

Blurry Boundaries, Neutral Spaces: Migration and Forms of Friendship

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Abstract

While migration provides courage for migrants to rebuild and re-manage their connections with non-kin, we know relatively little about the implications of migration on migrants' friendships over time and places. This article examines friendship in the context of transnationalism. Drawing upon qualitative interviews with 25 transnational migrants, I aim to grasp the friendship practices 'here' and 'there' to explore how migrants' transnational experiences impact their friendship ties. Findings reveal that the diversity and challenges of migrants' relationships within transnational spaces offer opportunities for migrants to define friendship as a range of emotionally embodied activities that migrants negotiate or re-engage in values and expectations in relation to their culture, religion, and gender. In this dynamic, friendship can be practised by participants as a critical negotiation process of homophily ties and cosmopolitan ties with non-kin. This study offers an empirical contribution to the understanding of how friendships are practised within and beyond borders, and to a wider sociological discussion on the influence of migration on personal life.

Keywords

cosmopolitan ties, friendship, homophily, transnationalism, Turkish migrants in the UK

Introduction

This article explores how migrants constitute and practise friendships with non-kin, and reveals how the transnational process influences their friendships over time and place. Employing qualitative interview data from 25 transnational Turkish migrants living in the UK, I examine how participants define the function of friendship in their personal lives. Rather than focusing on the friendship-making process within the migration, I analyse how transnational lives offer spaces for them to negotiate values and

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expectations relating to culture, religion, and gender. I explore how friendships propose a structure to understand changes in relationships across borders and times. I argue that the changes created by the social process and the reproduction and accumulation of socio-economic and educational resources of participants transform how transnational Turkish migrants maintain and practise their friendships. This empirical analysis adds a novel perspective to the recent binary debates (homophily vs cosmopolitan ties) on migrants' social networks by examining how different factors of personal lives frame and are framed by relational formations in specific contexts.

Recent studies promote discussions regarding how friendships are influenced by personal factors and the structural circumstances of individuals' lives (Bartram, 2019; Chaudhry, 2022; Gillespie et al., 2014; Lambert, 2013; Shelton et al., 2009; Smart, 2007). They argue the concept of friendship is socially and economically constructed, and structural factors in people's lives influence the patterns of individual friendships and their overall personal networks (Allan, 2011; Morgan, 2011). Their discussions suggest expectations are given to the meaning of friendship, and the form of friendship can be changed when friendship ties are linked with daily activities. This point suggests the importance and patterns of friendship ties are socially constructed within cultures (Allan and Adams, 2007). Literature on friendship explores how friendship is an integral part of personal, social and emotional lives and how individuals learn social worlds by engaging in practices and co-existing with others (Bartram, 2019; Iqbal et al., 2017), but not in the context of migration.

Extending the framework of the social networks of migrants, I explore how transnational migrants understand and practise friendships and investigate the implications of migration on friendships over time and place. The core aim of this article is to provide critical consideration of the ways in which migrants' transnational experiences impact their friendship ties. To achieve this aim, I construct two significant arguments: first, I consider how migrants define friendship and its roles in their personal lives by negotiating dynamics influenced by their cultural and religious values and expectations; second, I focus on important issues concerning migration and the transformation of friendship to investigate how migrants discuss their shifting friendship ties by highlighting how their transnational experiences impact their friendship ties. This article unites the views and practices left in the shade in sociology, personal life, and migration studies. It looks at how friendships become a significant category in migrants' lives and explores whether geographical distance and proximity are significant factors in their friendship practices. Hence, this article provides empirical investigations for extending the studies on friendship and migrants' friendship understanding and practices.

Friendship, migrants' friendships, and transnational Turkish migrants' non-kin ties

Today, friendships are often viewed as grounded in equality and mutual exchange (Allan, 1998), and a deep understanding of one another (Jamieson, 1998). Sociological accounts of friendship consider friendship an intersubjective concept consisting of emotional, social, and cultural dynamics. Yet we know little about what constitutes friendship and the reasons why we become friends with certain people (Eve, 2002; Ryan, 2015).

Sociological studies of friendship investigate these complex questions on friendship by focusing on how modern friendship is an integral part of our social life and how the rise of individualism and late modernity evolved the concept of friendship. They argue that friendship is mostly understood as informal, chosen, non-institutional, and non socio-legally regulated relationships (Budgeon, 2006).

