highlighted for its role in enhancing the survival and durability of migrant entrepreneurship (Bird and Wennberg 2016; Li and Johansen 2023; Hu, Su, and Zhang 2021). From a more holistic view, the embeddedness of context is regarded as an important analytical framework, as it offers a valuable perspective for understanding the heterogeneity of family businesses within interconnected and interdependent subsystems (Labaki and Mustafa 2023). Despite the significant intersection of migration, work, and family relations, migrant family businesses remain an underexplored area, especially concerning Turkish-origin family businesses in Germany. For instance, Berwing (2019) reports

that, apart from construction enterprises, more than 50 % of all co-ethnic employees in migrant entrepreneurship are family members across various branches. While Tolciu, Schaland, and El-Cherkeh (2010) emphasize the human capital provided by family as a critical component, Tata and Prasad (2015) consider family as the primary source of social capital. Malki (2024) introduces the concept of financial ambidexterity to explain how migrant family businesses utilize flexibility to exploit financial opportunities. While these are crucial aspects, the internal dynamics of family embeddedness require further attention. Schmiz (2013) advocates for a new perspective on self-employed migrants and their businesses, describing them as “service providers in neoliberal urban labor markets” that demand high levels of flexibility. This often leads to precariousness and self-exploitation within the context of family-run businesses. Under such challenging conditions, employing family members becomes a strategic response to manage budget constraints and high search costs – factors that disproportionately impact individuals with migration backgrounds and contribute to the prevalence of foreign-origin entrepreneurs in certain sectors (Tolciu 2011). Additionally, Pütz, Schreiber, and Welpé (2007) highlight exploitation as a significant competitive characteristic of these enterprises.

Another multilayered issue, the lived experiences of entrepreneurs in migration-background-dominated markets remain also sparsely studied. While studies have examined general business relations in sectors like Muslim-exclusive halal businesses (Lever and Miele 2012; Hussein de Araújo, Hamid, and do Rego 2022), the internal dynamics of these businesses from the entrepreneurs’ perspectives have not been sufficiently investigated. My analysis highlights both issues based on empirical evidence.

2.2 Turkish-Origin Entrepreneurs in Germany

The motivations driving Turkish-origin entrepreneurs are diverse and shaped by various factors, including diasporic identity and emotional attachment to the homeland (Schulte 2008), the utility of transculturalism as a resource (Pütz 2008), transnational ties (Elo 2019), and individual choices and ambitions (Hackett 2015). Berwing, Isaak, and Leicht (2019) note that while self-employment among native Germans decreased by 4 % between 2005 and 2016, it increased by 24 % among immigrants. Notably, migrants from Turkey are 70 % more likely to become self-employed than other migrant groups in Germany, though their earnings often lag behind (Constant, Shachmurove, and Zimmermann 2005). Zimmermann and colleagues (2003) demonstrate that unlike native Germans, Turkish-origin entrepreneurs do not earn more by working longer hours; rather, business longevity is key to sustaining higher earnings.

Ethnic resources play a significant role in service and trade sectors. The symbolic association of Turkish migrants with döner shops highlights the transition from guestworker to entrepreneur in the food industry (Filiz 2015). Migrants in Germany are often identified by their labor roles, and as employment trends shift, so too does their cultural image (Filiz 2015). Çağlar (1995) explores how different forms of capital shape the social positioning of German Turks, emphasizing that access to various types of capital is crucial in migrant entrepreneurship. Bruder and colleagues (2011) find that individuals with migration backgrounds, including those of Turkish-origin, are more likely to be denied credit or receive smaller loans compared to natives. Similarly, limited social capital, evidenced by grassroots efforts like the creation of a “Turkish business community” directory (Ülker 2019), reflects the challenges faced by Turkish-origin entrepreneurs. Ülker (2016) critiques the essentialist view of culture as the primary resource for entrepreneurs, instead situating Turkish-origin entrepreneurs in Berlin within “the broader context of the neoliberal urban labor market”. Although studies have observed the role of family in these enterprises, research specifically on family businesses remains sparse. Early study by Blaschke and Ersöz (1986) finds that most workers in Turkish migrant businesses were family and community members, such as spouses and children, with human capital sustaining work flexibility and low wages. I examine how family embeddedness serves as a substitute for other forms of capital in these businesses.

Research on migrant entrepreneurship and integration in Germany has primarily focused on labor market and economic integration (Liu et al. 2018; Brzozowski and Lasek 2019; Coletti and Pasini 2022). While entrepreneurship is often seen as a pathway to integration (Brixy, Sternberg, and Vorderwülbecke 2011; David et al. 2020), the impact of integration on the decision to pursue self-employment has been less explored. Individuals with certain levels of integration may enter entrepreneurship with diverse motivations. Hillmann (2018) finds that later-generation immigrant-background business owners have a deep understanding of their social surroundings, suggesting that such knowledge requires a certain level of integration to connect with meaningful spatial interactions.

In the early stages of Turkish-origin businesses, scholars offered contrasting perspectives. Abadan-Unat (1997) aligned with the ethnic enclave approach, suggesting that ethnic businesses confine Turkish-origin individuals to their cultural communities, thus impeding socio-economic integration. From today's perspective, her findings appear outdated, particularly her view that these businesses cater exclusively to Turkish-origin customers. While she saw such businesses as burdens on socio-economic integration, other studies highlight their positive outcomes. Sen (1991) argued that ethnic businesses reflect an effort to settle in Germany and contribute to integration. Pécoud (2003) took a more nuanced position, recognizing the ambivalence in the relationship between ethnic businesses and integration,

pointing to the heterogeneity of business relations. He suggested that while businesses provide minimal social connections, they do not significantly influence existing power dynamics. Coming to the contemporary times, changes in employment practices have been highlighted. Eroğlu (2018) captures this shift, finding that Turkish-origin individuals in Europe, including Germany, are more inclined toward entrepreneurship than their first-generation parents. Later generations engage in small-scale business ownership despite the need for flexibility and longer working hours, often driven by discrimination. Eroğlu's findings challenge assimilation theory, demonstrating that discrimination persists even among highly educated new generations (Eroğlu 2018, 14–15).

