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CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY: THE CASE OF SYRIAN AND AFGHAN MEN LIVING IN SIVAS*

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Abstract

This study focuses on the reshaped masculinity experiences of Syrian and Afghan men with different legal statuses living in the city centre of Sivas during the transnational migration process. The field research was conducted between August 2022 and November 2023 and involved a comprehensive analysis of men's ability to maintain traditional gender roles, such as earning money, sending money back home, and getting married. The research, which has a qualitative research design, is based on in-depth interviews using semi-structured questions. Descriptive and systematic analysis of the data obtained was made and interpreted. Despite all their vulnerabilities, especially the uncertainty of their legal status, Syrian and Afghan men oppose the local men's criticism of them that 'They fled instead of defending their homeland' by turning traditional masculinity codes such as protecting and providing for the family into an individual choice. However, Syrian and Afghan men are trying to overcome the difficulties they face locally with strategies that can be summarized as 'not getting involved in the problem and social distancing', 'ignoring and trivializing' stigmatizing words in everyday life', and finally leading them to 'revert to various discourses that restore their masculinity'.

Keywords: *Migration, Masculinity, Gender roles, Syrian and Afghan Men, Sivas.*

ERKEKLİK İNŞASINDA SÜREKLİLİKLER VE DEĞİŞİMLER: SİVAS'TA YAŞAYAN SURİYELİ VE AFGAN ERKEKLER ÖRNEĞİ

Öz

Bu çalışma Sivas kent merkezinde yaşayan yasal statüleri farklı olan Suriyeli ve Afgan erkeklerin ulus ötesi göç sürecinde yeniden şekillenen erkeklik deneyimlerine odaklanmaktadır. Saha araştırması Ağustos 2022 ile Kasım 2023 arasında yapılan araştırma erkeklerin para kazanmak, aileye para göndermek ve evlenmek gibi bazı geleneksel cinsiyet rollerinin kapsamlı bir analizini içermektedir. Nitel bir araştırma tasarımına sahip olan araştırma, yarı yapılandırılmış soruların kullanıldığı derinlemesine görüşmelere dayanmaktadır. Elde edilen verilerin betimsel ve sistematik analizi yapılmış ve yorumlanmıştır. Suriyeli ve Afgan erkekler yasal statülerinin belirsizliği başta olmak üzere bütün kırılganlıklarına rağmen yerel erkeklerin kendilerine yönelik 'vatanlarını savunmak yerine kaçtılar' eleştirisini aileyi koruma ve geçindirme gibi geleneksel erkeklik kodlarını bireysel bir tercih haline dönüştürerek karşı çıkmaktadırlar. Bununla birlikte Suriyeli ve Afgan erkekler 'soruna bulaşmamak ve sosyal mesafe', gündelik hayatta damgalayıcı sözleri 'görmezden gelme ve önemsizleştirme' ve son olarak 'erkekliklerini onaran söylemler inşa etme' şeklinde özetlenebilecek stratejilerle yerelde karşılaştıkları zorlukları aşmaya çalışmaktadırlar.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Göç, Erkeklik, Cinsiyet rolleri, Suriyeli ve Afgan erkekler, Sivas.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, migration flows from Afghanistan and Syria to Türkiye have different characteristics. The violence and conflict environment in Syria were evident in the mass migration flow from Syria to Türkiye started in 2011. As a result of this process, roughly 3.5 million Syrians now reside in Türkiye under "temporary protection" status, which allows them to benefit from health, education, and social services, but a work permit is required to access the formal labor market. On the other hand, the first wave of migration from Afghanistan was triggered by political and economic instability began in 1982-83, resulting in around 6.000 Afghans entering Türkiye. (Danış, Taraghi & Pérouse, 2009: 543-544). The second wave was influenced by both Iran's deportation of Afghan immigrants and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Political and economic instability in Afghanistan has determined migration from Afghanistan to Türkiye, and since the 2000s, both irregular migration and international protection have increased. When it comes to irregular migration trends from Syria and Afghanistan, Syrians placed top in 2014, with 24.948 illegal immigrants, followed by Afghans with 12.248. The number of irregular Afghans increased exponentially in 2018, exceeding 100.000, and rapidly grew to over 200.000 in 2019, while the number of Syrians entering irregularly exceeded 34.000 in 2018 and 55.000 in 2019, respectively. Recent figures show that this number has fallen, although Afghans continue to rank top and Syrians second in irregular migration. (Presidency of Migration of Management, Irregular Migration, 2024). In addition to "international protection" and "short-term residence" permits, Afghans reside in Türkiye as irregular migrants. According to 2023 data, Afghans (13.068) rank first among those who asked for international protection, and they are among the top 10 nationalities with short-term resident permits (42.131) (Presidency of Migration of Management, International Protection, 2024). Considering the number of "international protection applicants" made to Türkiye, Afghans rank first with 126.387 applications. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data, Türkiye ranks first among the countries that provide the most protection in the world, with 3.3 million Syrians under temporary protection status and approximately 300.000 "international protection applicants and status holders" (BMMYK, 2023).