Rebughini (2011) and Spencer and Pahl (2006) note social transformation, particularly in the West, influences the form and ties of friendship. They refer to social transformation as the processes of individualisation, modernisation, and globalisation, particularly the shift from traditional, ascribed relationships to more chosen, voluntary relationships. These transformations create new forms of social solidarity through friendship networks and flexible personal ties. This evolution influences friendships by making them more selective and intentional, while also potentially increasing their diversity in terms of social backgrounds and geographical reach. Their discussion is often less connected with social norms or socially defined expectations as family or romantic relationships are, making friendship elastic and negotiable within interpersonal space. Through the process of individualisation, people can expose and self-analyse their experiences and construct their friendships. Hence, the ideas around ties of friendship in contemporary, particularly Western, societies allow the maintaining of bonds of amity. These studies acknowledge family and friend categories can be re-embodied conversely.

Wellman (1992), Weeks et al. (2001), and Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) move this discussion further and offer the term 'personal community' to define the people someone feels are important to them, whether or not they are kin. They claim the roles of kin and non-kin may overlap or remain distinct depending on how individuals compose them. Their main emphasis is to acknowledge friendship ties based on the quality of bonds rather than blood relationships. In this context, friendship offers new possibilities and a secure space to explore different forms of and be connected with non-kin. While the modernity thesis receives a range of criticism, the ideas of transformation and individualisation offer a fresh perspective on intimacy that moves beyond traditional limits. In this article, I engage with the concept of modernity to explore evolving notions of personal relationships. Specifically, modernity represents a de-traditionalisation process that reflects how increased self-reflexivity is destabilising 'traditional' intimacy and bringing new possibilities, arrangements, and expectations in friendship ties. 'Traditional' intimacy in this context refers to relationships defined by established social roles, kinship ties, geographical proximity, and gender expectations, contrasting this with the more individualised and chosen nature of negotiated relationship boundaries. This approach offers insight into the neglected space in this literature regarding transnational Turkish migrants.

There is a need for scholarly investigations on how friendship becomes central in people's lives, how its meaning and form are represented, and how the term is used to imply relationships with both kin and non-kin. The proximity between individuals shapes friendship, taking into account broader socio-economic processes and institutions. I engage Spencer and Pahl's (2006) framework of 'personal network' and Mason's (2018: 200) 'invitation to think differently' to understand friendship practices in the migration context.

In migrant and diasporic communities, friends can become more family-like (Spencer and Pahl, 2006) or create their ‘personal community’ through their migratory process. For some migrants, friendships transform into an interpersonal category they autonomously choose or develop when the family category is not available to them; therefore, they allocate family practices to these friendships (Usta, 2023).

Friendships can be a vital component of migrants’ social lives by providing emotional and practical support and easing their social adaptations and integration process within the host society. Discussions among migrant groups centre on same/cross-ethnic homophily. McPherson et al. (2001) explain homophily – interpersonal attachments to similar others – as the ‘gravity’ of social life, which is associated with a range of dynamics. Specifically in migration, migrants enact their social connections within highly homogeneous networks (Chaudhry, 2022; Leszczensky, 2013; Wimmer, 2004). The members of these networks are mostly family, co-ethnics, and co-nationals, and they can play significant roles in migrants’ settlement procedure, sense of stability, and cultural continuity in the host society. Nannestad et al. (2008) explain these networks as bonding solidarity, which offers migrants structural and social capital to overcome certain struggles during their migration.

Some studies provide critical accounts of the ethnic/national diversity of migrant networks and long-term friendships. They claim explaining migrant friendships with only co-ethnic and national ones may undermine the complexity of migrants’ everyday life practices and their relationships with others in the host society (Lauer, 2024; Glick Schiller et al., 2011). They highlight the importance of employing a cosmopolitan approach in understanding friendship networks within migration. Their discussion suggests the cosmopolitan approach enhances our understanding of friendship in the migration process and offers analytical tools to imagine migrants’ long-term friendships beyond national and cultural elements (Glick Schiller et al., 2011; Lauer, 2024). The cosmopolitan approach situates the migrant network within multicultural and transnational contexts. Recent studies focusing on the transnational ties of migrants indicate transnational space facilitates the exchange of information and resources and helps migrants maintain ties to their home countries (Anderson, 2004; Hiebert, 2002; Vertovec, 2009; Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2019). These studies raise important questions about the overlap between transnationalism and cosmopolitanism and how they establish structural relationships across national and cultural borders.