Understanding the role of small-scale family businesses owned by Turkish-origin entrepreneurs in Germany's socio-economic integration processes requires a conceptual framework that considers political institutional structure and agency as interconnected. The mixed embeddedness approach, with its interactionist perspective, provides a foundation for analysing integration without isolating migration history and entrepreneurial motivations from their broader context.

3 Context and Research Design: Transformation from Guestworker to Entrepreneur

Germany has the highest number of foreign-born residents and people with migration backgrounds in Europe. According to the Federal Statistical Office, 22.3 million people in Germany have a migration background, making up 27.8 % of the population.³ Over the years, both Germany's integration policies and the demographic characteristics of Turkish-origin residents have undergone significant changes. Policies such as the Family Unification Law of 1973 and the Immigration Law of 2005 have shaped these changes, influencing social and economic outcomes for migrants. As Abadan-Unat (2002) notes, migratory processes since the 1990s have been reflected in various aspects of German society, including changes to the Foreigners Law, the growth of ethnic businesses, the proliferation of ethnic and religious associations, rising xenophobia, and the formation of a distinct identity for foreigners. I focus on the period after the late 1990s, examining the shifts in labor and employment practices among Turkish-origin individuals in Germany.

The first generation of Turkish migrants predominantly worked as dependent labourers, often in factories, mining and construction. The surge in business start-

³ Of this, individuals with Turkish migration-backgrounds make up 12 %. See destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2022/04/PD22_162_125.html. accessed 27 January 2023.

ups in the 1990s is frequently attributed to high unemployment rates among the children of these migrants (Selçuk and Suwala 2020). Research indicates that during the 1990s, the unemployment rate among those with a Turkish migration background was double the national average (Pütz 2003). This disparity in unemployment rates between natives and those with migration backgrounds remains a significant concern. In 2019, the unemployment rate for foreign citizens in Germany was 12.9 %, compared to just 4.3 % for German nationals.⁴ Despite the labor market's need for a steady supply of workers, Germany has struggled to address labor turnover effectively. This has resulted in a paradox where some migrants remain unemployed while the country continues to recruit new workers from abroad.⁵ The ongoing challenges in the labor market underscore the complexity of integrating a diverse population and the need for policies that better address the realities faced by migrants, especially those of Turkish-origin, who continue to navigate a landscape marked by both opportunities and obstacles.

3.1 Research Design

To contextualize the motivations and resources of Turkish-origin entrepreneurs and analyse their frameworks, this study employs qualitative methods including (auto)/ethnography, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and participant observation. This approach aims to provide a migrant-centred perspective, avoiding the reproduction of institutional discourses on integration. The research focuses on themes and concepts derived inductively from the lived experiences of the subjects, particularly their biographical stories. Findings are based on thematic analysis of interview narratives, observations, fieldnotes, and reflections from work experience in a migrant family business. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2012), identifies patterns of meaning that go beyond conventional institutional definitions. Besides, the analysis also follows the method suggested by Gioia (2021), which involves reporting data with a two-tier approach: first-order coding as informant-centred and second-order coding as theory-centred. This approach means that my analysis is grounded in empirical evidence, which is then connected to theoretical

4 See p. 202. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/publikationen/deutschland-kann-integration-potenziale-foerdern-integration-fordern-zusammenhalt-staerken-1823794>. accessed 27 January 2023.

5 See Reuters news “Germany wants to attract 400,000 skilled workers from abroad each year”. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-wants-attract-400000-skilled-workers-abroad-each-year-2022-01-21/> accessed 8 April 2023.

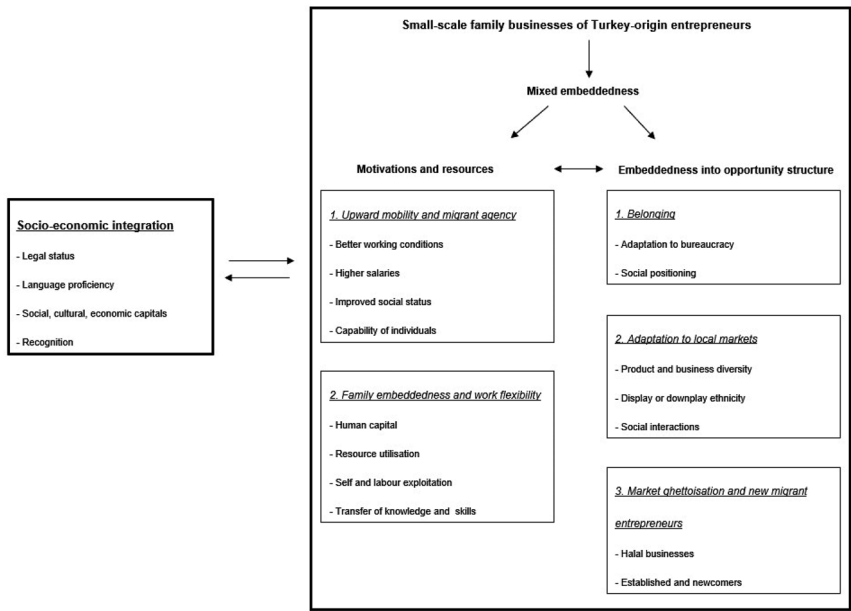


Figure 1: Data structure.

themes. This method allows for an evaluation of all sub-themes in their interconnectedness.

Thereby, to ensure valid reflexivity, the study is both empirically grounded and theoretically informed, using mixed embeddedness as its research framework. This framework examines how entrepreneurs are embedded in social networks, and socio-economic and political-institutional contexts (Davids and Van Houte 2008; Solano 2020). The analysis explores how business owners relate to socio-economic integration through their business practices and their positions within co-ethnic and inter-ethnic communities. I aim to offer insights into how Turkish-origin entrepreneurs navigate their socio-economic environments, focusing on their motivations and resources within the mixed embeddedness framework. Below, I demonstrate how this methodological framework is applied to ethnographic research. Themes and subthemes are presented alongside the corresponding data coding and structure, following Gioia (2021) (see Figure 1).

3.1.1 Autoethnography

My experience as a migrant worker in a third-generation family business profoundly shapes the research approach and offers significant insiderness, as reflected in the

autoethnographic insights. In 2018, I worked for one month at a relative's small gastronomy shop in Duisburg. This role involved observing the formation and business relations of this enterprise, as well as those of other nearby migrant businesses with similar family business characteristics.

