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Formation of an academic diaspora: A study of scholars from Turkey in the higher education sector in Britain

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Abstract

The internationalisation of higher education has revealed the importance of understanding the formation and dynamics of academic diasporas. Most studies focus on cohesive academic diasporas, overlooking fragmentation in diasporas as a central concern. In this paper, we define and theorise fragmented academic diaspora. The emergence of a highly fragmented diaspora of scholars from Turkey in the British higher education sector presents an ideal opportunity to examine the notion of a fragmented academic diaspora. Based on an online study of 20 scholars from Turkey in British academia, this paper investigates the formation of an academic diaspora fragmented across social fault lines. We examine the factors driving the formation of a fragmented academic diaspora, the boundaries defining this community and the challenges it faces. Additionally, we discuss these scholars' professional and personal experiences and investigate their integration into the academic landscape of Britain. Based on the expectations and aspirations of the participants, we propose strategies to leverage fragmentation within this academic diaspora as a pathway to fostering synergies amidst fragmentation and divisiveness.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing internationalisation of higher education underscores the need to examine the dynamics and formation of academic diasporas, particularly those marked by fragmentation. The Turkish academic diaspora in Britain serves as an ideal case for studying the formation of a fragmented academic diaspora. In the late 1980s, there was significant migration from Turkey to the United Kingdom and other European countries for economic and political reasons (Kiran & Acikalin, 2021). This migration movement naturally impacted the academic sphere. There has been an exponential increase in the number of scholars from Turkey working in British academia. Academic migration from Turkey to Britain has remained relatively low compared to other minority ethnic groups until recently. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2024a), there were 240,420 academics in the UK higher education sector. Of these, 160,390 were local academics. The number of international academics was 80,030, and 1100 were from Turkey in 2023. Turkish scholars constitute 1.4% of the overall number of international academics in the United Kingdom. Since 2010, the number of scholars from Turkey in British higher education has doubled, whose attachment to Turkey is highly fragmented along social fault lines such as political ideology, secularism, proximity to the ruling elite, and ethnic and confessional differences (Özbilgin & Yildiz, 2022). The expanding Turkish academic diaspora stems from specific domestic pressures rather than general migration trends. Scholars seek opportunities abroad to maintain their integrity and careers, responding to eroding academic freedom, intensifying university politicisation and rampant nepotism in Turkey (Özbilgin et al., 2019; Sertdemir Özdemir, 2021). These factors drive intellectuals to pursue their scholarly endeavours in foreign institutions. With this growing number of scholars and their fragmentation across social, political and disciplinary boundaries, scholars from Turkey in Britain have an emerging sense of a diasporic community (Durak, 2020).

Drawing on a study of scholars from Turkey who now work in British academic institutions, this paper explores the dynamics of how a fragmented academic diaspora emerges among a diverse group of scholars from Turkey with varied backgrounds, paths of entry, goals, inspirations and successes. The process through which scholars from Turkey form a diasporic community, as well as how they overcome the challenges of migration and intragroup fragmentation they face, is a significant theme of the study. What makes the Turkish academic diaspora unique is its fragmented nature. A fragmented academic diaspora appears at first sight as an oxymoron. Fragmentation suggests divisions, and diaspora involves cohesion, two contrasting terms. Division and cohesion often co-exist in most social groups. However, in line with Khosravi (2018), we define the notion of a fragmented academic diaspora as an academic diaspora of scholars with migration histories who come together with common ties such as shared culture, language, belief and concerns and divisions based on social fault lines such as ethnicity, belief, ideology, sexual orientation and other asymmetries of power.

Many Greek intellectuals fled authoritarian regimes in the 1960s and 1970s, finding refuge in British academia (Asimakoulas, 2009). These scholars have formed a cohesive group with solid network ties within the United Kingdom; however, divisions persist along political ideology and religiosity within the Greek academic diaspora. Similarly, many Iranian academics have entered British academia, driven by religio-political migration pressures (Sreberny & Gholami, 2019). More recently, Ukrainian academics, fleeing war and conflict, have sought employment in Britain (Calic et al., 2024). Various academic communities with historical colonial connections to Britain, including those from India, Pakistan and the Caribbean, have also integrated into British academia, united by shared experiences of colonisation, conflict and displacement (Hussain, 2024).

In contrast, the Turkish academic diaspora in Britain is notably fragmented. Unlike other European diasporas, such as those from Spain and Italy, or communities with colonial ties to Britain, which have maintained cohesive identities through cultural connections to their homelands (Ragazzi, 2014), the Turkish case presents a unique paradigm. While other fragmented diasporas exist in Britain, including South Asian communities, these groups have demonstrated a remarkable ability to maintain strong cultural and religious continuity, fostering greater cohesion despite diverse state origins and migration histories (Jones, 2019). The Turkish diaspora is shaped by multifaceted push factors and diverse individual motivations, resulting in significant heterogeneity. This diversity, marked by

varying political orientations and academic disciplines, poses substantial challenges to forming a unified diasporic identity and hinders collective action among Turkish scholars in Britain.

The unique experience of migrating from Turkey as an academic and how they negotiate in the ethnic pecking order in Britain (Kamasak et al., 2019) provides a cognitive and affective umbrella for scholars from Turkey to form a diasporic community in Britain. In this study, we investigate the emergence and dynamics of an academic diaspora among scholars from Turkey in British higher education. We aim to understand the extent to which scholars from Turkey may form a cohesive and supportive diasporic community in the higher education sector in Britain. The paper concludes with an analysis of how academics from Turkey envision a healthy academic diaspora that can valorise its divisions. The paper contributes to the theorisation of modern academic diasporas by studying a group of scholars who form a fragmented academic diaspora, having left their countries due to a decline in institutions of economy, higher education governance, human rights and democracy. In line with Groutsis et al. (2020), our study highlights the decline of economic, human rights and political institutions as a key factor in the emergence of divergent pathways for marginalised groups to migrate.