Their critical approach to friendship within migration encourages recent work to move discussions on migrant friendship networks beyond inter-ethnic and national ties in migrant communities. They argue friendship in migration by focusing on the importance of kinship and neighbourhood for migrants (Conradson and Latham, 2005), the meanings and functions of social networks in time and place (Hollstein, 2011; Pescosolido and Rubin, 2000), and the friendship-making process of migrants (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Ryan, 2015). These studies acknowledge locality, workplace, and community become flexible and temporary via implications of migration. They claim people create their lives through personal networks instead of memberships as a response to migration. Alongside continuity and flexibility of networks, some scholars pay attention to the outcomes of migration on migrants’ friendships (Westcott and Vazquez Maggio, 2015).

Studies focused on Turkish migrant friendships remain relatively unexplored, especially in broader discussions on how friendship is defined, redefined, and practised in the process of migration. Much of the research, including Keskiner (2019), Akkaymak (2016), Guveli et al. (2016), and Faist and Özveren (2017), analyse a range of meanings of social networks for the transnational Turkish community. They suggest social networks bring several structural opportunities for Turkish migrants. These studies primarily focus on the social networks of Turkish migrants, emphasising bonding and homophily relationships based on ethnic and national identities, and overlook how the composition of social networks in migration is influenced by social and economic structures, as well as the transformations and diversity in social contacts (Ryan, 2011; Wimmer, 2004). My study confirms and offers an empirical framework to reveal the complexity and diversity of friendship networks for transnational Turkish migrants. My analysis raises questions about how the meanings and instrumentality of friendship transform transnational Turkish migrants, how their friendship networks consist of diversity in ethics and nationality, and how their friendship networks offer cultural continuity within the host society. This article reinforces the significance of focusing on the impact of gender, religion, and geography in the formation of friendship practices in the migration process.

Methodological approach to migrants' friendships

This article's findings and discussions emerged and are adapted from PhD research examining the intimate experiences and practices of transnational Turkish migrants living in the UK. The data was generated by employing a mixed qualitative approach to understand migrants' lives, transnational ties practised across borders, and everyday praxis of their relationships with kin and non-kin. We know little about transnational ties, social networks and intimate relationships of transnational Turkish migrants in the UK (Ozbilgin and Yildiz, 2022; Usta, 2023; Usta and Ozbilgin, 2023). While migrants from mainland Turkey represent one of the smaller migrant communities, migration from Turkey to the UK shows growing numbers each year. Based on Census 2021 data forecasts, 127,644 people identified their country of origin as Turkey. That calls for a scholarly investigation to understand Turkish migrants' presence and the issues attached to their migration. Acknowledging the limited scholarly attention on Turkish migrants' transnational ties and intimate relationships with kin and non-kin, this article explores how migration plays a role in their friendship ties across borders and how friendships become integral parts of their transnational lives.

Twenty-five semi-structured interviews were carried out with a sample of first-generation transnational Turkish skilled migrants in the UK. Each interview was accompanied by relational memo writing to capture insights into aspects of friendships in the context of migration. I particularly focused on the transformation of friendship ties, including roles of gender, religion, and culture on defining friendship, the influence of ethnics/national homophily in building friendship, and how friendship practices evolve in relation to cosmopolitan connections formed in the host society. The project sample represents diversity in age, occupational background, gender, sexual orientation, educational level, relationship status and their interactions with religion, nationality, and citizenship. Since the project captures diverse lived experiences of intimate relationships in

the context of migration, the inclusion criteria were migrating as first-generation from mainland Turkey and living transnationally between Turkish and British social spaces. The concept of 'transnational Turkish migrant' represents migrants who migrated from the mainland; live in the UK, sustain their ties with Turkey via a range of channels, including providing financial, emotional support and care to family and friends and maintain social and cultural ties within Turkey and the UK. Participants selected through these criteria self-identify as Turkish, Turkish-British, Turkish-Kurdish or Kurdish-Turkish (Bernardi, 2021). While the diversity within the sample is emphasised in qualitative data, it is important to acknowledge that other contextual factors, including participants' life cycles and stages, add layers of meaning and contribute to the complexity of these findings.

The main characteristics of Turkish migrants in this study are that they operationalise diverse politically and culturally constructed social processes across borders and sustain interpersonal intimate relationships over time and place. Thus, transnationalism is utilised as both a theoretical and methodological tool to understand the complexity of Turkish migrants' daily rhythms and show how they can live across borders even if they are in non-overlapping territories but display overlapping memberships (Bauböck, 1994). In this aspect, the article makes significant contributions to the study of transnationalism by providing an empirical analysis of migrants' experiences, which include networks and activities across national borders. Specifically, it introduces an empirical foundation for contemporary transnational Turkish migrants' everyday transnational experiences from the mainland, as it is understudied in both migration and transnational studies.