Through autoethnography, I gained a comprehensive understanding of various aspects of these businesses, including their organization, material acquisition, resource management, gendered division of labour, and the utilization of cultural capital. The experience also shed light on self-exploitation and interactions with customers. During this period, I engaged in multiple discussions with migrant entrepreneurs and workers, documenting my observations and reflections in a diary. This autoethnographic approach allowed me to inform the research's fieldwork with insights on where to focus participant observation, what questions to ask during interviews, and how to build a nuanced, migrant-centred perspective for analysing concepts like motivations, resources, integration, discrimination, belonging, and work flexibility. Such experience helps to foster reflexivity as "a dialogue" between me, researcher, and social world which I am engaged for my work. This dialogue includes challenging the assumptions and perspectives including my own and introspecting my subjectivity (Palaganas et al. 2017).

Despite the value of this insiderness, I maintained a self-reflexive stance to ensure that the analysis remained grounded in empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks. The autoethnographic insights provided access to "behind the scenes" dynamics within these enterprises. For instance, one significant incident involved not being paid for my work, as the owner claimed that the business did not generate enough profit and described my time there as "helping the family." Similarly, two other women from the kin were also unpaid. This experience highlighted how small-scale migrant family businesses utilize family members as a resource to maintain low wages and flexible labour. Patriarchal relations persist, reinforcing dependencies among younger male and female workers, a phenomenon discussed by Phizacklea (1988).

3.1.2 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in this research is ensured through several key strategies that align with ethnographic methods. Generous engagement with participants was prioritized, allowing for a deep and nuanced understanding of their experiences and perspectives. Throughout the process, I maintained a vigilant approach to saturation, ensuring that the themes emerging from the in-depth interviews reflected consistent patterns across multiple participants and settings, rather than being influenced by a single viewpoint or my personal assumptions. Self-reflexivity played a critical role, as I continuously examined my own positioning, biases, and the potential impact of

my identities, striving to interpret the data as authentically as possible. Additionally, I remained aware of the influence of gatekeepers, recognizing that their identities and roles could affect the access they provided and the dynamics of the interactions, thereby shaping the research process in subtle yet significant ways. Ethnography is inherently a dynamic interaction with people, where power relations naturally emerge, especially as the researcher is the one asking questions. Recognizing this, I approached the field with an acceptance of its complexities. I gathered and interpreted the data with careful consideration of these dynamics, acknowledging them as organic parts of the ethnography.

3.2 Sampling and Interview Partners

For this study, ethnographic research was conducted with businesses owned by self-employed individuals who employ others and meet specific criteria: they have a maximum of 10–15 employees, include at least one family or close kin member as an employee, operate in a geographically limited area, and maintain only one shop. To distinguish small-scale family businesses from other immigrant enterprises, the sample was strictly limited to businesses that are solely owned, managed, and controlled by family members without any non-family partners or managers (Frank et al. 2017).

In 2021, I interviewed 23 Turkish-origin business owners across four major sectors: gastronomy (11), supermarkets and kiosks (6), retail stores (3), and hair-dressers (3). These interviews were conducted in five cities – Bielefeld, Bochum, Mülheim an der Ruhr, Essen, and Gütersloh. Each interview lasted approximately 1 h and was conducted in Turkish, taking place at the participants' business premises. In addition to recording interviews and taking notes, I maintained a field diary to document participant observations. I resided in Bielefeld from April to October 2021, during which I visited numerous Turkish-origin businesses primarily as a customer. My observations included noting products, menus, workers' profiles (such as language skills and family connections), business hours and days, and customer profiles. I also engaged with the Turkish migration-background community more broadly. This involved visiting a political migrant organization, where I attended a meeting and observed discussions on various issues. I recorded the topics discussed and the range of opinions expressed in my field diary.

Throughout the interviews, I aimed to foster a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere, which often led participants to share personal and emotional stories about their experiences with discrimination and racism. I made a conscious effort to choose my words carefully to avoid exploiting these negative experiences. Additionally, I deliberately avoided using terms like “integration,” “discrimination,” and

Table 1: Interview partners.

Name ^a -f/m	Entrepreneurship	Age	Education	Generation
Kadir-m	Bakery	37	Ausbildung	Second
Nevra-f	Hairdresser	35	Ausbildung	Second
Kadriye-f	Çiğköfte shop	53	Ausbildung	Second
Özcan-m	Hairdresser	39	High school	Second
Levent-m	Retail store	45	University	Third
Vedat-m	Hairdresser	43	High school	First
İbrahim-m	Kiosk shop	45	University	First
Volkan-m	Market	32	University	Third
Erdal-m	Döner restaurant	34	Ausbildung	Third
Murat-m	Pizza restaurant	44	High school	First
Tarik-m	Bakery	57	University	Second
Muhsin-m	Restaurant	48	High school	Second
Kazım-m	Baklava shop	43	High school	First
Serdar-m	Kiosk shop	39	University	First
Gülaiy-f	Bakery	47	Ausbildung	Second
Ali-m	Kiosk shop	42	Ausbildung	Second
Kudret-m	Retail store	50	University	First
Ahmet-m	Bakery	38	University	First
Mehmet-m	Döner restaurant	46	University	Second
İsmail-m	Retail store	60	University	First
Remzi-m	Market	58	High school	Second
Bahri-m	Market	34	High school	Second
Kenan-m	Döner restaurant	40	University	First

^aAll names are changed with pseudonyms.

“racism” to prevent leading the interviews in any particular direction. The interview partners were reached through snowball sampling, utilizing personal connections in Germany as well as visiting migration-background shops and requesting interviews. A notable issue was the significant imbalance between male (20) and female (3) participants. Initially, I was concerned about this gender distribution and made efforts to reach more female entrepreneurs. However, in many instances, even if women worked with their spouses, they stated that it is their husbands who “owns the business”. This distribution highlights a gender imbalance and underscores the predominance of male entrepreneurs, reflecting broader patterns within the family businesses among Turkish-origin individuals. All participants had at least a high school education, with most holding either a university degree or having completed Ausbildung (vocational training). Notably, none of the participants were unemployed before becoming self-employed; for some, business ownership was their first job after high school. Most had prior experience working in various jobs (see Table 1 for sample characteristics).