Sivas is one of the provinces that hosts both Syrians under temporary protection and Afghans seeking international protection. While Syrians migrated to Sivas for various reasons, including social networks and job opportunities, Afghans were settled based on "the capacities of the cities and the request of the refugees" (Kahya Nizam & Sallan Gül, 2017: 1391). Syrians and Afghans[1] live in outer neighborhoods and work in low-wage industries such as construction, marketing, translation, tailoring, logistics, and cleaning as precarious laborers.

When we look at the roles that men from Afghanistan and Syria played in their families before migrating to Türkiye, we can see that, despite some differences, such as urban-rural disparities, men are generally responsible for financially supporting their families, whereas women are responsible for managing household chores and providing family care. This situation includes what Kandiyoti (1988: 279) calls "classical patriarchy", hierarchical relationships in which women are subordinate to men. Although these traditional gender roles, which are dominant in the source country, are moved to the newly settled country with the migration process, they undergo a partial transformation in this process. For instance, since Syrians migrate to Türkiye due to forced mass migration, it is common for families to migrate together. Social networks play a crucial role in helping them with basic needs such as finding a job and securing housing. For example, in a qualitative study on Syrians living in Şanlıurfa, it has been determined that social networks have important functions such as making migration decisions, making the migration journey safe, reducing migration costs, deciding whether migration will be carried out regularly or irregularly, choosing the city to settle in, and determining the intensity of migration (Gülerce and Demir, 2021). However, the migration of Afghans is known as the migration of mostly individual men. The employment market in Türkiye shows that Syrians and Afghans are generally concentrated in sectors outside the formal employment market. For example, they focus on precarious jobs such as construction and logistics and temporary jobs such as marketing or translators. Although Syrian men have relatively better education and employment opportunities than Afghan men, they both face challenges, such as working in unregistered, temporary, and low-paying jobs. After focusing on migration and masculinity studies, this article continues with a methodological discussion of

[1] It is important to note that while Syrians living in Türkiye are legally in a 'temporary protection' status, Afghans fall under the 'international protection applicants and status holders' category. However, there are also Syrians and Afghans with irregular immigrant status in Türkiye. In this article, the term 'migrant' is generally used to refer to both Syrians and Afghans, encompassing their various legal statuses.

the field research and discusses the research's findings. The findings of the field research are discussed under two headings. In the first title, while discussing the migration motivations of Syrian and Afghan men and their hold on the labor market, we witness how men reproduce traditional gender roles with new discourses. In the second title, we will analyse various strategies such as 'not getting involved in the problem and social distance', 'ignoring and trivialising' and 'masculinity restorative discourse' that immigrant men have developed by considering each other and local men.

2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTES FROM FIELD RESEARCH

Qualitative research is a process in which in-depth insights are gathered regarding individuals' everyday lives, as well as their emotions and thoughts, in the course of their ordinary activities (Neuman, 2013: 541). What is important in qualitative research can be summarized as how individuals ascribe meaning, how they interpret, and how they construct their world through their own experiences (Merriam, 2018: 5). In this context, the study is qualitative research and is based on the experiences and perspectives of Syrian and Afghan migrant men shaped by the migration process. This article is based on the findings of qualitative field research conducted between August 2022 to September 2023. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in neighborhoods such as Çiçekli, Altuntabak, Esentepe, Fatih, Alibaba, and Yenimahalle, where Syrians and Afghans live in high-density in Sivas.