Turkey is one of the key countries in which migration outflows for educated migrants occur. This manuscript focuses on the formation of a diaspora among migrants from Turkey employed in the British higher education sector. In the last decade, the number of academics from Turkey employed in the UK's higher education sector has increased exponentially (Akcigit et al., 2023). The reasons surrounding their migration are multifaceted. We focus on their post-migration experiences and potential for forming a diasporic community, even if fragmented, in Britain. Self-initiated expatriate literature offers frames that explore the migration process through relational and contextual perspectives, illustrating how macro, meso and micro choices and chances shape outcomes of migration (Arifa et al., 2021; Özbilgin et al., 2024). The original contribution of our findings is that the formation of an academic diaspora depends on a complex set of multilevel factors that motivate migration, pre-migration and post-settlement experiences. Many academics are resourceful actors and can negotiate their terms and conditions across national borders. Establishing and maintaining healthy academic diasporas necessitates a keen awareness of the fault lines that divide and marginalise scholars, driving them to seek opportunities abroad. Therefore, defining and theorising fragmentation in academic diasporas offers insights into how divisions could help strengthen cohesion among academic diasporas. This paper explores these trends through the lens of the Turkish academic diaspora in Britain, aiming to provide theoretical and practical insights into fragmented diasporas.

Drawing on an online study that generated 20 responses, we analyse the formation of a diaspora fragmented along social, political and disciplinary fault lines. We analyse the data from the respondents through a process-relational approach, identifying pre-migration experiences, migration motives and experiences, and post-migration experiences of forming a diasporic community, including possibilities, enablers and barriers. We conclude with future crafting based on suggested development by the respondents. This study makes contributions to the existing literature in three ways. First, we define and theorise fragmented academic diaspora, analysing the factors that drive the formation of a fragmented academic diaspora. We provide an in-depth exploration of pre-migration motivations and post-migration experiences. Second, we shed light on the boundary conditions and barriers that shape and challenge this community, providing a nuanced understanding of the fragmentation within the academic diaspora from Turkey. Third, we present forward-looking ideas based on the hopes and expectations of the participants, proposing strategies to support and enhance the development of a cohesive and supportive academic community that gains strength from its diversity and divisions.

THEORISING FORMATION OF A FRAGMENTED ACADEMIC DIASPORA

The term diaspora traditionally refers to the dispersion of people from their homeland to various parts of the world. Over time, this concept has evolved to encompass not only the scattering of people but also their continued engagement with their place of origin and their impact on their home and host countries (Cohen, 1997). A search

on the Web of Science (23 January 2025) reveals 25 manuscripts on the academic diaspora, of which there is only one on the Turkish academic diaspora (Özbilgin & Yıldız, 2022). The continued engagement of diasporic communities between their home and host countries often manifests through cultural, social and political connections that bind the dispersed communities to their homeland. Such interactions not only help maintain the cultural identity of the diaspora but also contribute to the socio-economic development of both the home and host countries (Pasura, 2012). Studies of diaspora often overlook divisions and diversity among diasporic communities for the sake of analytical clarity in their attempts to illustrate cohesion and togetherness in diasporic communities.

In line with this broader understanding of diaspora, an academic diaspora consists of scholars and researchers who have migrated from their home country to pursue academic careers abroad. Academic diaspora is particularly significant due to its potential to contribute to the knowledge economy in both the home and host countries. Such diaspora members engage in knowledge transfer, collaborative research and educational development, thus acting as bridges between their countries of origin and their new places of residence (Meyer & Brown, 1999; Larner, 2015). The flow of knowledge and expertise facilitated by academic diasporas is crucial in fostering innovation, enhancing educational standards and promoting international collaboration in research (Akcigit et al., 2023). Leung (2013) explains that in forming an academic diaspora, home and host country dynamics shape academics' human, social and cultural capital, as symbolic capital is context-dependent. While a particular academic degree or knowledge may have value in one context, it may be devalued and marginalised in another. Academic diasporas need to address such losses. In most studies of academic diaspora, central attention is on shared concerns, struggles and attributes of diaspora members, overlooking intragroup divisions and fragmentation in academic diasporas.

The formation of an academic diaspora acquires different meanings across various contexts. Nevertheless, it is fundamentally an agentic phenomenon at individual, group and institutional levels. At the micro level, individuals must be inspired and interested in forming a diaspora. At the meso level, ideal conditions, shared goals, agreed meanings, historical connections and a supportive environment are essential for a group to establish a diaspora. At the macro institutional level, the academic diaspora must be recognised and legitimised at the national level. Therefore, forming a diaspora is a process-relational multilevel phenomenon involving micro, meso and macro considerations that require shared meanings, concerns or interests among members to emerge as a diaspora (Meliou et al., 2021; Özbilgin & Yıldız, 2022). However, these formulations of the academic diaspora are not adequate to capture the emergence of an academic diaspora made up of individual members thrown together with a shared migration experience and with deep divisions, tensions and intragroup hostilities that shadow the formation of a cohesive community, fragmenting their togetherness along social fault lines.

The formation of an academic diaspora unfolds through an interplay of phases and factors, significantly shaped by transnational connections, socio-political transformations and the diasporic dynamics of belonging and identity (Gholami, 2025). This process involves multiple dimensions, including the challenges and opportunities faced by academics in their home countries and the host countries' receptiveness to integrating skilled professionals into their academic and social fabric. Teferra (2021) explains that highly skilled professionals, such as academics, migrate due to a combination of push and pull factors. Push factors include systemic issues such as political instability (Ahsan Ullah, 2023), war (Costas et al., 2024), lack of resources for research (Akcigit et al., 2023) and lack of academic freedom (Akcigit et al., 2023; Zavale & Langa, 2018), which create an untenable environment for scholarly work and personal security. These pressures compel academics to seek safer and more supportive environments abroad.

In contrast, superior career opportunities, advanced research facilities and supportive academic environments in host countries are compelling pull factors (Cerna & Chou, 2023). Ackers (2005) explains that some countries are net winners and others are net losers in attracting and retaining academic talent. In fact, not only migrant academics but also international students add to the complexity of winners and losers in academic talent acquisition and the formation of academic diasporas internationally (Brooks & Waters, 2021). Yalkin and Özbilgin (2022) explain that colonial relations have transformed into neocolonial relations in the formation of academic diasporas and

migration trajectories, retaining much of their original character of uneven power relations between the Global North and the Global South, privileging the former. These relations reproduce historical patterns of dominance and subordination, where scholars from formerly colonised regions may find their knowledge and expertise devalued or appropriated. Within Western academic institutions, the legacy of colonialism can manifest itself in systemic biases that favour Western paradigms and marginalise non-Western perspectives. The interplay of neo-colonial relations and academic diasporas thus unearths the ongoing struggle for equitable representation and the validation of diverse epistemologies in the global academic landscape. While most studies focus on how members of academic diasporas come together with shared experiences of discrimination, devaluation, misrecognition and neocolonial forms of exploitation (Yalkin & Özbilgin, 2022), there has been limited attention to intragroup divisions and tensions within academic diasporas.