4 Findings

Analysis of lived experiences of participants, field diary, and autoethnographic notes underscores that socio-economic integration serves not only as an outcome but also as a driving force for self-employment. This indicates a multi-dimensional relationship between the two. The role of small-scale family businesses on socio-economic integration is revealed through the intersection of motivations and resources, and opportunity structures. This section presents findings categorized under these two aspects of mixed embeddedness, concluding with an exploration of how these themes interplay. In terms of motivations and resources, upward social mobility and migrant agency, and family embeddedness and work flexibility emerged as key themes. Belonging, adaptation to local markets, and market ghettoization are identified as major aspects of embeddedness within the opportunity structure. I demonstrate how these themes are connected to integration, not merely as an outcome, but as a condition that influences, shapes, and transforms entrepreneurial activities. In this context, a new issue is also highlighted: the intercommunal relationships between different immigrant groups from Muslim-majority countries and their connection to the level of integration.

4.1 Motivations and Resources

4.1.1 Upward Social Mobility and Migrant Agency

In this study, unemployment is not found as a motivation for self-employment. Instead, participants express dissatisfaction with their previous work experiences, driven by workplace discrimination and low wages. Unequal treatment compared to their native colleagues is a common experience. The primary motivation revealed through data analysis is the pursuit of **upward social mobility**. Participants frequently cite the desire for better working conditions, higher salaries, and improved social status, as I will illustrate below. However, these aspirations are deeply and directly influenced by **migrant agency**; the ability of individuals to seek better work and social conditions is contingent upon micro-level factors. Therefore, I present upward social mobility and migrant agency as interdependent themes in this section.

Aspirations for upward social mobility are particularly explicit among second- and third-generation business owners. Drawing from interview narratives, individuals with migration backgrounds tend to face discrimination in the job market, regardless of their education level and qualifications. They are often expected to take

over their parents' jobs, typically those classified as migrant work. Opportunities in the labor market are significantly shaped by the political-institutional context, which is also filtered through migration background and ethnic identity. The children of the guestworker generation commonly express a reluctance to inherit their parents' roles in the labour force, which are often labour-intensive, poorly paid, and low in status. Muhsin's words exemplify a common sentiment among interviewees: the rejection of taking over migrant work;

My father worked at a pipe factory. I visited the factory when I was 15 years old. I saw six or seven people approaching me, dressed in typical worker's attire with hats on their heads. Their faces were covered in black soot, and at first, I could not recognise my father among them. However, upon a closer look, I realised it was indeed him. At that moment, I decided that I would not work there.

The memory of his father's harsh working conditions, which rendered him almost unrecognizable, was a turning point that drove him to seek better opportunities. Motivated by this, he pursued self-employment from a young age. This issue is equally significant for participants who have personally endured labour-intensive work conditions and workplace discrimination. Bahri reflects on his past work experiences with the following statement:

I used to work as a contractor on highways. Most of my co-workers were foreigners, many of whom were Africans. I noticed that Germans were given more comfortable tasks, like handling and placing materials, while Turks, Africans, and Bulgarians were assigned the more gruelling work, such as carrying stones. I questioned this disparity, asking why everyone wasn't given the same tasks if we were all being paid the same. Such incidents made me uncomfortable, especially given my personality. It was then that I decided to start my own business.

The examples provided by Muhsin and Bahri illustrate that agency is a crucial factor for achieving upward social mobility. Their decisions to pursue self-employment were driven by personal experiences and a desire to escape labour-intensive and discriminatory work conditions. This highlights how micro-level strategies and motivations are deeply intertwined with macro-level social phenomena. These narratives also suggest that individual agency is influenced by the level of integration into the host society. For those who grew up in Germany, personal motivations and expectations often reflect a desire for equality, as indicated by the aspiration to attain lifestyles similar to those of native Germans, or as commonly expressed in the interviews, *"like Germans have"*, *"like Germans do"*. In fact, unequal division of labour at work is the major motivation for Bahri. Pursuing upward mobility is not only about having desire for something better, but also resisting what they had been directed into. Levent talks about how their store with his father turned out to be whole family business because of disappointments they faced at job market;

My brother, Selahattin, studied business management. He was working somewhere else, but we were very offended by the working conditions he had despite from his university degree. So, we brought him in to work with us. After our other brother finished school, he didn't even want to go to university because of all this. So, we took him in and sent him to a vocational school to work with us afterwards.

Nevertheless, pursuing upward social mobility is insufficient without the necessary means. Even for the most ambitious and risk-taking individuals, access to certain resources is essential. In the context of this study, family serves as the primary resource. In the next section, I will discuss how family embeddedness significantly alters work relations.

4.1.2 Family Embeddedness and Work Flexibility

In the analysis, it is crucial not to conceptualize migration-background individuals as mere passive victims, as such a perspective risk naturalizing and perpetuating structural inequalities. While ongoing discrimination and racism are significant factors, it is important to also consider the resources and adaptation strategies that migration backgrounds and ethnic communities bring to the discussion. Building on this, the findings reveal that migrant entrepreneurs strategically utilize their available resources to enhance their market competitiveness. In this respect, **family embeddedness** has emerged as a major resource in terms of human capital, aligning with findings from Tolciu, Schaland, and El-Cherkeh (2010). Participants frequently described their family and kin members as *“life-saving”* and *“very helpful”*. This extends beyond traditional definitions of family businesses; data analysis shows that many businesses rely not only on a core group of stable employees but also on other family members who contribute occasionally as needed. This supports the notion that the likelihood of having a low-paid, informal, or unpaid workforce is higher in migrant entrepreneurship, as noted by Schmiz (2013) and Pütz, Schreiber, and Welpé (2007).

Serdar's comment further explores why small-scale family businesses associated with immigrant groups often rely heavily on family support;

First of all, this is an occupation abandoned by Germans, not an area where they particularly want to work because it requires intensified labour. At the same time, it is necessary to show the ability to organize quickly with family, relatives, and similar relationships, especially when starting a business. In this regard, communities such as Syrians, Arabs, and people from Turkey can be more effective. A family business, a shop with their spouses and children, is not very feasible for a European. If you are looking for employment in Germany, do not have any education in Europe, and have come from another part of the world with little capital, trade is the only way for you to live more comfortably.

