

Beyond Integration: A Relational Framework for Comparing Multi-Layered Belonging in Post-Migrant Europe

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Research Article

Keywords: multi-layered belonging, integration, post-migration, racialisation, transnationalism, Türkiye-Europe migration

Posted Date: October 28th, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-10657878/v1>

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Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Abstract

Integration remains a central term in European debates about the descendants of migration, even when those so described are citizens, have never migrated themselves, and participate in local, national, transnational, religious, familial, and digital social worlds. This article develops multi-layered belonging as a relational framework for comparative analysis beyond linear accounts of integration. It identifies five analytical components: scales of membership, institutional domains, social positionalities, relational mechanisms, and boundary processes involving self-identification, ascription, recognition, misrecognition, and racialisation. These components are organised around four principles: multi-scalarity, institutional mediation, non-developmental multidirectionality, and sensitivity to power and conflict. The argument is developed through a purposive conceptual synthesis of scholarship on the long-established Türkiye-Europe migration field, treated here as a theory-building case. Rather than ranking national-origin populations against a shared integration benchmark, the framework compares configurations across countries, groups, scales, institutions, and historical periods. It specifies four mechanisms—reinforcement, compensation, contradiction, and translation—through which attachments interact, and explains why formal inclusion may diverge from recognition and why hierarchies within migrantised spaces shape access to ostensibly shared institutions. The article's contribution is therefore not the claim that identities are plural, but an analytical architecture for explaining how plural attachments are institutionally produced, unequally distributed, and historically reconfigured.

1. Introduction

More than six decades after the bilateral labour-recruitment agreements that brought large-scale migration from Türkiye to Western Europe, many of those still described in policy and scholarship as “Turkish migrants” or “people of Turkish origin” are neither recent arrivals nor external to the societies in which they live. Many are citizens by birth or naturalisation, have grown up entirely in European cities, and participate in institutions that are municipal, national, European, religious, familial, associational, and transnational at the same time. This social reality makes the continued dominance of “integration” analytically consequential. The term often presupposes a bounded receiving society, a migrant population positioned outside it, a movement from exteriority toward membership, and an endpoint against which incorporation can be assessed (Dahinden 2016; Favell 2022; Schinkel 2017, 2018).

The problem is therefore not simply that integration is normatively contested. More fundamentally, its developmental vocabulary sits uneasily with social worlds in which legal membership, everyday emplacement, transnational engagement, religious or non-religious identification, and external ascription coexist without converging toward a single endpoint. The so-called integration paradox brings this tension into sharp relief. In some cases, highly educated and structurally incorporated members of immigrant-origin populations report stronger perceptions of discrimination, or more conditional forms of national identification, than less educated counterparts (de Vroome et al. 2014; Geurts et al. 2021, 2022; Schaeffer and Kas 2024; Verkuyten 2016). Within a developmental model, this appears anomalous because structural incorporation is expected to strengthen subjective belonging. From a relational perspective, however, it is less surprising: legal and socioeconomic inclusion may increase contact with majority institutions, raise expectations of equal recognition, and make misrecognition more visible.

This tension provides the point of departure for the article's account of multi-layered belonging. The concept is not intended to restate the familiar observation that people hold more than one attachment; that insight is already central to work on transnationalism, diaspora, translocational positionality, post-migrant society, and the politics of belonging. Its value lies in specifying how those attachments are organised, mediated, and contested. The framework therefore asks where membership is organised, through which institutions it is mediated, for whom access and recognition vary, how different attachments affect one another, and whose classifications define the situation. This also addresses a recurrent weakness of fixed layer models. European, national, and urban belonging refer to scales, whereas religion, family, and digital media are better understood as domains or infrastructures that may operate across several scales. Keeping these dimensions analytically separate makes the framework less schematic, but more faithful to how belonging is actually organised.

To develop this framework, the article uses the Türkiye-Europe migration field as a theory-building case rather than as the empirical boundary of the theory. The distinction matters. Simultaneous attachments, urban emplacement, bilateral non-belonging, and transnational ties are not uniquely Turkish phenomena; they recur across many post-migrant formations. The Türkiye-Europe field is especially useful analytically because the relevant mechanisms are unusually dense and visible: long-term settlement across several national regimes; extensive sending-state and diaspora institutions; external voting and religious infrastructures; established Alevi, Kurdish, Sunni, secular, leftist, nationalist, and other organisational fields; and migration cohorts shaped by labour recruitment, family

reunification, political violence, educational mobility, and post-2016 political displacement (Adamson 2019; Aksel 2022; Kaya 2018; Sökefeld 2008). The general claim, therefore, is not that people located in this field possess a distinctive kind of belonging, but that the field brings into view a relational architecture that can be examined in other post-migrant settings.

This case logic also shapes the article's comparative ambition. Rather than ranking national-origin populations against a receiving-society benchmark, the framework treats countries, groups, scales, institutions, and historical periods as sites in which different configurations of belonging are produced. Comparison is therefore used for theory building: it can identify recurring mechanisms while allowing their institutional weight and consequences to vary. This makes comparison possible without assuming equivalent group categories, a shared developmental endpoint, or a single national scale of membership.

