RECONSTRUCTED HETERONORMATIVE TENDENCIES ON REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

ULUSÖTESİ GÖÇTE KADINLARIN TEMSİLİNE İLİŞKİN YENİDEN İNŞA EDİLEN HETERONORMATİF EĞİLİMLER

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to offer a critical and analytical examination of transnational migration data, encompassing empirical studies that underscore the "emancipation" and "empowerment" of women in the economic, social, and political dimensions of transnational migration while elucidating how these elements reinforce binary gender conceptualizations. The article will follow this structure: Firstly, an investigation into transnational migration and its ramifications on the 'social transformation' of women's lives will be conducted. Secondly, an exploration into the portrayal of the economic status of immigrant and displaced women as "empowered" in the existing research and discourse, particularly through enhancements in social status. Thirdly, an examination of political empowerment within the context of evolving marital dynamics will be undertaken, delving deeper into the discourse surrounding gender. This article will elucidate how numerous scholars may perpetuate gender binaries by not engaging in a comprehensive critical analysis of gender while contributing to the ongoing discourse concerning women immigrants and refugees.

ÖZ

Bu makalenin amacı, uluslararası göçün ekonomik, sosyal ve siyasi boyutlarına dair kadınların "özgürleşme" ve "güçlenme" süreçlerini eleştirel ve analitik bir bakış açısıyla incelemektir. Bu bağlamda, uluslararası göç verilerine dayalı olarak gerçekleştirilen amprik çalışmaları gözden geçirerek, bu süreçlerin toplumsal cinsiyet kavramlarına nasıl etki ettiğini açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Makale aşağıdaki yapıyı takip edecektir: İlk olarak, uluslararası göçün kadınların yaşamları üzerindeki "toplumsal dönüşümü" üzerine bir araştırma sunacaktır. Ardından, özellikle sosyal statüdeki gelişmeler yoluyla göçmen ve yerinden edilmiş kadınların ekonomik durumunun nasıl "güçlendirildiğini" gösteren mevcut araştırmalara ve tartışmalara odaklanacaktır. Son olarak, değişen evlilik dinamikleri bağlamında siyasi güçlenmeyi inceleyecek ve toplumsal cinsiyet üzerine yapılan tartışmaları derinlemesine ele alacaktır. Bu makale, birçok bilim insanının, kadın göçmenler ve mültecilerle ilgili süregelen tartışmalara katkıda bulunurken, toplumsal cinsiyetin kapsamlı bir eleştirel analizini yapmadan nasıl toplumsal cinsiyet ikiliğini pekiştirdiğini açıklayacaktır.

Introduction

Within the intricate fabric of human migration, women's narratives have often dwelled in the shadows, their experiences marginalized or obscured. While feminist scholars of the 1970s and 1980s initiated studies on women's migration patterns (Pessar and Mahler, 2003), it wasn't until the late 1980s that a transformative shift took place—an examination of women's transnational migrations. This shift was long overdue, considering that women, though frequently unacknowledged, constitute the majority of migrants. This paradigm shift has paved the way for a growing body of theoretical works dissecting women's contributions to labor and the multifaceted nature of their experiences, encompassing aspects of gender, ethnicity, class, and education (Salih, 2003, p. 26; Massey et al., 2006).

As asserted by Pedraza (1991, p. 304), recognizing the prevalence of women in the world of migration is not merely important; it is essential to illuminate the true nature of this complex reality. Nevertheless, delving into this discourse reveals that the study has not consistently applied a critical lens to examine women's positions within the realm of transnational migration, particularly concerning the construction of gender roles within a binary framework.

This exploration embarks on a critical journey through a substantial body of literature, with a particular focus on migrants who maintain intricate ties with family, households, and relatives both in their home countries and host countries. Ethnographers honing in on these relationships have unveiled a compelling narrative: women migrants, as an integral part of the labor force, often experience a surge in personal autonomy and independence, thereby moving closer to achieving gender parity, while their male counterparts falter (Mahler and Pessar, 2006, p. 34). In numerous instances, women, as migrants in refugee camps, inadvertently become standard-bearers of gendered assumptions, discourses, and narratives. This unintended role showcases their journey as more nuanced and complex than the simplistic categorizations often found in mainstream discourse (Essed et al., 2004, p. 3).