Host countries, particularly those with robust educational infrastructures and progressive academic policies, attract professionals from the Global South by offering resources and conditions that encourage academic excellence and personal development. Socio-political transformations within various European states, alongside an expanding and commercialised higher education sector and English language instruction, enhance these attractions (Kamasak & Ozbilgin, 2021). These transformations often include policies promoting international collaboration, funding for research and inclusive academic practices, making relocation highly attractive for academics seeking to advance their careers. The glamourisation of academic mobility and the internationalisation of higher education also amplify these appealing aspects, making countries such as Britain, Germany and Scandinavia desirable destinations for migrant academics (Tsouroufli, 2023). Such factors influence academics' decision-making processes and shape the nature and extent of the academic diaspora. However, most studies treat academic diasporas as homogenous, coherent, cohesive and monolithic entities, failing to explore their intragroup heterogeneity.

Forming an academic diaspora involves several stages, starting with the critical migration decision. This decision rests on a combination of personal and professional aspirations, as well as the socio-political context of the home country. Academics may pursue more promising research opportunities and higher living standards or avoid political instability. Once they decide to migrate, academics face the formidable challenge of adapting to a new environment. They must manage the academic and cultural landscapes of the host country, which can differ significantly from their country of origin. Establishing networks and communities within the host country also becomes essential. Building these connections can provide support, collaboration opportunities and a sense of belonging. Engaging with local and international academic communities through conferences, workshops and professional organisations can facilitate such networks. The motivations of the individual, the professional opportunities available and the socio-political contexts of both the home and host countries profoundly influence this entire process, shaping the experiences and outcomes for academics in the diaspora (Isaakyan, 2010; Lerner, 2015). Most of these studies overlook how different motivations and the demography of migrant academics from the same country could fragment their efforts to form academic diasporas in host countries.

The formation of an academic diaspora is not without challenges. It requires them to establish new professional identities, integrate into the host country's academic environment and build fresh networks. Diaspora members frequently face barriers such as marginalisation, disadvantage, othering, cultural adaptation challenges and the struggle to maintain connections with their homeland (Mousa, 2024). As Bamberger (2022) highlighted, diasporic scholars oscillate between being seen as valuable human capital and marginalising others within their new environments. Discrimination can manifest in various forms, including biases in hiring practices, limited opportunities for career advancement and unequal access to resources (Fenton et al., 2000). Sociocultural and linguistic differences can also challenge communication, social integration, and acceptance within the academic community (Erbil et al., 2023). Language barriers, for example, present significant challenges, requiring academics to become proficient in the host country's language to communicate and collaborate effectively.

The recognition and validation of academic qualifications are usually lengthy. It requires flexibility and adaptation to new approaches, impacting professional relationships and career progression (Baykut et al., 2022). Cultural misunderstandings due to differing attitudes towards hierarchy, personal space and communication styles create

friction. The lack of support systems, such as family and familiar community networks, affects mental health and well-being. Differences in work–life balance expectations and financial challenges, including relocation costs and income disparities, add to the complexity. Legal and administrative hurdles, such as visa and residency requirements, further complicate the transition. These challenges affect their ability to integrate into, and contribute effectively to, their new environment (Frittelli, 2018).

Moreover, maintaining connections with their homeland can be challenging; yet it is crucial for many diaspora members, as it helps preserve their cultural identity and provides emotional support. These connections can, however, rest on regular communication with family and friends, participation in cultural traditions and festivals, and involvement in diaspora communities that share similar backgrounds. Staying connected to their roots would allow diaspora members to retain a sense of belonging and continuity, which can be exceptionally comforting in times of adjustment and transition (Cohen & Yefet, 2019). Furthermore, academic diaspora members also face the challenge of intragroup struggles for power, influence and legitimacy, as they often bring with them the asymmetries of power from their home countries.

Academic diasporas also present significant opportunities for promoting international collaboration, enhancing research capacities and contributing to the socio-economic development of both the home and host countries (Anand et al., 2009; Hugo, 2010; Kramer & Zent, 2019). For instance, diaspora members can act as intermediaries in establishing research collaborations, securing funding, and promoting student and faculty exchanges between institutions in the home and host countries. These activities can significantly enhance the research capabilities of both countries and foster a more inclusive and collaborative academic environment. In addition, the role of the diaspora in driving development, mainly through international entrepreneurship and the infusion of remittances and expertise, has been increasingly recognised (Nkongolo-Bakenda & Chrysostome, 2013). Academic diasporas and their diverse nature could also help support the democratisation of home countries, as migrant academics who leave because of institutional decline and the democratic deficit (Groutsis et al., 2020) could become democracy advocates and bolster opposition from abroad.

Understanding the formation of an academic diaspora requires a multidimensional approach considering the socio-political, economic and cultural factors influencing migration and how fragmentation occurs during pre- and post-migration phases. The Turkish academic diaspora in Britain exemplifies the complex dynamics of fragmented diaspora formation, highlighting both the challenges faced by migrant scholars and the potential benefits of their engagement in transnational academic networks. By examining these processes, we can gain deeper insights into the contributions of fragmented academic diasporas and develop strategies to support their integration and participation in global knowledge production (Woldegiyorgis, 2021).

CONTEXT

In recent years, Turkey has experienced a significant rise in the migration of skilled professionals, including doctors, engineers and academics, primarily driven by economic decline, political instability and precarious living conditions. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2023), the number of Turkish citizens migrating increased dramatically, with 2022 witnessing a record high over the past 7 years. Many migrants are highly educated professionals seeking better opportunities abroad (Filiz, 2024). For example, in 2022, substantial numbers of doctors left Turkey. Reports indicate that 231 doctors applied to work abroad in July 2022 alone, indicating the increasing trend of healthcare professionals seeking opportunities outside Turkey due to the country's challenging working conditions and lack of resources (Elmacioğlu, 2022).