During my autoethnography, I observed that trust and commitment between business owners and workers, coupled with the transfer of knowledge and skills, are particularly prominent in family enterprises. Participant observation revealed that new workers are often groomed with the prospect of eventually taking over the business. Such relationships foster heightened **work flexibility**, evident in practices such as extended operating hours, additional shifts, and the availability of substitute workers during emergencies. The ability to employ family members at minimal wages provides a significant competitive advantage. The exploitation of family and kin members, often exacerbated by gender inequality, further amplifies economic gains. As Pütz and his colleagues noted, “self-exploitation of the entrepreneur and collaboration without pay by family members are thus frequently the only success factors with which to retain the business” (Pütz, Schreiber, and Welpé 2007, 496). Consequently, the combination of family embeddedness and work flexibility – reinforced by the very essence of family involvement – emerges as the cornerstone resource for these enterprises. Erdal exemplifies how family is leveraged as both a financial and human capital resource;

From what I’ve observed, the Germans would always reserve the good jobs for themselves. They would give the foreigners the hardest and dirtiest jobs in the factory. Seeing this, our people thought it would be better to be their own boss. They would gather some money, 10,000 from an uncle, 10,000 from another uncle, and with a little bit of their own savings, everyone would start these small kiosk-like businesses. That’s how these things started. And I think it’s still going on this way. They say, “Instead of being mistreated in a factory, my spouse and I can work together and become our own boss”. This pushes people in that direction. The whole family works together, and automatically, they find workers. They move from being workers to becoming employers.

“Being your own boss” is indeed something to celebrate among narratives, as it offers work flexibility, the opportunity to organize your own schedule, tasks, and vacations. With the added benefit of having family members as employees, planning doesn’t always need to follow the conventional rules, allowing business owners to maximize their financial gains. For many, pursuing hobbies, spending time with family, and taking vacations are linked to a higher level of integration, which they attribute to their entrepreneurial success. Mehmet, for instance, shared that after becoming self-employed, he developed new interests:

I made the most out of living in Germany as I earned more than I did as an employee. Economic gain has raised our standard of living. I became immediately interested in hobbies. I started running three days a week. We bought a caravan for our family and learned how to camp. In the past, even if you could afford it, you did not have enough time for these things. The difference with owning a business is that you have the chance to organise your schedule.

However, in practice, work flexibility often highlights the discrepancy between the desire to “be my own boss” and the reality of working longer hours than before. Although many entrepreneurs are responsible for the organizational aspects of labour, they frequently find themselves simultaneously handling material acquisition, production, commerce, and emotional labour. In fact, participants generally report working more as business owners than they did before. Bahri’s words are a good representation of these aspects among interviews;

So, it is not something that attracts them. Germans also earn decent money with a job. Why bother with the stress of running a shop? Then you have to be flexible with family members and other relationships. This place closes at 22.30, and Lidl closes at 21.00. A German does not want to work until half past ten. When something happens, my relatives stay here, I go on leave, and my family manage the shop. They (Germans) do not have that kind of support. If they go on vacation, they simply write ‘I am on vacation on Friday’ on the window and leave. They do not think about the customers here. Germans say, ‘Go and buy it from another market’. Since migrants have a different approach, Germans could not compete in this sector.

While family embeddedness emerged as a highly beneficial business strategy, contrary to other studies, ethnic solidarity and support did not appear to be significant resources. Particularly for female entrepreneurs, gender relations negatively affect family and co-ethnic support, as well as trust within the community (Hillmann 1999). Even male participants reported limited benefits from such networks. The findings align with Berwing’s (2019) research, indicating that most migrants do not use co-ethnic resources or interactions in their businesses. This suggests that labelling individuals with a Turkish migration-background in Germany as part of an ethnic enclave overlooks the nuanced degrees of integration and exaggerates the impact of ethnic solidarity and support. Ethnic relations and embeddedness are found to be more contextual, symbolic, and instrumental, with cultural knowledge derived from ethnicity playing a limited role.

In the interviews, none of the participants reported receiving financial or social support from their Turkish migration-background community during the business-building process. Instead, some noted facing challenges within the migrant community itself. Three female entrepreneurs mentioned facing harsh criticism from their co-ethnic networks. Nevra summarized this experience, saying, *“the Turks’ role was to say that she could not do it.”* Kadir’s remarks illustrate a common sentiment among entrepreneurs regarding the role of migration backgrounds from Turkey in the business-building process;

Nothing. No solidarity or anything. If it were up to them, we wouldn’t even open it at all. They can’t do anything; they just talk behind our backs. That’s the only way they do it.

4.2 Embeddedness into Opportunity Structure

4.2.1 Belonging

Embeddedness within the political and institutional context through enterprises is closely linked to socio-economic integration. Participants frequently referenced adaptation to bureaucracy, interactions with legislative institutions, and intergroup contact through business relationships. These elements contribute to their **sense of belonging**, as supported by Barberis and Solano (2018). Data analysis reveals that the sense of belonging is a central theme commonly identified among participants when discussing their embeddedness within the opportunity structure. While knowledge of bureaucracy and market dynamics can serve as resources linked to higher integration, a sense of belonging is more accurately described as a condition. In this study, being embedded within the political and institutional context is an inseparable aspect of small-scale migrant family businesses. These attachments or sense of belonging may evoke socialization processes that aren't necessarily tied to structural factors, but that is not the case here. Belonging is significantly shaped by the legal framework and the social positioning of individuals with migration backgrounds within the opportunity structure. The narratives below illustrate how belonging functions as a signifier of social embeddedness and how participants navigate institutional challenges.

The sense of belonging, though, is unique to each subject's definition. According to Jones and Krzyzanowski (2008), belonging is a contingent notion that lacks a precise definition in social sciences. They suggest that while a general analysis is challenging, belonging often arises when individuals feel a connection with a group. This connection is evident in participants' definitions. The most common statement during the interviews was *"being accepted by social surroundings"*. First-generation business owners describe self-employment as a pathway to learning, better adaptation, and deeper understanding of society. It fosters relationships with the local community, which, in turn, strengthens their embeddedness within the social structure. Vedat's comment represents a common first generation entrepreneur perspective:

After becoming an employer, I can say that I took the integration of German culture and Germany to a further level. Because when I was a Turkish worker, I had a certain group of friends. They were of Turkish or foreign origin. But after becoming an employer, you have to be there for everyone. German, Italian, that is, all of them. Then a different environment develops. Therefore, this made integration a bit easier.