Because the argument depends on avoiding reified group categories, the terminology used in the article also requires caution. "Türkiye-origin" is not treated as a natural or permanent identity. It is an administrative and scholarly shorthand that may itself contribute to perpetual othering when applied to third- or fourth-generation citizens, people from mixed families, or persons for whom Türkiye has little subjective significance. Following critiques of methodological nationalism and migrant exceptionalism, the article therefore refers mainly to the Türkiye-Europe migration field rather than replacing "Türkiye-origin" with another person-level umbrella label (Dahinden 2016; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Where individuals or subgroups are discussed, the terminology follows the self-description or analytical category used in the cited research. "Türkiye-origin" is retained only where a source or administrative classification requires a broad category. It is not taken to imply ethnic Turkishness, Sunni Muslimness, continuing homeland attachment, or a permanent condition of foreignness. Whether Türkiye remains subjectively or institutionally salient is treated as an empirical question.

The article develops this argument in three steps. First, it moves from a list of supposedly equivalent "layers" to a relational architecture organised around scales, institutional domains, social positionalities, relational mechanisms, and boundary processes. Second, it brings power into the analysis of post-migrant collectivities by treating intra-migrant racism, confessional boundary making, political exclusion, gendered hierarchy, and class differentiation as features of how belonging is organised, rather than as background variation. Third, it clarifies the scope of the argument: multi-layered belonging is proposed as a general analytic for post-migrant formations, while the institutional density of the Türkiye-Europe field remains case-specific. The aim is not to replace "integration" with another catch-all term, but to sharpen the vocabulary available for studying membership across social worlds that do not unfold along a single line.

2. Methodological Positioning and Comparative Case Logic

The article's methodological strategy follows from the conceptual problem outlined above. It engages existing scholarship through a purposive and interpretive synthesis designed to clarify conceptual relations, connect debates that are often treated separately, and develop propositions for future empirical research (Sandelowski and Barroso 2007; Snyder 2019). The review is therefore selective rather than systematic. It does not aim to cover the field exhaustively or to estimate aggregate effects across studies. Instead, it prioritises peer-reviewed comparative research, meta-analyses, and theoretically significant case studies on integration, belonging, transnationalism, citizenship, religion, recognition, urban emplacement, and intra-migrant boundary making. Official sources are used only where institutional rules themselves form part of the analysis.

Within this strategy, the Türkiye-Europe migration field is treated as a particularly revealing theory-building case. Its usefulness lies in four interrelated features. First, the field has sufficient historical depth for the distinction between migrant generation and contemporary membership to become analytically visible. Labour migration from the 1960s was followed by family reunification, political asylum, student and professional mobility, and more recent politically driven emigration, producing cohorts that differ in biography, class position, political orientation, and relationship to Türkiye. Second, the field extends across national contexts with different citizenship regimes, religion-state arrangements, urban opportunity structures, and repertoires of racialisation. Comparative work on the second generation has long shown that institutional contexts shape educational and incorporation outcomes, thereby challenging explanations that attribute differences primarily to inherited "culture" (Crul and Schneider 2010; Crul et al. 2012). Third, the field contains dense transnational and sending-state infrastructures, including religious organisations, diaspora policies, external electoral participation, media, and associational networks (Adamson 2019; Aksel 2022; Bruce 2020; Maritato 2018). Fourth, it includes visible internal cleavages that make homogenising group labels especially problematic. Recent work on "simultaneous racisms" among Turkey-originated communities in Germany shows how Kurdish, Alevi, Yazidi, Armenian, Pontic-Greek, Jewish, and

other minoritised participants may experience racism both from the dominant society and within migrantised social spaces (Burç et al. 2025).

These features shape how the evidence is used. The section draws on scholarship from established Türkiye-Europe migration contexts, including Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and France, but it does not present a symmetrical five-country comparison. Germany serves as the main theory-building site because the literatures on Alevi organisation, Turkish-Islamic institutions, citizenship, post-migrant politics, and intra-migrant boundary making are especially developed there. Comparative European studies are used where they speak directly to a proposed mechanism. The evidence is mobilised in three complementary ways: comparative survey and meta-analytic findings ground propositions about recognition, discrimination, and the integration paradox; institutional and organisational studies illuminate the mechanisms through which religious, civic, and transnational domains are governed; and ethnographic and qualitative work identifies boundary-making processes that aggregate statistics often conceal. Where the literature is contested or classifications are not equivalent, the analysis treats the evidence as illustrative rather than definitive. The comparative design is therefore configurational rather than symmetrical: variation across countries, groups, scales, institutions, and historical periods is used to examine mechanisms and scope conditions, not to estimate country effects or rank national populations along a common integration continuum.

This design also defines the limits of the article's claims and prepares the analytical work that follows. Multi-layered belonging is proposed as a theory-building framework, not as a validated measurement model. It does not assume that every person occupies every scale or institutional domain, nor that any single configuration can stand for a national population. Instead, it generates observable questions: which institutions mediate belonging, who is recognised within them, which attachments reinforce or contradict one another, and how configurations shift across contexts and life courses. Answering these questions requires dedicated empirical research. The purpose of the present article is to make them theoretically coherent and empirically tractable before turning, in the next section, to the conceptual move from integration to relational belonging.

3. From Integration to Relational Belonging

Critiques of integration have developed from several directions, but they converge on a shared concern: the concept often reproduces the very hierarchy it claims to analyse. Schinkel (2017, 2018) shows how integration discourse constructs "society" and "migrants" as asymmetrical categories. The majority is presumed to belong by default, while minoritised populations become objects of measurement. Dahinden (2016) makes a related case for the de-migrantisation of research, arguing that treating migrants and non-migrants as pre-given categories can reproduce the distinction that research should explain. Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) locate this problem within methodological nationalism, in which social processes are interpreted through the naturalised container of the nation-state even when the actors, institutions, and resources involved are transnational.