The migration trend from Turkey is part of a broader pattern seen in Europe. Historically, Britain was not a primary destination for Turkish academics. Due to colonial ties, individuals from Cyprus, particularly Turkish Cypriots, were among the first groups of Turkish-speaking migrants. Over time, this migration evolved to include guest workers during the mid-twentieth century, recruited to fill labour shortages in post-war Britain (Özbilgin &

Yildiz, 2022). Following this, skilled professionals, including academics seeking better career opportunities and political refugees fleeing persecution and instability in Turkey, joined the migration flow (Köse, 2021). In recent years, Turkey's political and economic challenges, including a decline in human rights and democracy, economic instability and restrictions on academic freedom (Filiz, 2024; Köse, 2022), have significantly increased the number of scholars looking for academic positions abroad. The deterioration of Turkey's relations with the United States, language barriers within Europe and the unwillingness of other European scholars to work in Brexit Britain have made Britain an increasingly suitable option for Turkish scholars. This evolution has resulted in a diverse and multifaceted Turkish academic community in Britain today, which encompasses various backgrounds and reasons for migration.

The number of academics from Turkey in Britain has significantly increased, tripling over the last decade. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2024a), the number of Turkish academics in British universities increased from 390 in 2014 to 1100 in 2023 (Figure 1). This growth suggests the potential for forming a more cohesive academic diaspora. However, the community remains fragmented and divided across various fault lines, including gender, ethnicity, politics, belief and ideology. These divisions have historically impeded the formation of a unified diasporic identity. Le (2023) notes that systemic inequalities in home and host countries shape and entrench the experiences of academic diasporas on the move. Gender disparities, ethnic tensions and ideological differences further complicate efforts to build a cohesive community. Addressing these issues requires understanding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by different sub-groups, such as supporters versus opponents of the dominant political elite in Turkey, minority and majority ethnic groups such as Turks and Kurds, and secular and sectarian divisions across secularists, atheists, Sunnis and Alevis within the Turkish academic diaspora (Aktas et al., 2018; Öztürk, 2020; Sarigil, 2018).

The academic community from Turkey in Britain is diverse and fragmented, comprising multiple sub-groups with distinct migration motivations and backgrounds (Özbilgin & Yildiz, 2022). One such group is the victim diaspora, consisting of academics who left Turkey due to oppressive conditions, including ethnic, religious and political persecution. These individuals often face significant risks and challenges in their home country, which prompt them to seek refuge and continue their academic careers abroad. Another significant group is the labour

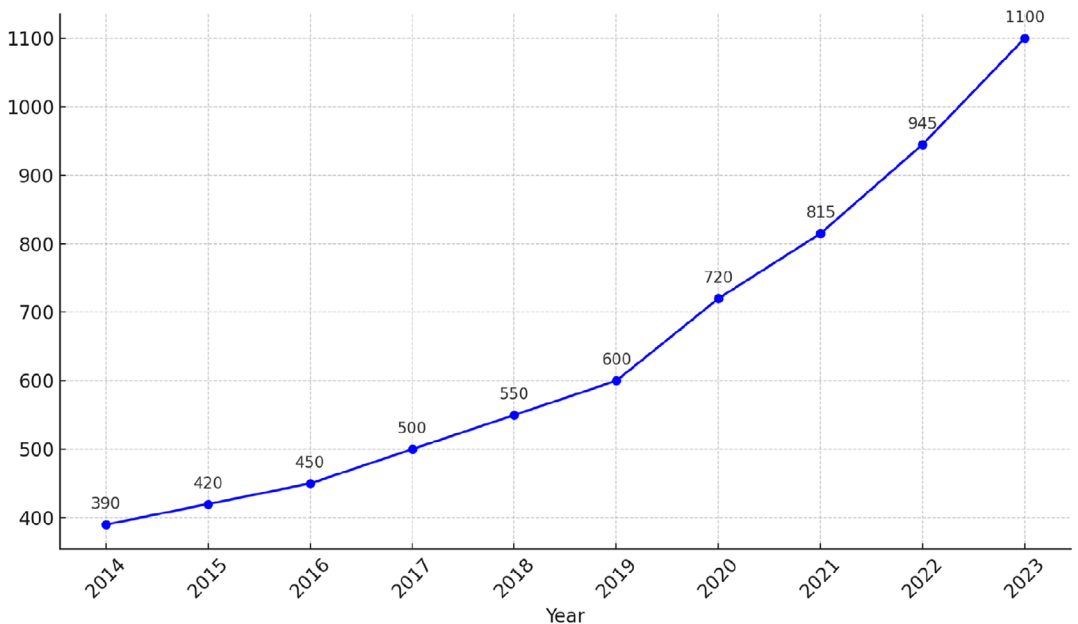


FIGURE 1 Number of scholars from Turkey in the higher education sector in Britain.

diaspora, which includes academics seeking better employment opportunities drawn by the competitive academic environment in Britain. The United Kingdom offers a robust research infrastructure, funding opportunities, and a collaborative academic culture, attracting many Turkish scholars. Additionally, there is a trade diaspora, which consists of academics with business ties who navigate between academia and entrepreneurship. These individuals leverage their academic expertise to engage in innovative business ventures, contributing to the academic and commercial sectors.

Moreover, the imperial diaspora includes Turkish Cypriot academics who maintain historical colonial ties to Britain. This group has long-standing connections to British institutions and society, benefiting from established networks and support systems. The cultural diaspora includes academics with cultural or ethnic connections to Turkey, including Turkish-speaking and Turcophile scholars. These individuals are motivated by a desire to preserve and promote Turkish culture, language and heritage within the British academic context. Lastly, the *gurbetçi* diaspora comprises academics who experience deep nostalgia and longing for Turkey, often with aspirations to return to their homeland (Özbilgin & Yıldız, 2022). These scholars maintain strong emotional and cultural ties to Turkey, viewing their time in Britain as temporary and seeking opportunities to contribute to their home country's academic landscape upon their return.

METHODS

Adopting a process-relational approach (Özbilgin, 2006; Özbilgin & Vassilopoulou, 2018), we investigate the formation of an academic diaspora among scholars from Turkey in Britain through an online study that generated 20 responses. The process-relational approach was selected to capture Turkish academics' interconnected and evolving experiences across micro-level individual choices and changes, meso-level organisational dynamics, and macro-level exposure to national regulatory frames. The study included questions covering various themes, such as the participants' demographics, education, and life and career trajectories with significant milestones. It also explored their migration experiences, settlement in Britain as scholars, career experiences in Britain, and their thoughts, experiences, and feelings regarding the formation of an academic diaspora among scholars from Turkey within the British higher education system.