The primary objective of this work is clear: to conduct a critical and analytical examination of empirical studies that emphasize the empowerment and emancipation of women in the context of transnational migration. Simultaneously, it aims to shed light on how these studies, whether intentionally or unintentionally, contribute to the redefinition of gender roles. Traditionally, labor migrants are associated with economic aspects, while refugees are framed through political lenses (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002, p. 3). However, this exploration goes beyond conventional boundaries. Instead of perpetuating reductionist and stereotypical portrayals, I take a holistic approach to examining women migrants and refugees, exploring their empowerment within the social, political, and economic dimensions. Through this comprehensive approach, I bring to the forefront a narrative that has often been overshadowed: that of migrant and refugee women portrayed through reductionist, romanticized, gendered, and essentialized perspectives.

This article unfolds in three critical acts. Firstly, it questions the essence of transnational migration and its profound effects on the social transformation of women's lives, highlighting the inherently gendered nature of this transformation. Secondly, it scrutinizes the prevailing discourse surrounding the economic empowerment of migrants and displaced women, placing their (re)definition within a heteronormative framework under the spotlight. I delve into how women achieve parity with men within migrant households and how displaced (refugee) women frequently assume the role of family leaders in households devoid of a male presence. Finally, the third act unfolds as I navigate the realm of political empowerment within the ever-evolving institution of marriage, paying special attention to the gendered discourses that influence the experiences of migrant and refugee women. In essence, this exploration contends that despite noble intentions, many scholars have fallen short of conducting a critical analysis of gender dynamics in their efforts to contribute to the discourse on women migrants and refugees, inadvertently perpetuating simplistic gender binaries.

Women or Gender?

In the realm of feminist studies, the transition from a singular focus on women to considering the broader concept of gender has a long history. While these two terms are often related and used interchangeably, they have sparked heated discussions, particularly concerning the distinction between sex and gender (Kaşka, 2020, p. 70).

The concept of gender found its initial foothold in feminist literature through the pioneering work of British sociologist Oakley in her book *Sex, Gender, and Society* (1972). Oakley argued that gender should not be seen as the sole determinant of women's oppression (Ecevit, 2021, p. 9). Additionally, Scott (2007) offers a critique and rejection of the notion of biological determinism as it pertains to the concept of sex, instead introducing the term gender as an alternative framework. However, even today, gender is often closely associated with women and used interchangeably. As Evecen and Kendir-Gök emphasized that

> The terms sex and gender refer to different concepts. Sex primarily relies on biological criteria, with a focus on anatomical indicators, to determine whether someone is a woman or a man at birth. Conversely, while the concept of gender is often used interchangeably with that of woman, it does not exclusively represent women. Instead, gender encompasses a complex web of relationships rather than a singular configuration (2022, p. 7-8).

Sex primarily relies on biological criteria, whereas gender directs attention to a network of relationships based on performances and shaped by interactions between the body and society. However, the concept of gender is contentious because it carries different meanings in various feminist contexts and is often used interchangeably with women (Özkazanç, 2010, p. 1-2).

Drawing from the influential theories of Judith Butler, gender is perceived as a series of reiterated actions that gradually solidify within a rigid regulatory framework, thereby giving rise to the illusion of a natural essence. A political genealogy of gender ontologies endeavors to deconstruct the ostensibly substantive nature of gender and elucidate these actions within frameworks governed by multifarious forces that shape the social manifestation of gender (1999, p. 43-44). This portrayal underscores the performative character of gender and its construction within intricate social dimensions.

Traditional immigration theory has often been gender-blind or openly sexist (Carling, 2005, p. 3). However, as interests in migration theories grew, gender considerations gained importance, leading to a dual understanding that considers both women and men. This shift resulted in a focus on the feminization of migration, leading to a significant body of literature on gender roles. Academics from various disciplines have revealed how communities allocate responsibilities to individuals based on gender in various contexts, including the economy, politics, and culture (Donato et al., 2006, p. 4-5). These studies demonstrate that migration is increasingly viewed as a gendered phenomenon in academic research (ibid, p. 6).

Delving deeper into studies centered on women, diverse aspects related to womanhood and femininity have been exhaustively explored across a wide spectrum of social, economic, and political contexts. In the subsequent stages of this study, a meticulous analysis will be conducted to unearth and scrutinize the heteronormative utilization of the concept of women. This critical examination will unveil transformative shifts that have transpired within academic and media discourses, serving as compelling exemplars to buttress the central argument posited in this study. By further expanding on the historical context, the nuances of gender, and the significance of the feminization of migration, this extended discussion provides a more comprehensive exploration of the complex landscape of feminist and migration studies.