The major alternatives to integration are therefore indispensable, but they do not all solve the same analytical problem. Transnationalism and simultaneity show that incorporation in a country of residence and cross-border engagement can develop together rather than as mutually exclusive trajectories (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). The politics of belonging distinguishes affective attachment from the political work through which boundaries of membership are drawn and policed (Yuval-Davis 2006, 2011). Antonsich (2010) similarly separates everyday place-belongingness from wider politics of membership. Translocational positionality explains how gender, class, ethnicity, generation, and place intersect and shift across contexts rather than forming stable identity containers (Anthias 2002, 2008, 2013). Post-migrant scholarship relocates the unit of analysis from "migrants" to societies transformed by migration and by struggles over recognising that transformation (Foroutan 2019; Yurdakul 2024). Urban migration scholarship, finally, shows that cities and neighbourhoods can become substantive fields of membership that are not reducible to national belonging (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011; Wessendorf 2013).

Taken together, these approaches are complementary rather than competing. They show that belonging is at once affective and institutional, local and transnational, self-defined and externally ascribed, and shaped by unequal access to recognition. What they leave less fully specified is how these dimensions can be organised analytically without turning multiplicity into a mere catalogue of identities. Multi-layered belonging addresses that problem by treating "layeredness" as a relational configuration rather than as a stack of discrete attachments.

A relational account begins with three distinctions. First, scale is not the same as domain. National citizenship and urban membership operate at different territorial-institutional scales, whereas religion and family are domains that can operate across

several scales. Alevi organisations, for example, may be locally embedded, nationally recognised, and transnationally networked at the same time (Özyürek 2009; Sökefeld 2003, 2008). Second, self-identification is not the same as ascription. People may be racialised as Muslim or Turkish regardless of how they identify, while Alevi, Kurdish, or secular self-understandings may be erased by administrative or public classifications. Third, plural membership is not necessarily harmonious. Institutions distribute recognition unevenly, and attachments may become mutually supportive, compensatory, or conflictual depending on political context and social position.

The distinction is especially important in relation to religion. Muslimness in Europe may function as a voluntary identification, an institutional affiliation, and an externally imposed racialised marker. Scholarship on securitisation and anti-Muslim boundary making shows that public visibility can generate suspicion independently of individual religiosity (Amir-Moazami 2018; Helbling 2014; Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014). At the same time, Alevi organisations have long contested their subsumption under undifferentiated categories of Turkish or Muslim identity, while Alevi self-understandings vary across religious, cultural, political, humanist, and other formulations (Arkilic and Gurcan 2021; Özyürek 2009; Şahin 2005; Sökefeld 2008). A framework that simply places “religion” alongside “national” or “urban” belonging therefore risks reproducing the classifications it should be examining. The revised model instead asks how religious and worldview institutions intersect with multiple scales, and how their boundaries include some actors while rendering others invisible.

Relational belonging also requires attention to power within migrantised collectivities. Erel (2010) demonstrates that migrants from the same national background do not carry a single cultural repertoire; rather, they produce distinctions through gender, class, ethnicity, and locally valued forms of capital. Burç et al. (2025) extend this insight by showing how minoritised people within Turkey-originated social spaces navigate simultaneous forms of racism and strategically manage visibility. These findings make intra-group hierarchy central to a theory of belonging, not external to it. The relevant question is therefore not simply whether a person belongs to a diaspora institution, but on what terms, with what capacity for self-definition, and with what risks of misrecognition or exclusion.

4. The Relational Architecture of Multi-Layered Belonging

The preceding section established why multi-layered belonging cannot be reduced either to plural identity or to a sequence of integration. This section specifies the architecture of the framework. Multi-layered belonging denotes a configuration of memberships and attachments that are institutionally mediated, organised across more than one scale, differentiated by social position, and connected through relations of reinforcement, compensation, contradiction, and translation. The emphasis falls on configuration rather than sequence. The aim is not to suggest that every layer carries the same weight, that layers form a stable hierarchy, or that plural attachments eventually resolve into a single pattern. The analytical question is instead how specific attachments are combined, through which institutions they are sustained, and under what conditions they become mutually supportive, compensatory, or conflictual.

The framework is built from five analytical components and organised by four cross-cutting principles. The first principle is multi-scalarity. Belonging may be organised at supranational, national, urban or local, and transnational scales, each of which distributes different rights, resources, forms of recognition, and opportunities for participation. European Union citizenship, national naturalisation, municipal participation, and transnational political mobilisation can be inhabited by the same person, but they do not provide the same kind of membership. Distinguishing these scales is therefore the first step in avoiding the assumption that national integration is the only meaningful horizon of belonging.

The second principle follows directly from this scalar distinction: belonging is institutionally mediated. It is not reducible to subjective identification; it is enacted through legal-civic institutions, schools and labour markets, families and kin networks, religious and worldview organisations, voluntary associations, media, and digital infrastructures. These domains often operate across several scales at once. A cemevi, for instance, may be locally embedded, nationally recognised, and transnationally networked. A mosque affiliated with the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DİTİB) may provide worship, social services, and youth activities locally while remaining connected to transnational religious governance. The analytical task is therefore to examine what an institution enables, what norms it enacts, and whose participation it facilitates, conditions, or excludes.