The participants were recruited via a range of methods, including the snowballing method, advertising the research details to a member of Turkish societies through gatekeepers and personal networks of the researcher, and posting online research invitations on networks from Turkish migrant communities. In total, 25 participants, ranging from 25 to 55 years old, participated in the project. The sample represents diversity in the length of settlement in the UK, with a minimum living period of 4 years for participants. Among the participants, 15 hold documented migrant status in the UK, while 10 have dual citizenship.

Interviews were conducted either in Turkish or English and lasted an average of 2 hours; they were fully transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. All data sets, including interviews and memo writing, were analysed with a combination of thematic analysis and modified grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The first step of analysis consisted of three layers of coding, including initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding, to reveal silent factors influencing participants' friendship ties in the context of migration. The second stage of analysis involved combining the theoretical categories and subcategories with field notes and selected themes. All data set was managed, organised, coded, and analysed manually. Pseudonyms were used throughout the project to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of both participants and gatekeepers.

The qualitative method and grounded analysis approach provide an empirical foreground to understand changes and challenges in everyday life and the transnational, social, cultural, and emotional ties of migrants. The qualitative approach offers a rich

methodological framework to understand the everyday praxis of intimate relationships in the context of migration, as there have been calls for this research (Geys and Murdoch, 2008; Pahl and Pevalin, 2005). My findings offer qualitative data to illustrate the ways transnational migrants understand and practise intimacy within friendship in the host country.

Friendship as unsettled category: continuity, culture, and homophily

Analysis of data shows a fundamental tension among participants' understanding of friendship. Participants' stories show friendship involves multiple sets of intimate connections which represent subjective experiences. Their ways of developing and maintaining friendships require a different form of intimacy, which appears as reciprocity, trust, self-disclosure, and loyalty. Their definitions align with how existing literature refers to friendship (Allan, 2011; Smart et al., 2012; Spencer and Pahl, 2006); however, the stories reveal a cultural understanding of practising such elements in Turkish and British contexts. For them, friendship is not merely upholding feelings of trust, reciprocity, and self-disclosure but also requires certain cultural and religious familiarity. To emphasise the complexity of defining friendship in the context of migration, I particularly focus on discussions that define friendship as culturally or religiously impacted personal networks.

The sentiment of sameness: homophily and gender. The ways some participants understand and build friendships reveal dynamics influenced by their cultural and religious values and expectations. Some women participants with an Islamic background discussed how their cultural and religious expectations impact and shape their gender identities and their practices in their everyday life connections, which influences their friendship understanding and practices. Demet says,

. . . I can be friendly with people. But I cannot be close and share things with everybody. I mean . . . I am talking about friendship with ladies. I have close friends to share things and being close. I cannot be very . . . you know . . . very close with men. Needs to have some lines between men and women. I feel close to people who share similar values and life perspectives with me. Of course, culture and religion can help with this. For example, one of my close friends and I think we are liberal about religion. I mean, religion is important, but we are not radical about it. Therefore, we can share similar viewpoints. That is why she is my best/close friend. (Demet)

Demet explains her friendships are closely associated with sharing cultural and religious commonality. Islamic faith and her political positions about Islam create a foreground to establish her friendships. When Demet realises a sense of sameness in terms of sharing a Muslim identity and political values, she develops her friendships as a form of closeness and openness. However, her religious and cultural values restrict her friendship practices. Becher (2008) suggests a person's values and belief systems, including social norms and expectations, shape friendships, particularly in the ways women and men practice friendships.

Many participants with a religious background indicate their gender identity influences the ways they practise friendship, but they also structure their gender identity in friendships. This point raises questions about how socio-religious norms and gender establish boundaries and limitations for participants while developing and sustaining friendships across genders. Buket highlights her religious identity, and her past religious community involvement set boundaries and inhibited her likely friendships across genders:

As a woman living in Istanbul was hard . . . I preferred to live in Fatih (Istanbul). It was a very conservative environment. I was part of a religious community. My life was just surrounded by people from this community. In this community male and female friendship was very clearly explained. So, I did not have any friendships with men. We could have professional relationships with men, but it was not friendship. . . . I mean, we did not have any close connections or friendships with another gender other than for professional reasons . . . I am not in the same environment, but I think my friend(ship) is still on the same level and the same type (with men). (Buket)

Friendships influenced by religious and cultural values can be an example of how religious traditions construct gender identities for believers. Buket's story shows Islamic faith shapes a form of gender identity. Limiting across-gender friendships is associated with the idea of meeting religious expectations as a Muslim woman. Such a viewpoint on friendship is structured around presenting culturally and religiously dignified Muslim women's identities. Performing community-based acceptable Muslim identity avoids emotional and physical attachments and behaviours across genders. Clearly, in their case, shared religious values strengthen friendships among women and help to manage community expectations from their gender identity. Surprisingly, while women participants openly discussed this form of friendship across genders, male participants were notably reluctant to discuss such relationships, particularly regarding their cultural and religious implications. This difference may reflect how women's identity within Islamic cultures is often constructed around explicitly defined boundaries and societal and religious expectations. These women's narratives recall that there is a clear gender-based public control on one's body, lived experiences in Turkey, within particular communities.