In-depth interviews (8 Syrian men and 8 Afghan men aged from 22 to 43) were conducted using semi-structured interview questions to analyze how migration has changed the lives and masculinity experiences of immigrant men. As a female researcher, "gatekeepers", as stated by Neuman (2013: 555), were used to reach Syrian and Afghan men with various legal statuses in neighborhoods with relatively low socio-economic status. In this context, headmen, employers, and non-governmental workers who have close relations with Syrian and Afghan immigrants made significant contributions to accessing the field and building trust among the research participants. In-depth interviews were conducted in places where the participants felt safe, such as their homes, cafés, and the billiard room, which is a meeting place for some Afghan men. The interviews were conducted in Turkish, as some participants spoke sufficient Turkish to express themselves, while others were assisted by their friends or spouses, who knew Turkish better. Interpreter support was used in the interview with a Syrian man. The real names of the participants were not used in the article, and anonymous names chosen by the participants or researchers were selected.

In qualitative research, the main goal is the saturation of the data and the in-depth understanding of the subject under investigation based on the context, rather than the number of participants or samples aimed at making generalizations (Neuman, 2013: 660; Creswell, 2019: 5; Kümbetoğlu, 2008: 98-99). Semi-structured interview questions were prepared, and in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants to gain an in-depth understanding of the everyday lives, business lives, and masculinity experiences of Syrian and Afghan men as shaped by the migration process. The interviews, which lasted an average of one hour, after which categories such as "immigration process to Türkiye", "business life", "everyday life", "encounters with local men" and "coping with the problems encountered" were determined, and codes were created. The data obtained were analyzed and interpreted descriptively and systematically (Kümbetoğlu, 2008: 154). In this context, direct quotes from the words of Syrian and Afghan men were made, and the relationships between themes were analyzed and interpreted. Based on their experiences, it has been determined that Syrian and Afghan men resort to various strategies in their everyday lives, such as 'not getting involved in the problem and social distance', 'ignoring and trivializing' stigmatizing words in everyday life', and 'building discourses that repair their masculinity'. The article is based on the first author's master's thesis, and this research was approved by the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Gaziantep University, with the decision dated 26.05.2022 and numbered 30.

Syrian participants hailed from the Syrian provinces of Aleppo, Raqqa, Damascus, Deir ez-Zor, and Idlib between 2012 and 2018. Three of them are married, one is engaged, and four are single. In terms of education, five have a bachelor's degree, one has a master's degree, and two have dropped out of high school. On the other hand, most of the Afghan participants migrated from Kabul, Mazar-i Sharif, and Herat regions between 2015 and 2018. Three of them are single, four are married, and one is divorced. Their education levels are listed as follows: one has a bachelor's degree, one has a master's degree, two are high school graduates, two are

high school dropouts, one is a secondary school graduates, and one has never attended formal school. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the Syrian and Afghan men in this study. Participants were generally asked about their migration experiences, the changes and challenges resulting from migration, and their understanding of femininity and masculinity in their new settlement.