In the interviews, the concept of belonging was not framed as a strict condition but rather as a socially interactive phenomenon. Ibrahim's comment exemplifies this:

I can say that I experience feelings of being both a local and a foreigner at the same time. I am both integrated and not fully integrated. The question is, has Germany adapted to people like me?

He emphasizes that his efforts to adapt to German norms and cultures often go unrecognized, despite his best efforts. Much of his focus has been on navigating bureaucracy. Most small-scale business owners in this study prioritize completing paperwork and paying taxes on time, arguing that their migration background does not lead to legal inequalities. They believe that successful integration is linked to adhering to these rules. Although some participants recounted experiences of discrimination and racism during official inspections, they did not attribute these instances to institutionalized discrimination. This paradox is common among migrant entrepreneurs, who feel that fulfilling their bureaucratic duties will lead to broader societal acceptance. Özcan's experience illustrates this issue,

Is there any discrimination during controls? Of course, it depends on the person who conducts it. If they do not like Turks, they may look for problems to find fault somehow. But such individuals in this line of work have become less common. I have never been fined. You always pay your insurance and take care of everything. You keep your papers and show them when asked. When you go to an office or an institution, your name and nationality do not matter to those working there. Whether or not Özcan pays taxes, he is treated equally. Okay, they quickly take care of what you need. If a German does not pay taxes, can they discriminate against them because they are German?

What's noteworthy is that many participants described similar experiences with what they termed "individual misconduct." Officers who inspect migrant-owned businesses in various cities often seem to be those "problematic" ones. On the other hand, most participants believe that inspections are often more stringent for migrant businesses. Kudret does not hesitate to label these practices as discriminatory:

(discrimination) is institutional. I witnessed this. It is done openly among the Germans. I believe that if you do what the Germans are doing, they block you there. They try to block you from every direction. People have adopted this as a policy. People (migrants) are afraid when they are called by the bank as if the state has called them. I saw people at that level.

Nevertheless, some participants reported fines for having informal workers, while others struggled to manage paperwork. Even if migrant-background individuals are perceived as more prone to fraud, the social and economic conditions that perpetuate these issues are rooted in a political and institutional context that initially discriminates against them.

4.2.2 Adaptation to Local Markets

Adaptation to local markets requires an in-depth awareness of the local social structure. Understanding what types of businesses can thrive, identifying the needs and demands of the community, and knowing who the residents are, are all critical components. Additionally, insight into which types of businesses can navigate the bureaucratic processes more smoothly in that specific area is essential. For individuals with migration backgrounds, these calculations go beyond the standard profit margins for small-scale businesses. For example, the decision to display or downplay ethnic identity often depends on the specific business branch and the local market dynamics. In the context of this study, such embeddedness into the opportunity structure is crucial, as it sustains these various considerations and enables entrepreneurs to align their strategies with the local environment effectively. For instance, Levent and İsmail intentionally hire non-migration background German workers to present their business as “less Turkish”. Quick adaptation to changes in market dynamics and customer demands is argued to be critical. Decisiveness, determination, and risk-taking are often viewed as key qualities associated with the abstract concept of “Turkishness,” as commonly referred to by participants. According to their narratives, the *“flexible behaviour of Turks”* in the labour market is an expression of their adaptive skills. This is not merely a primordialist reference; rather, Turkishness is invoked to denote creativity, flexibility, and problem-solving. Conversely, Germanness is characterized as honest and trustworthy but also associated with individualism and a conservative approach to entrepreneurship.

In this case, small-scale business owners with a Turkish migration background had to exert additional effort to succeed. Although these businesses typically charge less than other enterprises in the same fields, they compensate by working longer hours and leveraging family embeddedness. For instance, Kadir’s bakery opens at 08:00 and closes at 20:30, six days a week. Another bakery located less than 1 km away operates only five days a week, from 09:00 to 18:00, with reduced hours on Wednesdays (12:00 to 16:00). To increase their market competitiveness, owners also diversify their product offerings. Creative business strategies are evident in their products: Kadir sells not only bread and sandwiches but also hot and cold appetizers from Turkish cuisine, alongside baklava and tiramisu, similar to Gülay’s shop. At Erdal’s döner shop, customers can purchase falafel and sigara böreği – an increasingly common offering in döner shops across Germany. Mehmet’s restaurant includes German dishes, while Volkan’s, Remzi’s, and Bahri’s markets carry brands from various Middle Eastern countries. These examples from field observations demonstrate that Turkish-origin businesses, particularly in the gastronomy and trade sectors, exhibit a creative and flexible character that participants believe contributes to business success. All participants reported that their businesses are

either growing or stable and that they are content with their current situation, with the exception of supermarket owner Remzi, who plans to retire. None of the participants are facing financial difficulties.

Some participants have had prior business ventures. For instance, Muhsin mentions that his first two shops went bankrupt. Others have changed the location or branch of their businesses, though they do not explicitly refer to these changes as failures. Intense competition and discrimination based on migration background have consequently enhanced the capabilities of the self-employed. Drawing from the interviews, participants describe themselves as self-confident individuals, having had to overcome various challenges and navigate a more difficult path than their native counterparts. This confidence is also evident in their tone and attitude. For many, success is essential and irreplaceable. They feel the need to exceed the expectations set by native businesses, striving to outperform their German counterparts. Failure is not an option; otherwise, they would have to return to so-called migrant work, a prospect all participants are eager to avoid. İsmail encapsulates this sentiment perfectly:

Now, when I go by the name İsmail Akıncı as a Turk, and the other person goes by the name Thomas Müller, I already begin with a 1-0 deficit. However, I can still end the match with a 1-0 deficit without conceding another goal. That is what I mean. We are doomed to be successful here if we are trading. Success is not an option, but a must.

Adaptation to local markets involves not only understanding business dynamics but also cultivating a robust social network. As noted by Allen and Busse (2016), social integration is significantly enhanced through interactions between natives and migrant entrepreneurs. Kemal's comment underscores this point:

Absolutely, (business ownership) had an effect. When I first came here, I experienced quite a few adaptation issues. I mentioned earlier that I worked in a factory for two or three jobs. During that time, I had quite a few problems. Integration, as you know, is an effort to understand and get to know each other mutually. (...) For example, some Germans made efforts for my integration, but I still felt distant. However, once I started trading, German society started to get to know me, and I started to get to know Germans. I had the opportunity to get to know Germans through working together and having them as clients. I got to know German culture. They got to know us more closely. And I realized that it is possible to integrate with them while preserving my own culture.