As Rao (2015) argues, the religious, moral self is linked with the process of construction of the gender moral self. Being a religious subject constructs how some women participants practise their everyday lives. Being selective about whom to be friends with illustrates that Muslim beliefs influence intimate freedom in friendships, especially across genders. Importantly, such agreement between these participants' genders and religious identities assists them in managing any conflicts between their religious and social identities. In their lives, the religious community plays a significant role in their gendered and religious socialisation even after migration: their friendship with people of different genders remains within boundaries. Thus, these people are not part of their gender and religious socialisation process.

These stories echo Rao (2015), Cronin (2015) and my observations that examining gender and gendered identity requires intersectional approaches involving age, ethnicity,

social structure, religion, and geography. All participants are located within British society, where the views of liberalism and secularity are priorities in their daily lives; however, some participants practise their friendships across genders as they practised in Turkey regardless of how long they had been living in the UK (Demet had dual citizenship, and Buket was completing 4 years in the UK). Their balancing approach to managing religious and social identities provides critical accounts of how friendship can be a culturally and religiously integral category for some religious migrants.

Friends or lovers?. While participants share religious and social values that arrange their friendships as interactions among the same gender, their closeness and self-disclosure can be defined as different interpersonal relationships by the public on some occasions. Ece and Ayse highlight confusion and conflict in their friendships:

. . . I do not know if I should define it as love romance, but I had a very (very) close relationship with one of my female friends when I was in university. People from the community often questioned whether we were friends or something else. But it was never openly addressed. It was the moment that you started to realise you do not need anything else because you have this friendship. I was able to share everything about myself with her in terms of what I like, what I love . . . We shared lots of things like time, meals, and days. . . . it is like you started to feel you have everything. It was a different feeling. But we thought it was a close friendship at that time, maybe because we knew how being a lover with women could be an issue in our situations . . . you know Islam, homosexuality. There is a clear line . . . Maybe we were just close friends. (Ece)

. . . My relationships with my close friends are emotionally and physically very close. Like we can hug each other and sleep in the same bed. We have much physical contact and connections. . . . But this is not romantic love. . . . But it is different from other kinds. You do not feel the same way about your mum . . . So, I am close to my friends the same way now. (Ayse)

For many woman participants, gender is the most significant factor as they build intimacy within friendship. They suggest their friendships were the most valuable support and fulfilment for them; however, they represented confusion in categorising such connections as friends or lovers. While Ece and Ayse constitute their friendships only with women as expected by their religious values, intimacy in their friendships fundamentally conflicts with their religious, gendered identity and emotions. Ece's friendship has been questioned as homosexuality; no one, including Ece and her friend, addressed their friendship as romantic intimacy among same-sex. This silent approach to same-sex intimacy in Ece's community might represent Islamic viewpoints towards homosexuality and women's sexuality. Likewise, Ayse borrows some intimate elements expected from romantic relationships and integrates them into her friendship practices. In Islamic views, homosexuality is often referred to as sexual intercourse, mostly among men, and women's homosexuality is vaguely addressed (cf. Usta, 2019). Possibly, Ece's community considers same-sex sexuality among women as not harmful, which is related to how female sexuality is defined in Islamic traditions.

The fears of being considered homosexual may contribute to confusion on mixing friend and lover categories. As Ece and Ayse indicate, homosexuality is against Islamic

traditions and not socially acceptable. Even if Turkey does not follow Islamic Law, some Islamic interpretations of diversity in sexuality receive hostility in Turkish society (Usta and Ozbilgin, 2023). Ece reveals fear of being labelled as homosexual brings stigma and exclusion from the community. That fear represents the manifestations of their sexual freedom. To avoid violating the boundaries of religious identity, Ece chooses to suppress her complicated feelings within friendship. This suppression reveals nuanced presentations of women's sexuality in the Islamic community in Turkey. Although participants enact their lives in a society where the idea of modernisation leads to sexual tolerance and openness, they uphold the same Islamic paradoxical views on sexuality (Dialmy, 2010). This tension indicates people perform a specific gender identity to adjust to their religious conventions (Rao, 2015).