Table 1: Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of participants

Participant's Nicknames	*Source Country*	*Arrival date*	*Age*	*Marital Status*	*Education*	*Occupation*
Muhacir	Syria	2017	25	Engaged	University	Intern/Computer engineer
Feyzullah	Syria	2017	31	Married	Master of Science	Student/Grocery store clerk
Mahmud	Syria	2017	28	Married	High school	Carpenter
Ali	Syria	2014	26	Single	University	Computer engineer
Şerif	Syria	2016	33	Married	High school	Landscaper
Kadir	Syria	2012	24	Single	University	Student/Seasonal worker
Sadettin	Syria	2017	22	Single	University	Student/Seasonal worker
Ziyad	Syria	2018	26	Single	University	Student/Seasonal worker
Nimet	Afghanistan	2018	25	Married	High school	Construction worker
Faruk	Afghanistan	2018	30	Married	High school	Cleaner
Ali	Afghanistan	2017	32	Divorced	Unschooled	Tailor
Kâmil	Afghanistan	2018	33	Single	Master of Science	Shop assistant
Hasan	Afghanistan	2016	24	Single	High school drop-out	Construction worker
Cem	Afghanistan	2008	22	Single	High school drop-out	Motorcycle courier
Rashid	Afghanistan	2016	43	Married	University	Construction worker
Şahin	Afghanistan	2015	25	Married	Secondary school	Haberdasher

3. MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN THE MIGRATION PROCESS

The early feminist literature depicted men as possessing power and subjugating women. Similarly, the early literature on migration focused primarily on men as the main actors. Just as gender is historical, masculinity and femininity are historically constructed and subject to transformation over time (Connell, 2005: 81-82). This perspective has influenced migration studies and how migrant men are researched. As a rational decision maker, the immigrant takes part in the migration process as a "generalised man", and this approach both trivializes the situation of women and makes some masculinity experiences invisible (Hibbins & Pease, 2009, p. 4). Although men are at the forefront of the migration literature, men's "vulnerabilities" and their experiences during the migration process are often overlooked (Charsley & Wray, 2015). In studies dealing with masculinity in the migration process, it is argued that the men's modus vivendi begins to change with the migration process (Suerbaum, 2022; Huizinga & Van Hoven, 2021; Bozok, 2019; Charsley & Wray, 2015; Pease, 2009; Crossley & Pease, 2009).

Many variables influence the experience of masculinity during the migration process. These factors include gender equality in the host country, the legal status of immigrants, the social, economic, and cultural capital of the immigrant, the ethnic characteristics of the immigrant, and the perception of immigrants by the locals. In this process, men lose their social ties, try to create new relations, and try to regain their dignity. In doing so, they also explore new strategies and attempt to adapt to their new social environment. In all these processes, gender should not be considered a variable but an "analytical concept" to analyze migration (Hibbins & Pease, 2009: 5).

However, as Connell state, instead of the "crisis of masculinity", it is possible to discuss the "crisis of the entire gender order" and its impact on men. Because "masculinity is not a system but a practice", it is possible to talk about the "transformation" or "disruption" of masculinity rather than the crisis of masculinity (Connell, 2005: 84). For example, in her field research with Syrian men in Egypt, Suerbaum (2022) discusses how the inherent bond established between masculinity and war and violence does not apply. Huizinga and Van Hoven (2021) argue that Syrian immigrant men's perceptions of their masculinity in the Netherlands intersect with various characteristics such as race, age, and social class. As in these examples, men and the construction of masculinity are affected by transnational events such as migration.

The evaluation and discussion of Syrian and Afghan migration within the framework of forced migration to Türkiye has been approached in various contexts. In this field research, men's experiences were highlighted and focused on how their masculinity transformed during the migration process. It is essential to acknowledge that perspectives and perceptions towards the same group of refugees change over time. For example, the definition of Syrians as "victims escaped persecution/war" is still a vital statement, although it has changed over time (Erdoğan, 2022: 103). However, the perception of Afghans in the media is more negative and is associated with both "escaping war" and irregular migration. This implication of 'deficient masculinity' from local men to Syrian and Afghan men is transformed by refugees. There is a relationship between the expression "having abandoned the homeland" and the "subordination" discussed by Connell in the encounter between locals and Syrian and Afghan men. The statement implies that men are associated with the trait of cowardice commonly associated with women (Connell, 2005: 81). As Connell argues in the context of "marginalisation", there is no necessary link between individual success and being effective in society or, in Connell's words, "acquiring authority" (Connell, 2005: 81). Therefore, it will be first discussed that Syrian and Afghan men highlight masculinity-restorative discourses such as providing for the family and protecting the family. Secondly, various strategies employed by men, such as 'not getting involved in the problems and social distance', 'ignoring and trivialising' stigmatising words in everyday life, and finally', constructing discourses that restore their masculinity', will be discussed.