Once scales and domains are separated, the framework can also reject developmental assumptions about direction. The third principle is non-developmental multidirectionality. Belonging is not assumed to move from “Turkish” to “German,” from transnational to national, or from religious to secular. Attachments may intensify, weaken, or change form across the life course and in response to

institutions, conflicts, or political events. Resources and narratives also travel in more than one direction. Sökefeld's work on Alevi recognition shows that institutional resources acquired in Germany could support transnational claims in Türkiye, while developments in Türkiye simultaneously reshaped mobilisation in Germany (Sökefeld 2003, 2008). Such dynamics cannot be understood as residual homeland attachment that gradually fades with integration.

The fourth principle adds the power relations through which these scalar and institutional configurations are lived. Conflict is not confined to relations between minorities and majority societies; it can also occur within migrantised spaces, within institutions, and between collectivities that are differently self-defined or externally ascribed. Gender, class, ethnicity, confession or worldview, generation, migration cohort, and political orientation shape access to institutional resources and the risks attached to visibility. This principle prevents national-origin categories from becoming containers that obscure Turkish-Kurdish, Sunni-Alevi, secular-religious, pro-government-oppositional, and other relations. It also avoids the assumption that a religious or diaspora organisation represents everyone who is externally classified under the same national or religious label.

Taken together, these principles translate the architecture into a set of empirical questions (Table 1). Scales identify where membership is organised; institutional domains identify the infrastructures through which belonging is mediated; positionalities and cleavages specify for whom access, recognition, voice, and risk differ; relational mechanisms show how attachments affect one another; and boundary processes ask whose categories define the situation. In this sense, "layers" are not pre-existing boxes to be filled. They are configurations that emerge at the intersections of scale, institution, positionality, mechanism, and boundary making. Table 1 therefore functions as a comparative analytical matrix: it separates dimensions that should not be conflated while specifying the observations and questions needed to compare configurations without reducing them to a single integration score.

Table 1
Relational architecture of multi-layered belonging

Analytical component	Categories	What to observe	Core question
Scales of membership	Supranational/European; national; urban/local; transnational	Rights, participation, mobility, legal status, recognition, organisational reach	At which scale is membership enabled, withheld, or contested?
Institutional domains	Legal-civic; education/work; family-cultural; religious/worldview; associational; media/digital	Rules, organisations, routines, infrastructures, gatekeepers	Through which institutions is belonging produced and reproduced?
Positionalities and cleavages	Ethnicity; confession/worldview; gender; class; generation; migration cohort; political orientation	Differential access, visibility, voice, stigma, safety, representation	Who can belong on what terms, and who is misrecognised or excluded?
Relational mechanisms	Reinforcement; compensation; contradiction; translation	Changes in one attachment associated with another; transfer of resources and meanings across domains/scales	How do forms of belonging alter one another?
Boundary processes	Self-identification; external ascription; recognition; misrecognition; racialisation	Labels used by actors and institutions; discrepancies between status and recognition	Whose categories define the social situation?

4.1. Relational Mechanisms and Propositions

The matrix becomes explanatory when the relations among its components are specified. Four mechanisms are central. Reinforcement refers to cases in which investment in one domain strengthens another, as when local civic participation provides resources for transnational advocacy. Compensation describes situations in which exclusion at one scale increases the salience of another, for example when conditional national recognition makes urban identification or community institutions more important. Contradiction arises when institutional demands or political classifications make attachments difficult to inhabit together, as when state definitions of legitimate Islam conflict with Alevi self-classification or nationalist organisations delegitimise Kurdish identification. Translation occurs when meanings, resources, and repertoires change as they move between contexts rather than being reproduced unchanged. These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive; a single institution may reinforce one attachment, compensate for exclusion elsewhere, and generate contradictions for differently positioned actors.

On this basis, the framework generates five propositions for comparative research. Each proposition identifies a relation that can be examined across cases without assuming that all cases share the same institutional configuration or developmental endpoint.

Proposition 1

Institutional simultaneity. Strong attachment or participation at one scale does not automatically weaken attachment at another. National citizenship, urban emplacement, religious or worldview participation, and transnational engagement can coexist because they are sustained through different institutions and answer different social needs. This proposition builds on the simultaneity thesis while specifying the institutional sites through which simultaneity is maintained (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004).

Proposition 2

Recognition divergence. Formal inclusion and substantive recognition do not necessarily move together. Citizenship, educational attainment, or occupational success may raise expectations of equal membership without removing racialisation. The integration paradox may therefore indicate not failed incorporation, but a widening gap between institutional inclusion and continuing misrecognition (Geurts et al. 2021, 2022; Schaeffer and Kas 2024).

Proposition 3

Compensatory rescaling. When national belonging remains persistently qualified, actors may invest more strongly in urban, associational, religious or worldview, or transnational fields without abandoning national membership. The empirical question is whether alternative scales compensate for exclusion, reinforce civic participation, or become sites of withdrawal.

Proposition 4

Intra-migrant conditionality. Access to “community” institutions is shaped by internal power relations. National or religious umbrella categories can conceal minoritised positions; institutional participation must therefore be analysed together with ethnicity, confession or worldview, gender, class, political orientation, and migration cohort. Burç et al. (2025) provide direct evidence that migrantised spaces can reproduce racisms and enforce strategic in/visibility among groups externally homogenised as Turkey-originated.

Proposition 5

Configurational specificity. The relational architecture can travel across post-migrant populations, but the weight of particular scales, domains, and mechanisms will differ by case. Dense sending-state religious infrastructure, external voting, or a history of political exile may make transnational and intragroup mechanisms especially visible in one migration field without making them universal features of post-migrant life. Comparative research should therefore test configurations rather than assume a single migrant trajectory.