Social interactions within and around small-scale businesses are highly valued by participants. Entrepreneurship fosters and strengthens contacts with local residents. This finding challenges Pécoud's (2003) view that businesses create minimal connections and have little impact on existing power dynamics. Ali's experience illustrates how these interactions can help combat collective stigmatization. He took over

a kiosk from a German owner who had run the business for decades. Initially, local customers were displeased with the change to a foreign owner. However, after time and personal interactions, Ali was accepted, as customers got to know him personally. Despite this acceptance, Ali expressed frustration that, as someone born in Germany, he still faced such challenges.

4.2.3 Market Ghettoization and New Migrant Entrepreneurs

Ghettoized markets create distinct social and economic spheres where migrants attempt to integrate (Glinka 2018). The term ethnic niche has been discussed as not universally applicable to all Turkish-origin small-scale family businesses. However, certain sectors, such as halal businesses, are still strongly associated with immigrants. In this study, **market ghettoization** is conceptualized specifically for these businesses, where the notion of halal is indispensable. Yet, even within these niches, the realities are more complex than the classical definition suggests. Halal businesses are not marginalized from mainstream markets; instead, they have evolved to adapt to them. In other words, depending on the business branch, market ghettoization is a particular sphere in which entrepreneurs are embedded.

Kadriye's *çiğköfte* shop, for example, is strategically located in front of a university building, attracting a diverse clientele, including many vegan and young German customers. She exclusively hires Turkish-origin women to work at the counter, having noticed that her customers appreciate the image of a *“vegan and migrant women-owned business”*. Despite having a back entrance, she deliberately brings food supplies through the front door, emphasizing, *“to show women can do it too”*.

Market ghettoization broadens the understanding of adaptation to market dynamics. Rather than simply fitting into pre-existing structures, this study finds that a particular stratification exists within halal migrant businesses. The influence of new migrants from predominantly Muslim countries on these ghettoized markets is a relatively recent phenomenon. As Ali explains, small-scale gastronomy businesses often bear a distinctly migratory character:

This sector has been in the hands of foreigners for years. There were Germans, but they all withdrew. Wherever you look, 80 per cent, at least 70 per cent, are foreigners. It is always in the hands of foreigners.

The OECD and EU report that “Support for migrant entrepreneurs has drastically expanded in recent years, partially due to the refugee inflow since 2015, supported by the idea that immigrants have a higher propensity to start a firm than people born in Germany” (2018, 22). Analysis of participant narratives and field observations

indicate that the recent increase in migrant businesses in Germany, following the arrival of refugees from Muslim-majority countries, has transformed social and economic dynamics for Turkish-origin migrants. The key factors are the time of arrival and difference in integration levels between established and new immigrants (outsiders) (Elias and Scotson 1965). These variations in interactions can lead to conflicts due to competition or foster business solidarity. Both outcomes reflect hierarchical perceptions of newcomers. Kadriye, for example, expresses dissatisfaction with the new migrant and refugee communities:

After the arrival of refugees from Syria, Germany's economy suffered in many areas. When Turks want to start a business, they do not receive any support from the German state, but when Syrians start a business, they receive full support. Syrians have more opportunities than children who study here. Even if they open a shop, become shop owner, or even do an Ausbildung, they receive support from the state. This situation makes people very angry.

One might argue that her positions are contradictory. This highlights the need to consider the ambiguity involved. For her business, a migrant identity is advantageous for marketing. Yet, she blames the new migrants, perceiving herself as a successfully integrated resident while viewing newcomers as exploiters of Germany. New businesses owned by refugees are often criticized for lowering prices and compromising quality. Remzi comments:

Before the Syrians, we could earn bread. Now, it does not exist too.

As noted by Steigemann (2020), some Turkish and German entrepreneurs attribute market disruptions to new Muslim entrepreneurs. One participant remarked, *"Sonnenallee is shitty. Back when only the Germans and Turkish were influencing the street's image, everything was better"* (Steigemann 2020, 91). In this research, blaming new "Muslim" businesses for market issues was a recurring theme, emerging even though the questions did not directly address it. İbrahim shares his concerns:

Other food and beverage shops, döner shops, falafel shops, kebab restaurants; you can see that there is a serious concern in the market here. It would be appropriate to say that there is a negative effect that comes with refugees establishing a business and the state paying their employees' wages.

In contrast, established entrepreneurs often find themselves in a favourable position due to their legal status, language skills, experience, reputation, market knowledge, and social networks. Some have observed an increase in their customer base and market expansion. Murat explains:

Of course, it affects the market positively. The more the number rises, the higher our thing rises. The market is growing. The slice of the pie is getting bigger.

Therefore, it is meaningful to assert that ghettoized markets create their own conditions within inter-migrant communities. Participants' comments reveal numerous hints of boundary-making, which are also processed within socio-economic integration dynamics. Newcomers are often described as *“not knowing Germany”* and *“making mistakes that affect the image of all Muslims”*. Through such narratives, participants identify themselves as those who have successfully integrated into Germany, emphasizing that *“the new ones made it clear how much progress we had made”*. The “Muslim others” in the job market, as conceptualized in other studies, do not represent a homogenous group. Although the discriminatory opportunity structure tends to categorize individuals with migration backgrounds from predominantly Muslim countries, established residents are positioned in markedly different structural conditions compared to new refugees. While this paper does not delve into the integration levels of newly arrived refugees, it is significant to note that among Turkish-origin individuals with migration backgrounds, a new group perception of “successfully integrated Muslims” has emerged as a common theme within halal businesses.