We reached the participants through Turkish academic associations and our contacts. Our participants work in various academic fields, including Marketing, Management, Economics, International Relations, Applied Psychology, History and Creative Industries. Their academic experience ranges significantly, from 2 years to as much as 30 years, indicating a diverse range of career stages from early-career researchers to seasoned academics. Their residence in Britain spans from 1 year to 5 years, reflecting different stages of adaptation to the British academic environment. They consist of eight male and 12 female scholars. The majority identify as heterosexual, with one participant identifying as gay. The ethnic backgrounds of the participants are varied, encompassing Turkish, Caucasian and Middle Eastern identities, which suggests a rich cultural diversity within the group. Ethnic divisions prevail in Turkey, where there is a republican ideology similar to that of France, which prevents disclosure and discussion of ethnic identity with ease (Karakas & Özbilgin, 2019). Their religious beliefs also vary widely, including Islam, atheism and spiritual agnosticism, which indicate a range of personal and philosophical perspectives. Most of the participants do not have disabilities, with only one individual reporting a disability. Education predicts social class in Turkey, and resultantly all our participants consider themselves as middle class in this study, in line with the overall ethos of the academic community in Turkey (see Table 1 for detailed information). We did not ask the participants for their location to protect their anonymity, which constitutes a limitation of our study.

We downloaded the study responses to prepare the data for analysis. We used the thematic analysis process per Braun and Clarke's (2006) protocol (Table 2 and Figure 2). Each author simultaneously read the data and formed initial codes. Our collaborative efforts facilitated compiling a consensual coding list, which was individually applied and subsequently compared. This iterative process allowed us to refine the coding system collectively.

TABLE 1 Participants' demographics.

Pseudonym	Academic discipline	Years in academic disciplines	Years in Britain	Age	Gender	Sexual orientation	Ethnicity	Religion or belief	Disability status
Ayda	Marketing	10	2	31	Female	Heterosexual	Turkish	Islam	No
Banu	Management	8	2	33	Female	Heterosexual	White	Islam	No
Cenk	Built Environment	16	3	46	Male	Heterosexual	Turkish	Islam	No
Deniz	Economics	10	1	35	Male	Heterosexual	White Caucasian	Islam	No
Esin	International Relations	4	1	51	Female	Heterosexual	Caucasian-Macedonian	Islam	No
Feride	Marketing	15	15	43	Female	Heterosexual	White	Atheist	No
Ganze	Labour Economics and Industrial Relations	10	2	42	Female	Heterosexual	Middle Eastern	Islam	No
Halit	Business Administration	12		36	Male	Gay	Turkish	Islam	No
Kamil	Management	10	1	53	Male	Heterosexual	White, Turkish	Atheist	No
Nail	Business Management	10	1	46	Male	Heterosexual	British Turkish	Islam	No
Oya	Management	7	1	33	Female	Heterosexual	Balkan Turkish	Spiritual agnostic	No
Perihan	Management	9	2	34	Female	Heterosexual	Turkish	Spiritual	No
Rezzan	Business	9	2	37	Female	Heterosexual	Turkish	Atheist	No
Sevda	Applied Psychology	30	5	54	Female	Heterosexual	Eastern European	Islam	No
Tansu	Politics and since	10	3	40	Female	Heterosexual	Other White, Turkish	Atheist	No
Vildan	History	2	9	40	Female	Heterosexual	White	Atheist	No
Veysel	Creative Industries	5	1	37	Male	Heterosexual	White	Atheist	Yes
Zeynep	Business and Management	21	3	48	Female	Heterosexual	Other White, Turkish	Atheist	No
Zelha	Economics	15	3	42	Female	Heterosexual	Turkish	Atheist	No
Zafer	Business	8	1	33	Male	Heterosexual	White	Islam	No

TABLE 2 Codes, subthemes, and themes.

Codes	Subthemes	Themes
'global career goals', 'overseas ambitions', 'international prospects', 'academic mobility'	International career aspirations	Emergence of a fragmented academic diaspora
'seeking new challenges', 'pursuing growth', 'professional advancement', 'career development'	Seeking new opportunities and growth	
'previous academic experience', 'preparation for global academia', 'domestic work background'	Work experience in Turkey	
'gender inequality', 'patriarchal systems', 'gender discrimination', 'racial bias', 'xenophobic attitudes', 'ethnic discrimination', 'cultural prejudice'	Gender equality challenges and new forms of social hierarchies experienced in British academia	
'workload pressures', 'job instability', 'employment precarity', 'job uncertainty', 'occupational stress'	Workload and job insecurity	
'inclusive gatherings', 'intersectional groups', 'supportive communities'	Creating inclusive and intersectional platforms	Future crafting an academic diaspora
'online networking', 'digital engagement', 'social media connections'	Social media and networking	

We employed collective coding (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to enhance our data analysis and better understand the phenomenon under study. We identified two main themes using a process-relational approach (Özbilgin, 2006; Özbilgin & Vassilopoulou, 2018). We analysed the data and identified pre-migration experiences, migration motives and experiences, and post-migration experiences related to forming a diasporic community. We examined the possibilities, enablers and barriers encountered. Our analysis concluded with crafting future scenarios based on improvements suggested by the respondents. This process-relational approach allowed us to capture the dynamic and interconnected nature of the participants' experiences, providing a better articulation of the formation of an academic diaspora among scholars from Turkey in Britain.

FINDINGS

We present the findings in a process-relational thematic sequence, starting with the emergence of a fragmented academic diaspora of scholars from Turkey to join British academia and the factors that led them to form a fragmented diasporic community. The respondents also highlighted ways to transcend such fragmentation in the academic diaspora, which we present as ideas for future crafting based on the respondents' hopes and expectations to form a healthy academic diaspora of scholars from Turkey.

Emergence of a fragmented academic diaspora

Turkey offers a complex setting to pursue an academic. On the one hand, Turkey has an extensive network of universities and an internationally connected academic system (Baykut et al., 2022). On the other hand, Turkey has severe fault lines at work, offers a toxic triangle of diversity (Küskü et al., 2021) with unsupportive legal arrangements for diversity and inclusion, hostile discourses against social divisions, and limited institutional policies for supporting equality, diversity and inclusion (Aktas et al., 2018). Furthermore, the academic employment system in the last 10 years has corroded due to systemic forms of local nepotism (*biat* and *yağcılık*) that have politicised access to academic leadership posts (Özbilgin et al., 2019; Özbilgin & Yalkın, 2019). Combining these two factors,