5. Why the Türkiye-Europe Field Is a Revealing Theory-Building Case

The Türkiye-Europe field is useful for theory building because its historical development brings several elements of the framework into view at once. It shows, first, why a developmental account of integration is too narrow. Labour recruitment in the 1960s institutionalised temporariness through the guest-worker model, yet the end of recruitment in the 1970s did not lead primarily to return. It was followed instead by family reunification and long-term settlement. Political displacement after the 1980 military coup added Kurdish, Alevi, leftist, and other opposition-linked migrations to earlier labour-migrant networks, while later student, professional, and entrepreneurial mobility diversified the field further (Kaya 2018). These trajectories overlap rather than forming a single sequence from migrant arrival to integration. They have produced cohorts with different class positions, migration motives, political risks, institutional resources, and relationships to Türkiye. Migration cohort must therefore be treated as a positionality that can reorganise configurations of belonging.

This cohort logic is especially important for the most recent phase, which should not be folded into a generic category of “post-2016 migration.” Baser and Öztürk’s (2022) interview-based study identifies a new exile formation that includes academics, activists, artists, journalists, and politicians who decided to leave after the 2013 Gezi protests. It also situates the failed 2016 coup attempt and the subsequent authoritarian turn within a later constellation that included political dissidents, Gülen-affiliated migrants, and white-

collar or secular citizens. The renewed Kurdish conflict after the collapse of the peace process in 2015 constituted a different political shock. The 2015–2016 urban warfare in Kurdish-majority cities and the renewed repression surrounding the Kurdish question entered a transnational field in which Kurdish organisations in Europe had long responded to changing homeland conflicts and political opportunities (Baser 2017; Demir 2017). It should therefore not be analytically collapsed into the same cohort as highly educated urban exit. Oldac and Fancourt's (2021) account of self-described "New Wave Turks" in Germany further shows that recent highly educated migrants distinguish their biographies and social locations from established diaspora formations. Gezi-related exit, the 2015–2016 Kurdish conflict, and post-coup exile are therefore treated here as distinct political and migration conjunctures whose class composition, political risks, institutional resources, and relations to established organisations can reweight configurations of belonging in different ways.

Because these trajectories are internally differentiated, heterogeneity is not merely a descriptive feature of the field; it is part of the explanation. European statistics and public discourse have often used "Turkish" as though it named an ethnically and religiously coherent population, although the same umbrella category can include Turkish, Kurdish, Alevi, Sunni, secular, atheist, leftist, nationalist, and intersecting self-understandings. Gender and class further shape access to education, labour markets, family expectations, and associational leadership (Anthias 2013; Erel 2010). Later migration cohorts may also arrive with professional credentials, urban lifestyles, political experiences, and networks that differ sharply from those of labour migrants or their descendants. The framework therefore treats heterogeneity as a set of positional relations that condition institutional access, rather than as a descriptive list of subgroups. Secularity is analysed in the same way: not as the absence of religion, but as a historically situated orientation shaped by republican Turkish laicism and later secular traditions that have influenced organisations and boundary making within the migration field (Kaya 2018).

The question of religion and worldview provides a first institutional illustration of this positional complexity. Alevi mobilisation shows why religion cannot be treated as a single Muslim layer. Alevi self-understandings are internally diverse, and many Alevis contest classification as a branch of Islam or reject the assumption that Sunni institutional forms provide the baseline for religiosity. Scholarship on the Alevi movement in Germany shows how migration transformed organisational life, public visibility, and the politics of recognition (Özyürek 2009; Şahin 2005; Sökefeld 2003, 2008). Sökefeld demonstrates that Alevi institutionalisation in Germany was connected to claims for both equality and difference, and that resources gained through recognition in Germany could be redeployed transnationally. The point is not simply that Alevis retained a religious identity across borders. Rather, legal opportunity structures, public classifications, memories of discrimination, and organisational networks translated Aleviness into forms of membership that could be local, national, European, and transnational at the same time.

This example also shows why self-identification has to be analysed together with ascription. German institutions and public debates have historically classified migrants from Türkiye through categories such as foreigner, Turk, or Muslim, even when these labels conflict with people's own understandings of themselves. Alevi organisations have therefore had to negotiate not only recognition in relation to Sunni-majority Turkish institutions, but also the categories through which German authorities govern religion. Arkilic and Gurcan (2021) show that Alevi political participation is shaped by domestic institutional structures as well as transnational advocacy. The same institutional setting can therefore produce recognition and misrecognition simultaneously: inclusion in a state consultation forum may increase political voice while still locating Alevis within a broader "Islam" frame that some participants contest.

DİTİB illustrates a complementary mechanism. Reducing it either to a foreign-influence instrument or to a neutral provider of religious services obscures its institutional duality. DİTİB sustains mosque-based worship, education, youth work, and social activity, while its organisational relationship to Türkiye's Directorate of Religious Affairs and the circulation of religious personnel and discourse connect it to Turkish state religious governance (Bruce 2020; Carol and Hofheinz 2022; Maritato 2018; Yükleyn 2010). Carol and Hofheinz's (2022) analysis of 481 Friday sermons shows that homeland references vary across time and topic even as mosques remain embedded in everyday religious life. The comparative question is therefore not whether such institutions are simply local or transnational, but what norms they enact, how those norms travel, and which participants experience the space as supportive, conditional, or exclusionary.