To conclude this section, it is crucial to highlight that all these sub-themes are interconnected elements. As emphasized in the mixed embeddedness literature, the interplay between motivations, resources, and opportunity structures is key to understanding the multifaceted nature of migration background positions and economic activities. The analytical approach borrowed from mixed embeddedness offers a holistic view that captures these multifaceted issues. Instead of isolating individual agencies or the political-institutional context of small-scale family businesses among those with Turkish migration backgrounds, I advocate for a nuanced approach. All sub-themes become more meaningful when considered together.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The degrees of integration among individuals with Turkish migration backgrounds are diverse. However, the daily life experiences and embeddedness of recent generations in various spheres have significantly evolved compared to the guestworker generation. Employment practices are among the most critical aspects of these complex interrelationships and social positions. In this context, this paper seeks to understand the role of small-scale family businesses of Turkish-origin in socio-economic integration processes. While many studies highlight the role of migrant entrepreneurship in promoting integration through a one-dimensional relationship (e.g. Eraydın, Tasan-Kok, and Vranken 2010; Rath and Schutjens 2015; Rashid and Cepeda-García 2021), the analysis of findings here reveals a more complex dynamic. The relationship is, in fact, multi-dimensional. Entrepreneurship can enhance

integration, particularly the sense of belonging, while higher levels of integration and expectations in Germany can also serve as motivations for business ownership. Therefore, this paper offers a new perspective, context-sensitive approach (Krueger et al. 2021), positing that higher integration and attachment may be key elements in contemporary migrant entrepreneurship.

In line with this central idea, I have addressed several other concerns in this paper. Firstly, this study contrasts with other research that identifies unemployment as the major motivation for self-employment, such as Tolciu, Schaland, and El-Cherkeh (2010), Berner (2016), and Hillmann (2021). While I do not intend to generalize this point, given the ethnographic and non-representative nature of the research, it is still significant to consider small-scale business ownership not as a last resort after unemployment but as a response to discrimination in labour market. Contrary to Hartmann's (2016) findings, the disadvantages faced by the second generation of Turkish-origin cannot be solely attributed to lower levels of qualification and a lack of vocational training. Even qualified and educated individuals may seek better alternatives after experiencing discrimination. Discrimination in the labour market, as discussed in this context, refers to the pervasive experience of being pushed into "migrant work" – positions that are labour-intensive, low-paid, and low-status. Even within these jobs, individuals with migration backgrounds often face further discrimination compared to their non-migration background German counterparts. Parallel to Berwing (2019) and Eroğlu (2018), disadvantages and discrimination faced during previous work experiences have the most share to lead migration-background to entrepreneurship. While her study focuses on Dutch cities, this paper supports Rusinovic's (2006) findings, which show that for the first generation, adaptation is a fundamental motivation for entrepreneurship, whereas for the second generation, new expectations and are more influential.

Secondly, at the intersection of work, family, and gender relations, the potential for labour exploitation is significant. Competitive urban markets demand high flexibility in the service and trade sectors, where labour and self-exploitation are common. This case study, therefore, supports Phizacklea's (1988) argument that changes in urban markets encourage migrants to venture into entrepreneurship, where they can leverage the competitive advantage of human capital derived from family resources. However, findings indicate that Turkish-origin entrepreneurs do not rely on co-ethnic support for their businesses, as also noted by Berwing (2019). Instead, the primary source of human capital lies within the family and kinship networks.

The final point emphasizes that small-scale family businesses contribute to social interactions within the local environment, which helps establish or enhance community relations and embeddedness into opportunity structure. These findings challenge Pécoud's (2003) argument that immigrant businesses have minimal

influence on established power relations. In this case, the majority of enterprises extend contact with non-migration background Germans, with almost all participants noting that their largest consumer groups are Germans. This challenges the notion in ethnic entrepreneurship discussions that such businesses are necessarily marginalized from the mainstream market. Beyond personal contacts with customers, business-related interactions with suppliers, neighbours, and legislative institutions also increase. When considered alongside economic gains, these findings support Barberis and Solano's (2018) argument that social integration is positively affected by business ownership. I argue that higher social status (whether practiced or perceived) can influence power relations.

In conclusion, this study advocates for a shift in perspective by demonstrating that entrepreneurship is viewed as a promising employment type for achieving better life chances and economic benefits through the utilization of available resources, rather than being solely driven by unemployment. Individuals with migration backgrounds consciously choose entrepreneurship as they aspire for upward social mobility and greater acceptance in society. Viewing them as passive victims of structural discrimination perpetuates ongoing inequalities. Instead, greater attention should be given to how individuals with migration backgrounds navigate and cope with structural factors to better understand their capabilities.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research

Further research is needed to explore the potential of small-scale businesses in promoting interethnic relations and enhancing social capital among different communities in Germany. They could also explore overlooked areas within gastronomy studies. For instance, Atilgan, Berber, and Uyargil (2025) adopt such an approach in their study of Turkish gastro-dining chefs, analysing how they “muddle through” uncertainties by strategically balancing different business elements to achieve entrepreneurial success. Specifically, for Turkish-origin entrepreneurs, future studies should consider small-scale businesses outside the service and gastronomy sectors, such as tech firms and industrial manufacturers. This study presents a case example with certain limitations: despite incorporating autoethnographic insights from an insider perspective, it is regional, male-dominated, and does not cover diverse business sectors. Longitudinal research could potentially reveal changes in employment practices related to socio-economic integration. Further studies should also focus on women's narratives, particularly regarding the gendered division of labor and family embeddedness. Although there are studies on Turkish-origin women entrepreneurs (Hillmann 1999; Schreiber 2008; Kavuş 2019), the lived

experiences of women workers in migrant-owned businesses have not received sufficient attention.

5.2 Practical Implications for Practitioners and Policymakers

This study, while not aiming for representativeness, provides valuable qualitative insights into the lived experiences of small-scale business owners with migration backgrounds, highlighting critical challenges for policymakers. Policy responses concerning migrant family businesses should focus more on the internal work relations and backgrounds rather than solely viewing them as ethnic units within German cities. The intersection of family and work relationships, shaped by the conditions of migration, can lead to forms of labour and self-exploitation. Policies should prioritize ensuring decent working conditions and addressing the often-invisible labour of family members, particularly women. That being said, combating labour market discrimination remains an urgent priority. It is especially challenging to address how reliance on family and kin labour serves as a response to unequal opportunities in the labor market, even for individuals with higher education and significant integration. Strengthening anti-discrimination measures and developing support mechanisms are essential to fostering equitable opportunities for individuals with migration backgrounds. Ultimately, a nuanced approach that acknowledges the complexities of these enterprises is necessary to understand their formation and socio-economic implications.

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