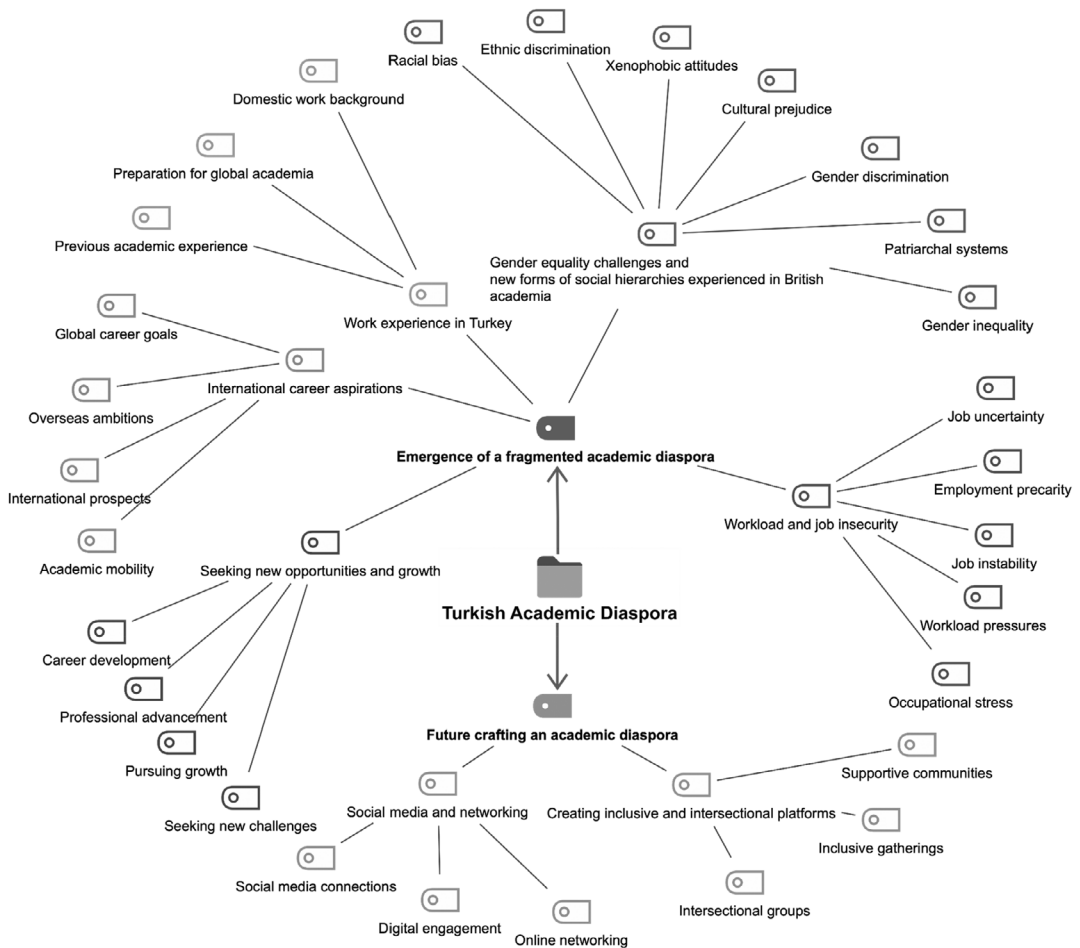


FIGURE 2 Thematic map of the data structure illustrating codes, subthemes and themes.

a competent cohort of academics from diverse backgrounds and an unsupportive environment of diversity has led to mass migration from Turkey to other developed countries. The British higher education sector absorbed much of this migration after Brexit, tightening inflows of European Union migration to academic posts (Şanlıtürk et al., 2024; Tsouroufli, 2023).

Some disciplines of academic work are locally meaningful. For example, academics in medicine, law, architecture, accountancy and other locally regulated disciplines find it challenging to migrate as scholars to other countries. However, social science and STEM subjects offer global career mobility, reflecting the skewed representation of the respondents in our study. Most participants indicated that they believed their education and scholarly work in Turkey would enable them to secure employment in the international academic labour market. One participant, Banu, who has been in Britain for 2 years, shared what inspired her to make the move:

The reason was 'to have an international career' and 'to create a challenge'.

(Banu, female, 33-year-old, management scholar, two years in Britain)

Some participants' work experience in Turkey prepared them for academic careers abroad. They applied to pursue employment opportunities in the United Kingdom, finding that working as an academic in Britain provided a conducive environment for academic success, research opportunities and a healthy work-life balance. Halit, who

experienced mobbing during his academic career in Turkey due to being gay, explained that factors motivated his move to Britain:

Working as an academic in Britain has provided me with a conducive environment for academic success, research opportunities, and a healthy work-life balance. Additionally, the inclusive and accepting culture ensures that I can pursue my career without any concerns related to my sexual orientation. This combination of factors has made my academic journey in Britain a genuinely enriching experience.

(Halit, male, 36-year-old, business administration scholar, four years in Britain)

Turkish experience of neoliberalism has exposed workers to insecurity, indignity, precarity and inequality without an institutional safety mechanism (Özbilgin et al., 2024). While the participants cited some forms of individual competencies that prepared them for the international academic labour market, nearly all of them mentioned the deterioration of work conditions, human rights and workplace equality in Turkey as a primary reason for their departure. Our participant, Ayda, who worked as a Research Assistant in Turkey for 10 years and later pursued her postdoctoral research in Britain, highlighted how academic performance and systems of nepotism and politicisation of academic work clashed, pushing competent scholars to leave (Acikalin, 2024). The deterioration of the academic system in recognising and rewarding academic performance was mentioned:

Only now, the Turkey part was challenging regarding research, funding, and resources. Also, only a few people appreciate my research focus in my department. The most significant barrier was to face more aggressive attitudes when I got published. As my publications increased, they believed that I had a lot of spare time so that more administrative work could be given. I attended one domestic and one international conference each year, using my budget, but after 2018, it was impossible to attend an international conference because of the currency devaluation.

(Ayda, female, 31-year-old, marketing scholar, two years in Britain)

Deniz, one of our participants, articulated the stereotype they held about British academia that shaped their motivation to seek employment opportunities there. They perceived British academia as a refuge from the overly politicised and nepotistic system in Turkey, believing it to be a place where professional merit and research are highly valued (Acikalin, 2024):

People generally focus on their work, and they value the research. These are my main motivations.

(Deniz, female, 35 year-old, economics scholar, one year in Britain)

Some respondents found more clarity in the British higher education system. Cenk, who had experience as a visiting scholar in both the USA and Poland during his doctoral studies, explained the clarity of the roles that they had without demands for political engagement at work:

My academic profile includes teaching, research, supervision, and administrative duties.