Social Transformation

In the scholarly discourse, Castles (2016) delves into the profound sociocultural alterations brought about by migration. He regards migration as a dynamic phenomenon that not only exerts influence on social transformation but is also significantly influenced by it. Consequently, his examination underscores the interdependence between migration and the process of societal transformation. Questioning the relationship between migration and social change by wondering whether migration changes society, and if so, what the nature of change is, Van Hear goes one step further and applies the following statements:

> In attempting to build a conceptual apparatus for understanding migration and social transformation, the articles address and try to reconcile a number of conceptual binaries that recur in Migration Studies and in social science more widely. The wider social science challenges include the relations between the macro and the micro levels; between large and small scale; between the general and the particular; and between the individual and the mass. They include relations between time and space, between dynamics or processes and outcomes, and between structure and agency.

> Mediating agents and transitions need also to be accounted for, as do intersections among class, gender, generation, ethnicity and other social cleavages (2010, p. 1532).

The profound connection between social transformation and women as gendered entities cannot be understated. Examined through a Butlerian lens, this relationship highlights the expansive and contextual nature of performance-based relationships within the framework of heteronormativity.

Many developing countries have witnessed a substantial increase in female-headed households (Shin, 2014, p. 41). Women frequently assume the roles of household providers and take on leadership positions within their families (Blau, Kahn, and Waldfogel, 2000). The emerging theory of migration economics situates the household at its core, assuming common interests among household members (Nawyn, 2010, p. 752-753). However, the complexity of migration experiences extends far beyond the confines of the household. Gender, often reduced to women's experiences, remains intricately linked to the interdependent relationship between migration and social change. Migration and social change are intimately connected, with migration often intensifying during periods of transformation. For instance, today's migration rates have reached unprecedented levels due to the rapid pace of globalization (Castles, 2010, p. 22). Neoliberal policies, economic development, political upheavals, violence, and war have contributed to profound social and cultural changes (Essed et al., 2004, p. 4). Additionally, financial globalization and shifts in military and political power have propelled global social transformation (Castles, 2010, p. 30).

A meticulous examination of gendered assumptions within the context of social transformation yields valuable insights for this paper. Rather than focusing solely on numerous processes, this paper scrutinizes the nature of changes in depth, elucidating the gendered ramifications of social transformation. Some scholars tend to portray women migrants as more inclined to bolster "personal and household strategies aligned with long-term or permanent resettlement abroad," implying an improved social status post-migration in comparison to male migrants (Pessar and Mahler, 2003, p. 826-827). Others underscore the bargaining power and adaptability of women refugees in times of crisis, emphasizing their capacity to adjust to new roles and responsibilities (Essed et al., 2004, p. 8).

The integration of women migrants into the labor market alongside their migration journey can be interpreted as empowering, as it challenges traditional gender roles. Nonetheless, it is imperative to critically assess the nature of these changes within the broader context of social transformation, as social transformation itself inherently carries gendered dimensions. Lutz (2010) posits that gendered aspects of migration are deeply intertwined with the labor market. The roles assigned to women and men are deeply embedded in the social structures of both their home and host countries long before migration takes place. This understanding supports the notion that patriarchal and heteronormative structures persist even after (forced) migration. A comprehensive examination of autonomy is warranted to unravel how migrant women navigate their objectives independently, negotiating familial and social relationships (George, 2005, p. 40).

It is essential to acknowledge that the concept of women cannot be analyzed as a homogenous and unified category without accounting for the heterogeneity stemming from factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, and sexuality. For instance, Filipino women's migration experiences, initially pigeonholed into nanny roles, have evolved over time in response to shifting social perceptions. Transnational family formation is explored as a strategy to address racial disparities (Matthei and Smith, 1998, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997). In the case of Cuban women, migration to the labor market is primarily driven by family needs rather than personal self-actualization (Ferree, 1979). Gender lenses are not consistently employed to scrutinize perceptions, attitudes, and analyses of gendered bodies in the context of the transformation process.

The expressions employed by Afghan women fleeing war and violence in their homeland, as they conceptualize Turkey, provide insights into their gendered experiences. Explaining that being a woman in their country consists of staying at home, Emiri said,

> Women in our country take care of the children and cook. They have no other right. In Turkey, women are free, their rights are better. It is forbidden for women to go to school, go out, or work in factories. I have never seen it like this in Turkey (Çelik, 2013).