4. ESTABLISHING, PROTECTING AND PROVIDING THE FAMILY AS A SIGN OF MASCULINITY

Although migration is not a new phenomenon, a process called "differentiation of migration" has recently emerged (Castles, De Haas & Miller, 2014: 16). Forced migration has taken an essential place in this process. This migration can sometimes result in displacement within a country or crossing national borders as documented or undocumented migrants. In the field research on Syrian and Afghan men, the migration of men is related to wars and conflicts and the lack of a safe and economically sustainable everyday life. The research focusing on the migration processes and social networks of Afghans in Ankara revealed that most Afghans decided to migrate due to economic reasons or the insecure environment created by the conflict environment in Afghanistan (Demir, 2022: 67). Especially in the case of Afghanistan, migration has increased due to conflicts continuing for decades, and irregular migration of children also consists of the responsibility of supporting the family is transferred to the children. Bozok and Bozok's field research in Istanbul reveals that children migrate to Istanbul unaccompanied and irregularly to find a job, earn money, and support their families (Bozok & Bozok, 2019). The migration of Afghan men becomes complicated due to these reasons as well as the reasons of patriarchal values for men to protect their daughters, wives, or themselves (men being forced into arranged marriages) (Ünlütürk & Topaloğlu, 2023). Men who migrate to Türkiye due to forced migration cannot access the formal employment market due to both their legal status and language level. Instead, they work in temporary jobs in insecure, low status, and low wages. In our fieldwork, men are often escaping from war, conflicts, unemployment, poverty, unsafe environments, and the effects of patriarchal gender roles on them. This situation emerges in the experiences of men who tell of the irregular migration routes and reasons from Afghanistan to Iran and Türkiye. The reasons for forced migration include protecting family members or seeking safety in a different area.

> *"Threat, Threat. Eventually, they threatened me with Meryem [his daughter]. You know they kidnap children there. Since ours is a girl. They even tried to kidnap my wife several times, but it failed. She defended herself; that is, she saved herself. Lastly, they tried to kidnap my little girl; they wanted her. They even sent threatening papers" (Rashid, Afghan, 43).*

> *"We were raided by soldiers every day. For the first time, they did not do anything to us, but they burned our house, our car, our motorcycle. Last time, they threatened to kill us. They almost killed us anyway" (Kadir, Syrian, 24).*

The above statements show that conflicts and traditional roles force men to migrate. The places where women and girls feel safe are turned into places where they feel unsafe. This insecure environment triggers men to participate in irregular migration because of their responsibilities to protect or care for women. Men are seen as responsible for the security of the family (Echavez, Mosawi & Pilongo, 2016: 20).

Almost all participants claimed that the migratory routes were extremely risky, unsuitable for women, and could only be crossed with men. This situation functions as the affirmation of masculinity associated with physical strength (Çarpar & Göktuna Yaylacı, 2021: 3861). While Syrian and Afghan men have different experiences when transitioning to Türkiye, they share the belief that the migration journey should be completed "together with men." This suggests that men value their physical strength, while women are more open to danger.

> *"But it is impossible for such a woman to come here safely. If there is no man, she cannot come. Everyone migrates with their own families. I have never seen a woman alone. So they go from Türkiye to Italy, that is easy. They get on the ship and pay a lot of money. I saw it there but did not see it on the border of Iran or Afghanistan; it is impossible, I did not see it" (Şahin, Afghan, 25).*

> *"A man can migrate alone, but it is troublesome for a woman... You cannot trust anyone. Will you trust your honour? Will you hide your child? Will you hide your money? There are thieves. That is why it is difficult" (Mahmud, Syrian, 28).*

Whether men are Syrian or Afghan, they migrated due to violence, conflict, poverty, and uncertainty in the source country. One of the most significant differences between Syrians and Afghans is that some Afghans tried to live in Iran for a certain period before migrating to Türkiye. In studies examining the journeys of Afghan and Syrian refugees to Europe, it is seen that Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Gulf countries are temporary countries (Belabbas et al., 2022: 214).