(Cenk, male, 46-year-old, built environment scholar, three years in Britain)

Considering that pre-arrival dreams and inspirations for scholars from Turkey were positive regarding Britain, one might expect that they could quickly form a diasporic community based on these shared visions. However, this was not the case due to the pressures of the local academic environment and existing divisions in Turkey. Academics from Turkey in Britain must adapt to a different academic system, create professional connections and adjust to a new sociocultural landscape while struggling with asymmetries of power within

their academic diaspora in Britain. This situation unveils the complex nature of academic migration, manifesting the importance of personal and professional integration in forming cohesive communities in the host country. There are barriers they face in forming an academic diaspora in Britain. Most respondents reported feeling trapped between their struggles to migrate from Turkey and settle in the British academic system. They faced significant hurdles initially, such as adapting to a new educational environment and navigating the academic job market. While some had idealised the British higher education system before departing Turkey, they soon realised it offered new challenges. For example, many academics experienced new forms of racism, xenophobia and other social hierarchies that they did not face in Turkey. These challenges are not isolated incidents but reflect the systemic issues within British academia, where minority scholars often encounter intersectional barriers that compound their experiences of exclusion and marginalisation (Guest et al., 2020; Mahmud & Islam, 2023; Stockfelt, 2018).

Similarly, sexism in British academia had a different flavour, manifesting in various forms and impacting women's career trajectories, professional identities and everyday experiences (Knights & Richards, 2003; Savigny, 2019; Yildiz et al., 2016). Turkey has one of the highest proportions of female academics as full professors worldwide (Healy et al., 2005; Kasap, 2021). However, gender representation in academic leadership is relatively poor in the United Kingdom compared to Turkey (Jack, 2024). According to HESA (2024b), the number of male full-time professors is 39% higher than that of females. Some female scholars from Turkey described facing new challenges within the performative system of British academia, which continues to struggle with gender inequalities and entrenched old boys' clubs. Feride, who moved to the United Kingdom after completing her PhD in North America in 2004, outlined her experiences with these systemic challenges during her post-arrival adjustment period. Her experience is reminiscent of the broader challenges encountered by minority academics in the United Kingdom:

The week I started work, Lehman Brothers crashed, and we were told we'd need to teach more and more students. At the time, I don't think we fully understood what that would mean regarding the increase in our administrative workload or the surge in student numbers. The precarity escalated quickly. I began to rely on the school's prestige and my interactions with colleagues to find meaning in my work amidst the pervasive office politics orchestrated by senior faculty in management positions, which we neither understood nor cared much about. The barriers became apparent in the first year: all the British male staff progressed more quickly through probation, secured publications, and achieved other milestones, while the female staff lagged.

(Feride, female, 43-year-old, marketing scholar, 15 years in Britain)

Fault lines by ethnicity, age, religion, belief and political divisions shaped the academic diaspora. The participating scholars from Turkey brought local mechanisms of exclusion and social division to their British context. Ethnic, religious and political minority and majority dynamics were replicated, which prevented the formation of an academic diaspora among those scholars from Turkey. The most notable examples of these divisions were between Turkish and Kurdish ethnicities, Sunni and Alevi beliefs, secular and religious dispositions, supporters and opponents of the political regime in Turkey, and allegiances to specific regions, cities, schools and universities (Aktas et al., 2018; Baser, 2013; Özbilgin et al., 2024). There is also a cohort effect, that is, fragmentation between the old and the new migrants (pre and post-2015) from Turkey. This is reflected in the fragmentation of Turkish academics in Britain. Unsurprisingly, those who arrived in the United Kingdom in the last decade have less embeddedness in the British academic milieu and lack social and cultural capital for post-migration adaptation than Turkish academics who migrated before 2015. Similarly, Turkish academics in Britain have indicated two divergent routes that shaped their fragmentation. If educated in the United Kingdom, they would be acculturated for migration to the UK education market. If they migrated after a period of work in Turkey, they reported having internationally competitive academic

performance outputs and highly developed English language skills in Turkey before migration. Most of these aspects present silent divisions, which have no outlet for peaceful expression in Turkey. For example, a scholar mentioning their ethnic, religious or political difference to the dominant group could find their academic post at risk.

Future crafting an academic diaspora

The persistence of divisions among Turkish scholars prevented them from forming a cohesive diasporic community, resulting in a fragmented diaspora. However, critical thought and oppositional politics are not common cultural constructs among scholars from Turkey (Özbilgin & Erbil, 2021, 2024). Our participants' responses lean towards an appreciation of the British context, failing to honestly critique its hierarchies of power and patterns of discrimination (Kamasak et al., 2019). The lack of a culture of adversarial relations in Turkey makes it difficult for Turkish scholars to engage with their diaspora formation critically. Like most others, one of our participants, Zafer, remained silent about these deep sources of fragmentation in Turkey but indirectly mentioned the fragmentation of the academic diaspora for Turkish scholars, alluding to the difficulties of overcoming these fragmentations and tensions.

It is sometimes challenging because they [the Turkish diaspora] sometimes judge you and try to force you to do something you do not want. They should be less judgmental and more helpful to each other. [...] A Turkish academic diaspora without bias and hate could be good. They can work on helping each other and on human rights issues concerning the citizens of Turkey.

(Zafer, male, 33-year-old, business scholar, one year in Britain)

The participating scholars from Turkey expressed a strong desire for an academic diaspora built on community and support networks. Our study sought to understand how diaspora members could transcend barriers to fragmentation. The scholars suggested organising meetups, forming societies and creating inclusive and intersectional platforms that could encourage a healthy academic diaspora. Vildan, who transitioned from a business career in Turkey to postgraduate education in the United Kingdom and subsequently became an academic there, explained that physical and online gatherings could facilitate exchanges and provide a sense of belonging among different cohort scholars from Turkey. These interactions, she noted, would help bridge gaps, share experiences and build a cohesive and supportive academic community:

Organising regular gatherings, both in-person and virtual, would be fantastic! For newcomers, such meetups would offer an excellent opportunity to integrate quickly, gain insights from more experienced members, and feel supported as they experience their new environment.

(Vildan, female, 40-year-old, history scholar, nine years in Britain)

Some respondents suggested forming societies and networks as a way forward to form academic diasporas. The participating scholars from Turkey remain hopeful about how they may form an academic diaspora that transcends social fault lines. For example, Nail suggested:

Establishing a society would be helpful. It would provide a structured way to connect, share resources, and support each other, promoting a stronger sense of community among Turkish academics in the UK.