In another example, stating that there were constant incidents in their country, Kazimi said,

> Our country was in turmoil and we were derelict. That's why we came to Turkey. My children are educated here. Women in Afghanistan do not have as many rights as they do in Turkey. But we see that women live in very good conditions here (Çelik, 2013).

While these statements offer valuable glimpses into the experiences of migrant women, they lack an in-depth analysis of gender relations. While they highlight the existence of gender equality in Turkey relative to their home country, they do not imply the superiority of one country over the other. Instead, these statements primarily underscore the binary conceptualization of gender relations, particularly concerning household chores, caregiving responsibilities, and childcare.

As noted in the report of UN Women, Kamal expressed her ideas by using these words in order to show how social network circulates among immigrants:

> The [Lebanese] women started teaching me their traditional needle work and I was genuinely happy to share with them all the traditional practices that I had learned from my mother and grandmother in loom work (14 September 2016a).

The UN Women's report sheds light on how gendered work is reflected in women's experiences on the loom, portraying it as a tool for women's empowerment without subjecting it to critical examination. Nevertheless, the inherently sexist nature of this work constrains women from transcending traditional gender roles, perpetuating binary perceptions of gender. Hence, it is imperative to question whether it enables women to challenge the roles ascribed to gendered bodies and to scrutinize who performs which tasks and why. Traditional practices exhibit adaptability even in the context of women's migration journeys.

Economic Empowerment and Its Relation to Social Empowerment

Within the rich and multifaceted realm of migration studies, researchers engaged in ethnographic inquiries consistently position the notion of gender at the forefront of their investigations. Their primary objective is to conduct a rigorous examination and understanding of various critical aspects, with a particular emphasis on the intricate and often nuanced landscape of gender roles. This pursuit of knowledge involves a meticulous comparative analysis that delves deep into the lived experiences of both men and women within the intricate web of households, thereby shedding light on the intricate dynamics at play (Yükseker 2003, Keough 2008, Kaşka 2009).

The analytical framework of gender, central to these investigations, serves as a powerful tool for deciphering a myriad of interconnected elements. These elements include the construction and perpetuation of the division between full-time and part-time work, the persistent and perplexing gender wage gap, the intricate labyrinth of labor market segregation, the often convoluted hierarchies within workplaces, and the profound influence of paid labor on the formation and evolution of individual and collective identities (Brah, 1996, p. 128).

As these dedicated scholars diligently unravel the complex web of gender dynamics, they boldly challenge not only the conventional and largely heteronormative constructs but also the deeply ingrained "racialized/ethnicized constructions" that are inherently intertwined with gender dynamics (ibid, p. 128). This holistic approach acknowledges the profound interplay between gender and a wide range of social and cultural factors that shape the experiences of migrants. However, it's imperative to recognize that this holistic perspective can inadvertently perpetuate a binary understanding of gender that tends to pit heterosexual men against women.

It is crucial to clarify that this does not negate the importance of focusing on the experiences of women migrants within the context of households; rather, it underscores the paramount importance of subjecting heteropatriarchal structures to critical examination. This critical perspective is vital to avoid the inadvertent reinforcement of naturalized, normalized, essentialized, and gendered narratives that have historically permeated academic discourse. For instance, the insightful work of Pessar (1984) stands as a testament to the necessity of scrutinizing and deconstructing these narratives. In her thorough analysis of Dominican immigrant women living in the USA, Pessar delves deep into the concept of social advancement by exploring the intricate connections between the realm of the household and the expansive domain of the workplace. In doing so, she astutely observes:

> Work heightens women's self-esteem as wives and mothers, affords them an income to actualize these roles more fully, and provides them with heightened leverage to participate as equals to men in household decision-making (ibid, p. 1192).

While Pessar's perspective offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge that it may inadvertently romanticize or ambiguously empower women by framing employment primarily as a means to reinforce their roles as mothers and wives. This perspective accentuates a positive correlation between social and economic empowerment, ultimately reiterating women's positioning within a heteronormative framework. This idealization of traditional gender roles finds resonance in the experiences of Syrian refugee women in Turkey, where traditional handcrafts have come to symbolize and reshape women's roles within gendered norms (Radikal, 2015). These narratives underscore the complex interplay between empowerment and the perpetuation of established gender norms.