Friendship often represents an unsettled category that shifts its conceptual understanding based on gender, religious, and cultural identity in the Turkish context. This representation means performing a particular gender identity and practising across-gender friendships, which provides a different conceptual understanding of female and male friendships. Ela elaborates on how the concept of friendship can be used to define socially accepted courtship:

I think I have one special friend. He is a friend. . . . I can go for a coffee. I mean, not like a date. Like having friendly coffee. Even now, it is still, I think friendship. I am not the kind of person who likes looking for a boyfriend. If I meet with someone, I can go for a friendly coffee, but it has to be for marriage purposes. (Ela)

Even if participants' shared religious and cultural values provide support to open their inner circle across sexes, friendships across genders are conceptualised surrounding the idea of sexual attraction for some participants. The category of friendship represents flexibility that allows participants to define their courtship in a culturally and religiously accepted way in public settings. Unlike O'Meara (1989), friendship represents five challenges in friendships across genders, including opportunity, sexuality, emotional connection, gender inequality, and presenting their relationship in public. These participants utilise these challenges in an advantageous way. Their friendships across genders provide elements to expand the possibility of having a future marital partner. Labelling courtship as friendship provides freedom to practise 'friendship' with the opposite gender in public space within everyday praxis. These friendship stories portray religious values and cultural consensus from how participants develop and sustain their intimacy in friendships. These narratives reveal discussions that friendship is a category that contains closeness, trust and loyalty, and a space where Muslim women and men negotiate their gender, intimacy, and sexuality in the context of their culture, religion, and migration.

Cosmopolitan friendship: changes, diversity, and migration

Transnational friendship stories provide a foreground for understanding intimacy and personal interconnections across borders. This point brings attention to the impact of global mobilities and transnationalism on friendships (Bowlby, 2011). For Turkish migrants, cultural and physical places shape the building of meaningful friendships. The

data shows how participants' mobility experiences shift the quality and forms of their intimacy within friendships and how they practise and negotiate their intimate relationships across different locations.

Meaningful attachments 'here' and 'there'. 'Meaningful' friendship ties with non-kin become a significant form of intimate connection to them. All participants re-evaluate the meaning of connections with friends and the principle of practising friendship in consideration of their mobility experiences, often finding themselves debating the quality of their friendships before their migration. For most participants, building meaningful friendships means keeping their inner circle small and expecting equality and recognition. Melih explains how they negotiate the values and qualities of their friendship after migration:

I started to build a more valuable relationship with a very small number of people here. I can say fewer people and a higher quality of the relationship. I had many people in my life when I was in Turkey. But, my relationship with them was very superficial. Most of them are not in my life anymore. . . . very hard to keep in touch with them. I am here; their life is different in Turkey. . . . My friendship has changed a lot here. (Melih)

Sharing similar circumstances and places establishes friendships for participants through experiences related to migration (Faist, 2010; Smart et al., 2012). Melih's account draws together many common themes in the project's data. Living apart from his friends in Turkey cut the friendship ties; however, this allows him to be reflexive about the quality of intimate ties with his friends. For participants, there is double-edged content in friendships. Keeping plenty of friends in their lives does not imply meaningful friendship. So, migration opens spaces for participants to review their past and present friendships, valuing quality over quantity in their friendships.

While participants reproduce their socio-economic resources through migration, they enhance and recreate divisions of their personal lives, including understanding and practices of relationships. Participants' friendships display content on how their cosmopolitan life settings and new socio-economic resources enhance the definition of the friendship category alongside its understanding within Turkish culture (Bell and Coleman, 2020; Morgan, 2011). For many, friendship displays intermixed characteristics that show how participants negotiate cultural boundaries and hybridise their practices within new cultural settings. The shift in their friendship practices emerges from a complex interplay between cultural expectations and situational opportunities, including shared values and lived experiences. Nalan explains,

I became pickier about keeping and allowing people in my life when I moved here . . . I still keep my connection with very few of my friends in Turkey . . . After that, you know, you started to be more careful about it. So, I have a great connection with some of my friends here . . . We share the same values in life. It is not a relationship for benefits. It is not really a one-way relationship. (Nalan)

For participants, practising friendships in the context of migration includes meaningful, shared activities, which recalls Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995, 2002: 22) arguments

on 'the ethic of individual self-fulfilment' and flexibility to negotiate intimate relationships in modern societies. For participants, intimacy in friendship becomes something that refers to the depth and connectedness of intimacy rather than an unconditional dependency as understood and practised in collectivist cultures. This provides important arguments in relation to geography and the practising of friendship. Shifting the living environment reshapes participants' understanding and practices of friendship. The sense of quality or meaningful activities takes over a sense of quantity. Their present friendships are built on intimate closeness, self-disclosure, reciprocity, and a combination of meaningful daily activities.