Power within the broader migration field becomes especially visible when DİTİB and comparable institutions are considered alongside Alevi, Kurdish, Yazidi, Armenian, secular, and oppositional experiences. Burç et al. (2025) show that minoritised members of Turkey-originated communities in Germany can face what the authors call simultaneous racisms: exclusion in relation to the dominant society as well as racism or enforced invisibility within migrantised spaces. Their evidence addresses a central blind spot in integration-centred research. "Community" cannot be treated as a homogeneous protective resource if some members must conceal

identity, manage visibility, or avoid institutions dominated by other groups. Multi-layered belonging therefore incorporates intra-migrant boundaries as mechanisms that shape access to belonging.

The Türkiye-Europe field also makes multidirectionality visible. Sending-state policy has expanded through diaspora engagement institutions, external voting, cultural programmes, and religious governance, but influence does not flow only from Ankara outward. Migrant organisations lobby European institutions, participate in host-country politics, transform religious and cultural practices, and feed claims and repertoires back into Türkiye (Adamson 2019; Aksel 2022; Özyürek 2009; Sökefeld 2008). Alevi mobilisation is a classic example: public institutionalisation in Germany contributed to transnational recognition politics, showing that incorporation in the country of residence can enable rather than weaken cross-border activism. This is precisely the kind of relation that a developmental integration model tends to misread as divided loyalty.

Transnational relations also move through memories, grievances, and narratives of violence, not only through votes, travel, organisations, or media. Yildiz and Verkuyten (2011) show how narratives of the 1993 Sivas massacre among Alevi organisations in Western Europe functioned as political capital for drawing group boundaries, defining intergroup relations, and constructing inclusive victimhood. Such memory work can sustain belonging even without frequent cross-border mobility because violent pasts are narrated, institutionalised, and translated into recognition claims, solidarities, and boundary disputes. More recent research on diaspora youth likewise shows that Kurdish and Alevi actors do not simply receive homeland-state mobilisation as members of a uniform national community; engagement is selective and conditioned by political histories and relations to the sending state (Baser and Böcü 2025). Within the framework, memories and grievances can operate through translation and reinforcement when they generate solidarity, but through contradiction when competing historical narratives or nationalist interpretations make recognition conditional inside ostensibly shared institutions. The transnational scale therefore includes the circulation of moral claims, collective memories, grievances, and narratives of violence as well as material, electoral, and digital practices.

German citizenship reform further illustrates relational rather than sequential change. The 2024 reform normalised multiple nationality and reduced the ordinary residence requirement for naturalisation to five years; a 2025 change then removed the three-year accelerated route while retaining the five-year standard (Bundesministerium des Innern n.d.; Bundesregierung 2025). These reforms reduce the legal costs of maintaining another citizenship, but they do not determine how Germanness is socially recognised. Legal membership can therefore expand while racialised or ethnicised assumptions about who is “really” German persist. In such cases, there is no necessary convergence between legal inclusion and publicly recognised belonging (Altay et al. 2025).

Urban emplacement provides another example of the same relational logic. Neighbourhood and municipal participation can become durable sites of everyday membership that are not reducible to national identity (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011; Wessendorf 2013). In Berlin, Rotterdam, Brussels, Vienna, or French metropolitan areas, the city can organise work, schooling, friendship, political participation, and routine familiarity even when national belonging is questioned. Urban identity need not replace national identity. It may reinforce it, compensate for its qualification, or operate in a different institutional register altogether.

The political environment of boundary making is historically variable. Post-2015 European debates over refugee migration, borders, and national cohesion expanded the repertoires through which the loyalty and foreignness of established migrantised and Muslim citizens were contested (Favell 2022; Foroutan 2019). Anti-Muslim racialisation also shows why identification and ascription must remain distinct: “Muslim” can be imposed through security, loyalty, gender, or cultural-compatibility debates independently of personal religiosity (Amir-Moazami 2018; Helbling 2014; Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014). A secular person of Turkish or Kurdish background may therefore be governed through Muslimness, while an Alevi actor may mobilise a religious or cultural identity to resist Sunni-majority representation. The framework captures both dynamics by separating religious and worldview institutions from racialised boundary processes.

The illustrations above are consolidated in Table 2, which links each site or process to the relational mechanism it activates, the power relation it makes visible, and the analytical implication that follows. The table is not a prevalence estimate or a ranking of national cases. It is a comparative heuristic: its rows identify configurations that can be examined across groups, scales, institutions, countries, and historical periods.

Table 2
Illustrative relational mechanisms in the Türkiye-Europe migration field

Illustrative site/process	Relational mechanism	Power relation made visible	Analytical implication
German citizenship and multiple nationality	Reinforcement or decoupling between legal membership and transnational ties; possible recognition divergence	State rules versus social recognition of Germanness	Legal inclusion should not be equated with subjective or publicly recognised belonging.
Alevi institutionalisation in Germany	Translation and reinforcement across local, national, European, and transnational scales	Alevi self-definition versus Sunni-majoritarian and state classifications	Religion/worldview must be analysed as a contested domain rather than a unitary Muslim layer.
DiTİB mosque field	Simultaneous local service provision and transnational institutional linkage	State-linked religious governance; uneven inclusion of dissenting or minoritised positions	Institutions can enable belonging and reproduce political boundaries at the same time.
Urban emplacement	Compensation or reinforcement	Qualified national recognition versus everyday local membership	City-level belonging can become substantively strong without replacing national or transnational ties.
Intra-migrant minoritisation	Contradiction; strategic visibility/invisibility	Ethnic, confessional, political, gendered, and other hierarchies inside migrantised spaces	Community institutions must be analysed through internal boundary making, not assumed to be uniformly protective.
Gezi-related exit; 2015–2016 Kurdish conflict; post-coup exile	Cohort-specific reweighting of scales, domains, and political risk	Established organisations versus new migrants with different class, political, and conflict biographies	Recent mobility must be disaggregated into distinct political and migration conjunctures rather than treated as one post-2016 wave.
Alevi collective memory of Sivas and other violent pasts	Translation, reinforcement, and possible contradiction through mnemonic and moral repertoires	Recognition claims and solidarities versus competing historical narratives and conditional recognition	Transnational belonging includes memories, grievances, and narratives of violence, not only material circulation or electoral practices.