Similarly, the poignant story of Sayohat offers a glimpse into how empowerment projects can unintentionally perpetuate traditional gender roles. Sayohat, a woman who acquired the skills of sewing and knitting from her mother, found herself gaining self-reliance through these skills when her husband left her. Her journey illustrates the intricate ways in which empowerment initiatives can inadvertently reinforce traditional gender roles. While her newfound self-sufficiency is undeniably empowering, it also highlights the broader challenge of navigating a landscape that often presents women as vulnerable and in need of rescue when they are left alone, rather than as inherently empowered individuals.

Sayohat's journey is not unique. She is part of a larger collective, where she shares her experiences with ten other women who, like herself, have been left by their husbands. Together, they have found a sense of comfort and security in their newfound economic independence. As she reflects:

> In our group, there are 10 other women who have been left by their husbands, like myself, she shares. We are comfortable with what we earn. Today, not only do we provide for our families, but we also invest in our businesses and train other women. (UN Women, 14 September 2016b).

The tension between empowerment and idealization raises significant questions about the conceptualization of migrant and refugee women within the broader discourse. It often simplifies their experiences, particularly when examined within the confines of traditional, masculinized roles, whether they reside in male-headed households or those without male heads. In the former scenario, women's empowerment is sometimes overly simplified as merely enhancing their status within the household, which inadvertently overlooks the profound complexities of their agency. In the latter case, gender-focused programs designed to empower Syrian women refugees by equipping them with practical skills may inadvertently undermine their agency by reinforcing a narrow connection between the individual and the community.

However, it is imperative to acknowledge that this issue transcends mere class considerations. While class certainly plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of migrants, it is equally crucial to recognize how analyses of relatively privileged migrant women often overlook the intricate web of gender dynamics. For instance, professional women have been stereotypically portrayed in some studies (Adhikari, 2013; George, 2005), often framed through a gendered lens, particularly concerning their parenting responsibilities. These studies tend to emphasize the changes in gender roles within households as a result of women's professional pursuits. However, it is essential to highlight that even in care-related professional occupations, such as nursing, undertaken by Nepali women in the UK (Adhikari, 2013) and Indian women in the United States (George, 2005), gendered frameworks have persisted. These frameworks often define these empowered women's roles within the context of gendered stereotypes, rather than subjecting them to critical examination.

For instance, empowered Nepali women's positions within the household are frequently represented as a transformation compared to men, who are sometimes depicted as dependent and frustrated husbands (Adhikari, 2013, p. 174). Yet, the essentialized roles of women as caregivers within the analysis of their care-related professional occupations often go unquestioned, thereby categorizing them as providers as part of their transformative journey. Similarly, George (2005, p. 68-69) underscores that Indian nurses in the USA, while gaining power and control, brought about changes within households where men became secondary providers, or, as George notes, "dependent men have trouble doing work that labels them as women" (ibid, p. 115).

These studies further illuminate how male migrants are often racialized through gendered markers, effectively feminizing their identities in the process. Brah (1996, p. 157) astutely highlights the phenomenon of gendered racialization, emphasizing that women's characteristics can racialize men in subordinate contexts. It is, therefore, incumbent upon scholars and researchers to recognize that, alongside men, women migrants have also been

subject to racialization in discourses that mirror gendered and sexualized attributes. In this multifaceted framework, studies such as those conducted by George (2005) and Adhikari (2013) inadvertently fall short in critically examining the nature of the changes that are redefined through binary gender codes. By doing so, they unwittingly reinforce traditional roles, whether it is wives and husbands or the constructs of femininity and masculinity, all within the confines of racialized constructs.

This phenomenon can, in part, be attributed to a somewhat misleading use of gender. Gender, often employed as a means to advocate for women's development and their pursuit of equality vis-à-vis heterosexual men, even within feminist interventions, can at times unwittingly oversimplify complex issues. It can inadvertently uphold a framework that fails to address the intricate intersections of gender, race, and class within the context of migration.

In conclusion, the intricate interplay between economic empowerment and social empowerment in the context of migration studies is a multifaceted and often challenging terrain. It necessitates a holistic examination that transcends binary gender constructs, racialized markers, and class considerations. Researchers and scholars must continually grapple with the complexity of migrant experiences and strive to avoid reinforcing narrow, heteronormative narratives. In doing so, they can contribute to a richer, more nuanced understanding of the dynamic relationships between gender, empowerment, and migration.