Nearest and dearest: embracing diversities. While data provides an analytical discourse on how migration influences migrants' everyday life activities across borders, it leads to recognition of the transformative impact of migration on selfhood and personal relationships. Their stories reflect discussions about the daily life experiences of migrants as a process of self-reflection and transition; they focus on developing a new sense of 'hybrid' (Koehne, 2005), 'cosmopolitan' (Rizvi, 2005), and 'multiple' (Gomes et al., 2014) orientations. When considering their diverse multi-localised social involvements (from national attachments to cosmopolitan attachments), participants' mobility experiences uproot their cultural and social forms of friendship. Mercan and Ediz elaborate on how migration provides space to establish friendship outside of collective, national, and religious boundaries and socio-economic backgrounds:

No matter the cultural differences, I can build this relationship. I kind of have mixed, but a small group of women which we kind of close mate here. We came from quite different backgrounds like socio-economic background, class vice . . . but we have such a common understanding of the world and ourselves. We got together; what brings us together is a mutual understanding of life and everything. (Mercan)

I have got a sort of friends all around the world. . . . I am very happy about this. I am probably more open-minded compared to my version of Turkey. If I stayed in Turkey, I would not have had the sort of open mind that I have now. I remember I was more nationalistic. I am definitely not a nationalist now. I can say it because of the diverse people all around the world that I engage with and be friends with them. For example, I go to the pub if my friends go to Pubs. I would order a non-alcoholic drink, and I buy them an alcoholic drink. I do not mind, to be honest. I do not see it as a big issue. So, it is kind of, I would say, integrated respect also. I definitely do not look down on anyone. Everybody has their own journey. (Ediz)

Multicultural life in the UK promotes a cosmopolitan perspective, where participants negotiate their relationships through a cosmopolitan lifestyle. For several participants, transnational friendships indicate the process of self-researching, negotiation of pre-existing identity, and unsettling cultural and religious expectations of friendships. Mobility experiences capture friendship networks beyond their cultural, national, and religious boundaries. For many participants, friendship has a moral meaning that includes shared personal values, which implies the contexts of sharing places, situations, experiences, and struggles of living transnationally alongside the sense of togetherness. A cosmopolitan setting evaluates their national and religious identity in their friendships. Ediz

highlights these common consequences harmonise his cultural and present experiences with respect to practising his friendships. This point moves discussions on migrants' social networks beyond ethnic, national, and religious homophily.

When participants moved to the UK, their social relationships changed in many aspects. In some cases, these changes enhanced their friendships by examining their self-knowledge about diversity. Demet and Ece explain the transformation of friendship through their encounters with diverse lifestyles:

My friendships are very different here. I had never had gay or lesbian friends and never thought it would be possible in Turkey. Now I have a lesbian couple neighbour here; I have one gay friend. I think I started to learn how I can find joy from differences. (Demet)

After I moved here, I started to change, especially my views and life perspective. Simply, if we take an example from sexual identity: Yes, I am straight, but after starting to live here, I started to believe they (*LGBTQ*) can be family. . . . I started to know those kinds of people here. I even became friends with some of them. Can you believe this? (Ece)

Establishing friendships in a new secular society can be compelling, specifically if you have a conservative and religious upbringing like Demet and Ece. When they became involved in the social and cultural life of England, their social relationships became considerably more varied. Their stories do not merely reflect the formation of friendships; they represent the processes of self-researching and the transition of selfhood. This process consists of three steps. The first is the realisation step, which involves critical negotiations about former and current social relationships. Demet and Ece realised the secular and liberal fabric of British society makes them negotiate their conservative upbringing. This negotiation brings a different critical account of what is possible and available for migrants in their new host society. The second step is the process of self-researching. Many participants indicate cosmopolitan friendships in the UK encourage them to evaluate their original views on sexuality and diversity: new forms of friendship ties challenge them but do not reinforce their conservative outlook. They change this religious bias by observing the secular outlook of England. This leads them to the third step, the evolving process. Their narratives show the transition of friendship networks in the UK implies the process of transforming self. These stories contain key elements discussed by Smith's and Eade's (2008) and Conradson's and McKay's (2007) on translocality and selfhood. They use the term 'translocal subjectivities' to define the multi-located sense of self among transnational subjects in the transnational social field. Demet and Ece modify their views on homosexuality by being concerned about their current local involvement in the UK. Consequently, these discussions display close perspectives on their local community: social connections, neighbours, and domestic and leisure activities. That reflects how migration has a transformative impact on migrants' understanding and practices of friendships.