6. What the Framework Explains That Integration Misses

The configurations summarised in Table 2 point to a broader analytical payoff. They show that similar mechanisms can operate across different institutional sites, and that the same institution may enable belonging for some actors while making it conditional for others. This is where the framework moves beyond integration-centred analysis. Its first contribution is to reinterpret the integration paradox. A developmental account expects structural incorporation to strengthen identification with the national community. Yet meta-analytic, comparative, and qualitative evidence shows that education and socioeconomic incorporation may coexist with stronger perceptions of discrimination or more conditional national belonging (Geurts et al. 2021, 2022; Schaeffer and Kas 2024). Multi-layered belonging treats this pattern not as a discrepancy between “objective” and “subjective” integration, but as recognition divergence. People may gain access to education, employment, and citizenship while still encountering signals that mark them as foreign, Muslim, Turkish, Kurdish, or otherwise not fully national. Greater participation may also increase contact with gatekeeping institutions and make unequal recognition more visible.

A second contribution follows from the same distinction between inclusion and recognition. The framework makes it possible to analyse religion without treating it as evidence of deficient civic attachment. Research on second-generation Turkish-background Muslims has shown that religiosity and structural incorporation are not simple opposites, and that family religious socialisation can persist across educational and occupational mobility (Fleischmann and Phalet 2012). A relational model asks a different set of questions: whether religious institutions reinforce civic participation, provide social resources, generate transnational links, or become sites of political and intragroup exclusion. In doing so, it avoids both the securitisation of religious organisation and its romanticisation as an automatically protective community resource.

The third contribution extends this logic to transnational engagement. Such engagement should not be read as distance from the country of residence. External voting, media consumption, family visits, property ownership, religious networks, political activism, and

transmitted memories of violence can coexist with citizenship, employment, and urban attachment because they are sustained through partly distinct infrastructures and narrative repertoires. The Alevi recognition movement demonstrates an even stronger relation: institutionalisation in the country of residence can generate resources for transnational action, while collective memories such as Sivas can be translated into recognition claims and solidarities in Europe (Sökefeld 2003, 2008; Yildiz and Verkuyten 2011). Transnationalism is therefore not a residual layer left over from incomplete integration. It is one possible scale of social and political action, whose content may be material, institutional, digital, mnemonic, or moral.

A fourth contribution concerns the unit of comparison. The framework makes internal differentiation central rather than incidental. Integration models often compare a national-origin group with a majority population and then treat within-group variation as a control variable. Multi-layered belonging reverses that order where necessary. If Kurdish, Alevi, Yazidi, Armenian, Jewish, secular, queer, or oppositional actors experience migrantised institutions differently, those differences are not noise around a group average; they are evidence of how belonging is institutionally distributed (Burç et al. 2025). This point also guards against reproducing majority or administrative categories. To classify every cemevi as part of a Muslim layer, or every person from Türkiye as Turkish, would substitute convenience for analysis.

The fifth contribution returns to scale. The framework integrates urban and national membership without ranking one as more authentic or more complete than the other. Comparative integration-context research has already shown that outcomes differ substantially across cities and national institutional settings (Crul and Schneider 2010; Crul et al. 2012). The relational model extends this insight from outcomes to belonging. Local institutions may provide concrete recognition where national discourse withholds it, or national citizenship may secure rights while everyday urban life supplies the affective and relational substance of membership. These relations need to be investigated empirically rather than presumed in advance.

Taken together, these contributions imply a different empirical strategy. Instead of asking whether a population is “more integrated,” researchers can compare which scales and institutional domains are salient, how access varies by positionality, and which mechanisms connect them. Surveys can measure legal status, local and national attachment, discrimination, organisational participation, transnational practices, and religious or worldview involvement without collapsing these dimensions into a single score. Qualitative and comparative research can then examine how actors interpret contradictions, how institutions distribute recognition, and why similar mechanisms produce different configurations across contexts. This shift does not make integration irrelevant as a topic of policy or public debate. It makes clear, rather, why integration alone is too blunt an analytical vocabulary for explaining the relations through which belonging is produced. The next section therefore turns from what the framework explains to the conditions under which it should be tested, limited, and revised.

7. Scope Conditions, Limitations, and Research Agenda

The preceding section identified what the framework can explain more precisely than integration-centred analysis. The next question is where that framework travels, where it reaches its limits, and how it should be tested. Its intended scope is broader than the Türkiye-Europe case from which it is developed: it applies to post-migrant social formations in which people participate in more than one institutional field and where membership cannot be adequately described as movement from an origin society into a bounded receiving society. This does not mean that every case will contain the same scales or domains, or that those scales and domains will carry equal weight. Rather, the framework offers a common grammar for comparing configurations whose institutional composition and historical significance may vary.