Political Empowerment and Its Relation to Social Empowerment

In the realm of migration studies, the intersection of economic empowerment and social empowerment for women in transnational spaces often raises complex questions. One pressing issue that emerges is the problematic binary categorization of gender. This binary categorization becomes strikingly evident when delving into the world of marital decisions. It highlights a profound shift from the once-idealized notion of marriage to a more politicized construct within the diaspora and camp environments. This exploration encompasses the perspectives of both migrant and refugee women, revealing a conspicuous gap in comprehensive analyses addressing the politicized dimension of marriage within existing discourses. This void underscores the pressing need for a critical evaluation of how marriage is (re)constructed within the context of heteronormative norms and forms.

Conversely, the phenomenon of bride migration often garners attention as a strategic avenue for political empowerment. It offers women a new identity and the opportunity to pursue their aspirations, including improved prospects abroad. Bride migrants are frequently identified as a privileged group of women who gain citizenship through transnational marriage. This pathway holds the potential for future benefits, particularly for their offspring (Hsia, 2009, p. 41). As illustrated by Rosario's (2005) insightful study of Filipina bridal migrants, these women adeptly negotiate the intricacies of their newfound dual identities:

> Filipina bridal migrants navigate their new- found dual identities as Filipina bride and American resident as a strategy to straddle two worlds, both of which they legitimately claim as their home (ibid, p. 256).

 In this context, one could argue that heterosexual women, as bridal migrants, adroitly leverage opportunities presented by transnational migration to navigate between two worlds. However, due to their centralization in host countries, these women often find themselves simultaneously positioned as "American residents" and "Filipina brides" or "foreign brides." This dual identity, paradoxically, exposes them to racialized stigmatization. It's essential to acknowledge that the concept of "home" is dynamic, characterized by a series of activities involving imagination, creation, transformation, loss, and relocation (Brah, 1996, p. 183). Consequently, it cannot be viewed as a static entity. Within this framework, bridal migrants experience a form of political empowerment facilitated by dual identities that enable mobility through marriage. Nevertheless, this empowerment remains nuanced and multifaceted, prompting a reevaluation of the concepts of home and community, particularly from a political perspective.

Political empowerment is inherently linked to social empowerment, particularly in terms of conferring social status upon migrant women through participation in international, transnational, and cross-border forms of marriage (Yeoh et al., 2013, p. 140). However, the social positioning of women within the context of marriage poses complexities. Marriage, when taken for granted, often reinforces traditional gender norms, and when

linked to White/American identities and ideals of superiority, becomes racialized. For example, Rosario's examination of Filipina bridal migrants (2005, p. 256) reveals that marriages to individuals from certain backgrounds are considered preferable to local unions, regardless of the social class of the spouse.

In doing so, Rosario perpetuates gendered assumptions within the discourse. While recognizing shifts in the nature of marriage, these discussions often fall short in critically engaging with the fetishized, racialized, and politicized dimensions of the institution. Moreover, the institution of marriage itself remains largely unquestioned and unexamined, leading to its prevailing conceptualization as a natural and normative societal construct. In a simplified analysis, marriage is presented as a means for women to pursue their aspirations, often within the confines of men's racialized perceptions. Brah (1996, p. 184) aptly points out the inherent ambiguity regarding who truly experiences empowerment and who may find themselves disempowered within this framework.

Within the context of refugee camps, the subject of marriage undergoes a transformation from a personal matter to a political one. To illustrate this transformation, one can examine a recent episode involving the victimization and stigmatization of Syrian women within a particular region. This episode also underscores how Syrian refugee women often lack agency and become victims, thereby highlighting the choices they make - such as marrying strangers - as a means of gaining political emancipation from their traumatized homes. In this context, Syrian women were problematized as civil marriages escalated. Notably, the voices of Syrian women remained conspicuously absent, even within feminist discourses and scholarly writings. These voices were primarily heard through media reports detailing the lived experiences of marginalized women. For instance, a newspaper named Sabah (2011) reported that both Turkish and Kurdish men commonly referred to the "emancipation" of Syrian women, suggesting a newfound freedom for these women.