Conclusion

This article provides empirical insight into rethinking the meanings, practices, and views to cultivate knowledge and awareness of different friendship practices from local to

global. It contributes to studies of friendship, migration, transnational activities, and personal lives by emphasising the importance of understanding friendships in the context of migration.

Diverse contextual factors can influence the migrants' friendships, including their age, length of residence in the host society, citizenship status, life cycle (e.g. fertility and reproduction), religious beliefs, societal expectations, and cultural norms. With this single article, I capture a variety of negotiations participants discuss boundaries related to social-religious norms, cultural expectations in different societal settings, gendered practices, and migration experiences and how these factors impact their friendship ties and practices.

My analysis affirms that friendship is defined as a range of embodied practices in which participants negotiate or re-engage in values and expectations in their intimate practices. For some participants, cultural and religious perspectives and practices, alongside emotional and intimate sharing, construct their understanding of the sense of sameness in friendships. I argue religious values and cultural consensus can form the ways participants develop and sustain their intimacy in friendships. This finding has implications for the developing sociological interest in migrants' personal lives and relationships by proposing a new conceptual understanding of friendships across genders for migrants who orientate Islamic values into their life expectations and habits.

I highlight how examining the dynamic of gender in intimate relationships requires intersectional approaches involving age, ethnicity, social structure, religion, and geography. My emphasis is that friendship is an intermixed category that shows how participants consider either their subjective lived experiences on friendship without touching sociocultural structures or organise their friendships by taking high value from their socio-religious upbringing. In this context, I argue friendship provides a significant discussion on how people internalise gender practices shaped by religious and traditional values and norms, and how these practices influence migrants' friendship understanding in both their cultural and personal biographies (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Ryan, 2015). Although participants discuss ambiguously connections between social structures (i.e. race, class, profession) and their friendship practices, it remains theoretically and methodologically essential to acknowledge how these structures influence the ways migrants establish and sustain their friendship ties. This highlights the importance of further examining how migrants' friendship practices can be understood and researched in relation to diverse social structures. Therefore, emphasising intersectional factors that influence friendship within migration provides valuable conceptual contributions by offering fresh insights that can enrich broader sociological discussions on non-kin relationships and social adaptation within migrant communities. Furthermore, it enhances the understanding of transnational friendships in relation to theories of belonging, identity, and integration in host societies.

This research offers a new conceptual understanding of migrants' friendships. The empirical analysis reflects the transformation of intimacy practices in friendship as a result of migration. Participants' friendships become something that refers to the depth and connectedness of intimacy rather than an unconditional dependency, as it is understood and practised in collectivist cultures (Spencer and Pahl, 2006). When participants transform their national involvement to a global multinational attachment, they work on

their ways of practising their friendships. Friendship becomes more fluid, important, and central to participants' lives as a source of continuity of connections. Hence, I argue the cosmopolitan ties they establish after their migration impact participants' practices of friendships. I suggest qualitative data provides a rich account to reveal shifting intimate connections and transformations of emotional attachments by highlighting the complexity of the intimate life of migrants' friendships at a distance. Echoing Usta's (2023) and Pescosolido and Rubin's (2000) arguments on personal networks, the social process, and the reproduction of social, economic, and educational resources transform how transnational Turkish migrants establish and maintain intimacy in their friendships. This empirical discussion provides a novel methodological approach by capturing the experiences of migrant communities that often receive less scholarly attention in migration research. Most importantly, it enhances the ways in which understanding and researching friendship often dominate sociological and personal life studies by challenging the Western-focused view of friendship.

In this article, I capture the silent relationship between migration and the transformation of friendships. Hence, my work indicates how friendship ties can be the touchstone of migrants' lives in terms of cultural continuity and establishing a sense of belonging in the host society. Thus, it is significant to explore the meaning of friendship 'here' and 'there' to show how migration and transnational experiences shape and inform migrants' friendships beyond the thesis of social networks in migration. This study adds to an understanding of how friendships are practised in relation to migration experiences. It contributes to sociological knowledge of transnational friendship practices by exploring intersectional accounts of homophily and cosmopolitan ties as they remain understudied.

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