This portability must be specified rather than assumed, and it also defines the framework's limits. First, the article does not present original survey, interview, ethnographic, or digital data. It cannot therefore establish the prevalence of particular configurations or estimate relationships among the framework's components. Second, the supporting literature is uneven across subgroups and countries. Germany is especially well represented in research on Alevi organisation, Turkish religious institutions, post-migrant politics, and intra-migrant racism, whereas comparable research is thinner in some other national contexts. Third, the framework does not assume that national origin remains socially salient indefinitely. Separating ascription from self-identification allows precisely for findings in which Türkiye ceases to matter subjectively for later generations, even while external institutions continue to impose an origin label.

A related limitation concerns forms of mediation that are clearly important but not yet sufficiently developed in the available literature. Digital infrastructures are the most obvious example. Digital media do not constitute a territorial scale; they mediate relations across

scales. They can intensify homeland politics, sustain family networks, circulate racialised narratives, and enable counter-publics. Future research should therefore treat digitality as an institutional domain and connective infrastructure rather than as a self-contained “digital layer.” The relational mechanisms also require direct empirical testing. Longitudinal surveys could examine whether discrimination at the national scale predicts stronger urban attachment or community participation; network research could trace the movement of organisational resources between local and transnational fields; and qualitative studies could identify when community institutions are experienced as protective, conditional, or exclusionary.

This agenda is especially important for intragroup power, where the available evidence already suggests that the framework’s conflict-sensitive claims are empirically testable. Burç et al. (2025) show that external racialisation and internal minoritisation may operate at the same time. Future work should compare how Alevi, Kurdish, Yazidi, Armenian, Sunni, secular, and other actors navigate organisations that are publicly presented as representing a national-origin community. Such research would move the conflict-sensitive element of the framework from a theoretical principle to an observable set of questions. Gender, class, sexuality, and migration cohort should likewise be analysed as intersecting positionalities, not added as separate identity layers.

Testing the framework also requires comparison beyond the Türkiye-Europe field, as well as contrasting configurations within it. Moroccan-origin populations in continental Europe, South Asian-origin populations in Britain, and more recent Syrian-origin populations would place different migration histories, associational fields, and sending-state relations under analytical pressure. The purpose of such comparison should not be to confirm the framework by definition. It should be to examine whether similar relational mechanisms recur when institutional weightings differ. If they do not, the framework’s scope should be narrowed rather than protected by definitional flexibility.

Switzerland offers a particularly demanding way to conduct this kind of test within the wider Türkiye-Europe field because it separates institutional dimensions that integration research often treats together. Its ordinary naturalisation regime is comparatively restrictive, generally requiring ten years of residence, while dual nationality has been recognised without restriction under Swiss law since 1992 (State Secretariat for Migration 2020, 2026). This configuration decouples ease of access to national citizenship from permission to retain another nationality. Research on Türkiye-linked residents across Swiss cantons could therefore test whether restrictive access to national citizenship is compensated by local or municipal membership (Kayran and Nadler 2022), whether dual nationality reinforces transnational ties without weakening local attachment, and how Alevi, Kurdish, Sunni, secular, class, gender, and political positionalities interact with cantonal opportunity structures. Such comparison should not presume a homogeneous or ideologically distinctive “Turkish community”; subgroup composition, self-identification, and political orientation must themselves be measured. Switzerland is therefore useful as a falsification-oriented case: if the predicted mechanisms do not recur under this institutional configuration, the scope conditions of multi-layered belonging should be revised.

8. Conclusion

This article has not argued simply that belonging is multiple. Migration scholarship has shown for decades that people sustain attachments across places, institutions, and categories of membership. The more difficult task is to analyse such multiplicity without reducing it to a list of identities or interpreting every tension through a developmental model of integration. Multi-layered belonging offers one way to meet that task. It separates scales of membership, institutional domains, social positionalities, relational mechanisms, and boundary processes, and then examines how their intersections produce specific configurations of belonging.

This reformulation changes the object of analysis. The question is no longer whether people located within the Türkiye-Europe migration field have completed a movement from migrant exteriority to national integration. It is how legal membership, urban emplacement, family and cultural practice, religious or non-religious organisation, transnational engagement, and external ascription are institutionally combined for differently positioned actors. These relations may reinforce one another, compensate for exclusion, come into contradiction, or be translated across contexts. They should therefore be studied as relational configurations rather than as stages in a linear sequence.

The Türkiye-Europe migration field makes this architecture especially visible. Multigenerational settlement coexists with dense transnational institutions; citizenship reform coexists with contested national recognition; Alevi mobilisation demonstrates that incorporation in the country of residence can enable transnational claims; DiTİB illustrates how religious service provision and state-linked transnational governance can operate together; and research on simultaneous racisms shows that the boundaries of belonging

run through migrantised spaces as well as between minorities and majority societies. These processes cannot be captured adequately by a homogeneous national-origin category or by a unitary Muslim layer.

The framework should therefore be judged by what it enables researchers to see, not by whether it replaces “integration” with a new master concept. Its value lies in opening more precise questions about institutions, power, recognition, and relations across scales. In post-migrant Europe, belonging is neither singular nor automatically cumulative. It is made, negotiated, and contested through configurations whose internal relations must be demonstrated rather than assumed.

Abbreviations

DiTİB

Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs

Declarations

Competing interests

The author declares that there are no competing interests.

Author Contribution

I.Y. conceived and designed the study, developed the theoretical and conceptual framework, conducted the literature review and interpretive synthesis, analysed and interpreted the relevant literature, and wrote, critically revised, and approved the final manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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