This situation aligns with Brah's assertion (1996, p. 197) that the desire to establish a settled life is not synonymous with a sense of homeland. Interestingly, these reports scarcely acknowledged the efforts of Turkish or Kurdish feminists working to empower women within a patriarchal society. Instead, some organizations drew attention to the issue of marriage in numerous regions, particularly where high numbers of such marriages occurred. However, rather than providing a critical analysis of the heteropatriarchal nature of marriage and its conceptualization as a struggle within forced migration, these discussions often problematized masculinity, depicting men as beneficiaries of Syrian women seeking emancipation (Mazlumder, 2014, p. 31-32). This narrative seems to be articulated within romanticized and gendered discourses that emphasize how Syrian women seek avenues for emancipation or rescue. When considering the full spectrum of possibilities, this narrative can be interpreted as a quest for power, distinct from the notion of empowerment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the evolving discourse surrounding gender in transnational migration studies. While acknowledging the historical gender blindness that persisted in migration research until the 1980s, it is evident that the inclusion of gender has introduced its own set of complexities. The incorporation of gender has, at times, inadvertently reinforced hetero-patriarchal tendencies within scholarly writings and discussions. In hindsight, it may have been more appropriate to adopt a binary approach using "sex" in the analysis of men versus women, rather than simplistically relying on the concept of "gender." This critique is grounded in the recognition that the introduction of gender into migration studies has occasionally led to misinterpretations, as exemplified by the literature critically examined in this paper. This critique aligns with the acknowledgment that "much of the discussion on transnationalism has been clearly gender blind" (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002, p. 5).

One of the crucial shortcomings identified in this analysis pertains to the examination of economic empowerment. Often, economic empowerment is studied in isolation, without a deeper exploration of how it intersects with the division of labor and the conceptualization of women's roles. Consequently, women's experiences become entrenched within gendered assumptions, narratives, and discourses that reinforce heteronormative norms. Furthermore, there is a tendency to conflate economic and political empowerment or emancipation within the same framework. In this context, women are frequently perceived as a monolithic category within heteronormative discourses, leading to an influx of studies and discussions that perpetuate stereotypical representations of women. In essence, the focus on how refugee and migrant women negotiate

their subordinated positions and transform them into empowerment, whether through the analysis of household dynamics, decision-making processes, or the politicization of marriage, should be viewed as a reevaluation of gendered positions. Within these gendered positions, the portrayal of women as neutrally empowered or emancipated in narratives inadvertently underscores the erroneous entanglement of gender with a developmental approach.

This study underscores the need to recognize that social transformations cannot be adequately analyzed without considering the nature of the transformation itself. It prompts us to grapple with a critical question: Can there be a meaningful transformation in deconstructing the gendered representations of women and their roles? Therefore, as Al-Ali and Koser (2002, p. 5) aptly emphasize, there is a call for a more critical evaluation, rather than simply associating transnationalism with the mere freedom and empowerment of women. Instead, it is crucial to engage in the deconstruction of heteronormative assumptions, discourses, and narratives, facilitating a critical process of 'knowledge production' pertaining to gender within transnational migration studies.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Bu araştırma, uluslararası göç bağlamında kadınların güçlenme ve özgürleşme deneyimlerini eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın bir diğer temel hedefi, göç, toplumsal dönüşüm, ekonomik güçlenme ve siyasi güçlenme arasındaki karmaşık ilişkileri anlamak ve bu bağlamda kadınların deneyimlerini eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla ele alarak sıkça kullanılan cinsiyet kalıplarının ötesine geçmektir. Bu değerlendirmeler, toplumsal cinsiyet perspektifi kullanılarak mı yapılıyor, yoksa toplumsal cinsiyetin zaten belirlenmiş bir gerçeklik olarak mı ele alındığını inceliyor?

Bu hedeflere ulaşmak için ampirik çalışmaları temel almakta ve bu çalışmaların toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin yeniden tanımlanmasına nasıl katkı sağladığını göstermektedir. Geleneksel olarak, göçmenler işgücü piyasasının kayıtdışılığı bağlamında ele alınıp ekonomik yönlerle ilişkilendirilirken, mülteciler politik bakış açılarıyla değerlendirilirler. Ancak bu çalışma, bu geleneksel sınırları aşmaktadır. Basit ve stereotip tasvirlerden kaçınarak, göçmen ve mülteci kadınları daha kapsamlı bir şekilde ele almaktadır. Bu kadınların toplumsal, siyasal ve ekonomik boyutlardaki güçlenme süreçlerini araştırmaktadır. Bu kapsamlı yaklaşım aracılığıyla, genellikle ana akım tartışmalarda basitleştirilmiş, romantize edilmiş, cinsiyet temelli ve özdeştirici bakış açılarıyla betimlenen göçmen ve mülteci kadınların gerçek hikayelerini ortaya koymaktadır.