(Nail, male, 46-year-old, management, management scholar, one year in Britain)

Over five associations and academic networks were established by academics from Turkey. However, these groups are divided along social fault lines, leading to minimal interaction across these communities. Intragenerational differences between these academic networks reveal how they entrench divisions by social class, ethnicity, belief and ideology. A lack of coordination and communication between these networks prevents the mobilisation of synergy in social diversity. Özbilgin and Yildiz (2022) proposed that forming a federation of these associations could help alleviate tensions, bridge divides, and therefore enhance the cohesion and effectiveness of the academic diaspora from Turkey by offering a unified platform for collaboration, resource sharing and mutual support, which would ultimately strengthen a more integrated and resilient academic community.

The other participants also suggested using social media, get-together events, networking sessions and the Turkish embassy and associated educational attachés in London to promote a sense of belonging and inclusion among academics. However, it is essential to acknowledge that these institution-building practices have yet to prove effective in transcending the fault lines that fragment academia from Turkey both in the country and abroad. Similar to the Chinese government's expectations for Chinese academics to return after a period of work abroad (Xu, 2022), the Turkish government also pursues relatively ineffective policies for the repatriation of its academic community, which do not effectively strengthen the ties that scholars from Turkey develop while working in the United Kingdom.

CONCLUSIONS

Currently, 12,000 Turkish academics have migrated to English-, French-, and German-speaking countries (Akcigit et al., 2023). Of these, 1100 are working in the UK higher education sector. The formation of a fragmented academic diaspora from Turkey in the UK higher education is evident but remains in its developmental stages due to the divided nature of this community. While many academics from Turkey have successfully integrated into the British academic system, they face challenges in navigating and weaving together, their fragmented diaspora. On reflection, we note that most academic diasporas are somehow fragmented (Le, 2023; Moshtari & Ghorbani, 2025). What sets the Turkish academic diaspora in the United Kingdom apart is the deep fragmentation that Turkish academics experienced across many social and political fault lines both in Turkey and in the United Kingdom, making it challenging for them to transcend their fragmented identities and identity politics to form a nation-based diaspora. As İçduygu (2014) highlights, Turkey's evolving immigration patterns have significantly influenced the formation and dynamics of its diaspora, underscoring the complexities of building cohesive communities abroad. This highlights how migration decisions are shaped by opportunities as well as the complex dynamics of identity and belonging (Arifa et al., 2021). Therefore, the Turkish academic diaspora is ideal for developing the theorisation of fragmented diasporas. This paper offers a theoretical extension by defining a fragmented academic diaspora as a migrant academic community that experiences challenges to transcend its identity divisions emanating from the country of origin and the receiving country. Theorising the emergence of a fragmented academic diaspora, the paper explores the boundary conditions and questions the assumption that fragmentation and divisiveness weaken diasporas. Roulet (2020) suggests that remaining in a divisive setting could have intended positive consequences, enriching groups and organisations by exposing them to healthy scrutiny across divisions and fragmentations. In this way, we challenge the positive portrayals of diasporas as coherent, monolithic and homogenous entities (Tölölyan, 2018), illuminating the heterogeneity and fragmentation within an academic diaspora and proposing strategies for building synergies in fragmentation that recognise the value of divisiveness.

Our findings suggest that a strong foundation of highly motivated and qualified individuals can solidify their presence and influence as a diasporic community, despite their fragmentation, within the British academic landscape. This paper makes three contributions to the extant theorisation of the formation of an academic diaspora. First, we define and operationalise fragmented academic diasporas, exploring academic migration from Turkey to Britain and revealing scholars' surprising experiences and observations as they move between increasingly

marketised academic environments with differing social fault lines. We demonstrate what drives migration, influences settlement experiences and shapes the formation of a fragmented academic diaspora. Second, we examine the formation of a fragmented academic diaspora among scholars from a country where the failure of social cohesion, human rights and solidarity drives academic migration and where socio-political divisions undermine merit-based systems (Kamasak & Özbilgin, 2021; Özbilgin et al., 2019). Yet, even in such a divisive context, we show the energy in synchronicity (Özbilgin, 2024) and synergy in an acausal, fragmented and divisive sense of togetherness. Third, we offer ideas for crafting sustainable and healthy academic diasporas based on the hopes and expectations of the participants to transcend current divisions and hostilities across political, religious, ethnic and sectarian lines.

The unregulated neoliberalism in Turkey further complicates the migration process and the formation of an academic diaspora of scholars from Turkey in Britain. Neoliberalism permeates all social and political aspects, deteriorating human rights, civil liberties and workplace democracy in Turkey (Erbil & Özbilgin, 2023). This pervasive influence creates additional difficulty for academics from Turkey by exacerbating social fault lines and uneven power relations, undermining solidarity and collective support (Doğan, 2023), which are crucial for forming a healthy diaspora. Scholars from Turkey consequently face significant asymmetrical challenges depending on their particular demographics during migration and in adapting to new social and professional environments (Özbilgin & Yildiz, 2022). They struggle with integrating into a new academic system, enduring its performative and competitive pressures, and contending with the divisive effects of neoliberal policies that erode communal bonds. The entrenched nature of neoliberal and marketised higher education systems in Turkey and Britain facilitates academic migration. Still, it hinders the development of solidaristic bonds resulting in fragmented diasporic communities. The lack of solidarity among scholars from Turkey makes these scholars more vulnerable to the intersectional barriers and exclusionary practices embedded within British academia (Mahmud & Islam, 2023; Stockfelt, 2018). Our participants reported that being scholars from Turkey in Britain puts them in an ill-fitting straightjacket, and they fail to recognise the intra-group struggles they face within this fragmented academic diaspora. The fragmented nature of the academic community from Turkey impedes the formation of a cohesive academic diaspora and forces them to focus on their struggles, often in isolation. Our participants suggested pathways through which the Turkish academic diaspora in Britain can valorise its divisions and diversity as its central strength.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study represents a preliminary step towards understanding the formation of an academic diaspora. More comprehensive ethnographic and participatory studies are needed to delve deeper into the organisation of these diasporas and identify strategies for overcoming challenges to their formation. Future research should also examine how diasporic communities negotiate and cultivate a shared identity, focusing on fragmented groups such as academics from Turkey. Investigating the role of digital platforms, transnational networks and policy interventions could also prove invaluable in encouraging a more cohesive and supportive academic diaspora. Finally, future research could examine practices to transcend fragmentation and support diaspora formation.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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