Ayrıca, kültürel özcülüğü önlemek ve konuyu sadece bir ülkeye veya bölgeye odaklamamak amacıyla ulusal ve uluslararası literatür titizlikle incelenmiş, ayrıca kitle iletişim araçlarının çıktıları da dahil edilmiştir. Bu bağlamda, yazılı ve ikincil kaynaklardan elde edilen akademik ve kurumsal dokümanlar (gazete, proje vb.) kullanılmıştır. Bu kapsamlı inceleme, toplumsal cinsiyetin tayin edilmiş/verili bir gerçek olarak kabul edildiği ve bağımsız çalışmaların derinlemesine incelendiği bir dizi çalışmayı ortaya koymaktadır.

1980'ler öncesinde uluslararası göçle ilgili yapılan araştırmalarda toplumsal cinsiyet konusundaki kör noktalar problemli olsa da sonraki çalışmalar, toplumsal cinsiyet anlayışını önemli ölçüde yeniden inşa etmiştir. Bu, göç araştırmalarına toplumsal cinsiyeti dahil etmek, Al-Ali ve Koser'in belirttiği gibi, uluslararası göçle ilgili tartışmaların çoğunun toplumsal cinsiyeti göz ardı ettiği gerçeği nedeniyle bazı literatürde yanıltıcı görünebilir. Bu yanılsama, ekonomik güçlendirme, iş bölümü ve kadınların konumsallığının kavramsallaştırılmasının cinsiyetçi varsayımları, anlatıları ve söylemleri nasıl yeniden ürettiği incelenmeden ele alınmıştır. Böylece, kısır döngü toplumsal cinsiyeti ulusaşan göç üzerinden analiz eden çalışmalara eklemlenmiş ve hetero-patriyarkal dokunun söylemsel yeniden üretimine hizmet eder hale gelmiştir.

Sonuçlar, kadınların göçün toplumsal dönüşüme nasıl etki ettiği ve kendi güçlerini nasıl buldukları konusunda zengin bir anlayış sağlamıştır. Özellikle, ekonomik güçlenme ile toplumsal güçlenme arasındaki ilişkiler ve göç sürecinin toplumsal cinsiyet dinamiklerini nasıl etkilediği üzerine derinlemesine analizler sunulmuştur. Ayrıca, siyasi güçlenme ile toplumsal güçlenme arasındaki bağlantılar da incelenmiş ve evlilik gibi kişisel kararların kadınların toplumsal kimliği üzerinde nasıl etkili olduğu vurgulanmıştır.

Tam da bu nedenle, bu makale, göçmen ve mülteci kadınların heteronormatif söylemlerde nasıl yeniden tanımlandığını göstermektedir. Dahası, dönüşümün türüne bakmadan toplumsal dönüşümlerin analiz edilemeyeceğini gösteriyor ve önemli bir soruyu hatırlatıyor: Kadınların cinsiyetlendirilmiş temsilinin ve konumlandırılmasının yapı-bozuma uğratılmasında önemli bir dönüşüm olabilir mi? Bu nedenle, Al-Ali ve Koser'in belirttiği gibi, uluslararası göçü sadece kadın özgürlüğü ve güçlenmesi ile ilişkilendirmek yerine daha eleştirel bir değerlendirmeye ihtiyaç vardır. Heteroseksüel varsayımları, söylemleri ve anlatıları yapı-bozuma uğratmak ve toplumsal cinsiyet üzerine eleştirel bilgi üretimini kolaylaştırmak için daha iyi desteklenebilir. Bu çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyetin karmaşıklığını ve göçle ilgili araştırmalarda dikkate alınması gereken önemli bir boyutu vurgulamaktadır.

Bu çalışmanın katkıları, göç çalışmalarına ve toplumsal cinsiyet çalışmalarına önemli bir katkı sağladığı gibi, feminist teorileri, toplumsal dönüşümü ve kadınların güçlenme süreçlerini daha iyi anlama konusundaki mevcut bilgiyi derinleştirmiştir. Ayrıca, kadınların deneyimlerini eleştirel bir perspektifle inceleyerek geleneksel cinsiyet normlarını sorgulama çağrısında bulunmuş ve bu alandaki ileri araştırmalara yol göstermiştir. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, kadınların göç deneyimlerini daha iyi anlama ve güçlenme süreçlerini derinlemesine inceleme çabasının bir ürünü olarak önemli bir katkı sunmaktadır.