The process of men rejuvenating their masculinity is a dynamic relationship that they must develop not only during their migration but also when they settle in Türkiye and look for a job in their working procedures and everyday activities. At this juncture, Butler's (2010: 185) idea that gender is performative and only gets its reality through acts becomes crucial. It is possible to say that refugee men seek to restore their masculinity every day in the country they are newly settled in. In different studies, it is stated that the migration process distorts the current position of men; they feel "feminine" because they cannot perform traditional masculine roles, and patriarchal values begin to undermine or are negotiated, especially in the case of men from societies dominated by patriarchal systems where men are the sole breadwinners and women are confined to the private sphere (Pease, 2009; Mungai & Pease, 2009).

Just as the migration process does not affect all men in the same way, men's experiences of forced migration and the strategies they develop in this process are also different from each other. In this process, refugee or immigrant men's capital, ethnicity, class, age or pattern of migration are decisive. For example, Pease (2009: 81-86), in his study focusing on the experiences of men immigrating to Australia from East Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America, stated that despite their differences, men are generally in the position of being breadwinners and that being a man requires this. While men held respected positions in their source country, it has been observed that their authority within the family was also undermined as their role as breadwinners was challenged during the migration process. In countries like Australia, where women gained relatively equal rights, they find jobs more easily, and the position and prestige of immigrant men seem to be undermined. It is seen that migrant men begin to perform jobs mostly associated with women in their home country, and to cope with this dilemma threatening their masculinity, they reinterpret their position. In her comparative research in Italy, India, Ivory Coast, and Congo, Bartolomei (2010: 102-103) states that despite the stigma associated with men's involvement in housework, they re-establish their masculinity by knitting a joint "identity" around "putting bread on the table" and present these contributions to their family members as positive examples.

Even though they reconstruct their masculinity and fatherhood roles by doing paid housework outside the home, this does not change the gender-based division of labor at home. Another study argues that Sri Lankan immigrant men working in the house in Naples, while strategically conforming to some stereotypes (as "docile" and "submissive"), continue patriarchal masculinity values in their everyday lives, thus highlighting men's role as breadwinners (Näre, 2010: 80-81).

In the experiences of refugee or immigrant men, the loss of authority and respect and the process of producing compensatory strategies appear not only in their family relationships or their perception of masculinity but also in their encounters with local men in the public sphere and when they are ignored. Afghan Kamil, who is enrolling in graduate school, describes his stay in Türkiye as "I came and stayed here so I can make use of my time [he means he has started his master's degree] so that it does not go to waste... I will have a diploma in my hand that makes me very happy." "If this did not happen, I would go bankrupt," he expresses the powerlessness and loss of status he feels in everyday life.

> *"…I did not go to the mosque this Eid. When I went to the mosque before, everyone celebrated Eid with each other, but no one greeted me. No one knows you. Nobody hugs you. You are human, after all. This social exclusion gives people trouble. You are weak and zero" (Kamil, Afghan, 33).*

Similarly, the Syrian participant considers living in a city away from his family as "being thrown away".

> *"My mother, father, and siblings are all in Istanbul. They threw me here for ID card. There is no work here either. You see, we eat whatever we find…" (Mahmud, Syrian, 28).*

Kamil feels powerless in his new settlement despite being educated and, in his words, knowing two foreign languages. On the other hand, Syrian Mahmud establishes a close relationship between being deprived of social networks and being excluded. While Mahmud compares his position to that of local men, Kamil compares his situation to his position in Afghanistan, where his goals of 'getting an education' and 'returning to Afghanistan one day' appear to compensate for the exclusion and lack of status he experiences.

For Syrian and Afghan men, supporting the family and earning money are integral to masculinity. Participants' relationship with money at a young age differs from that of local men.

> *"Our men are not very gentle like your men. He can work at the age of 12… He can feed a family [talking about supporting the family]. I know someone who is nine years old and looks after the family in Sivas. When he is an orphan or his identity is cancelled, he can work hard for the family. I mean, I started working when I was nine years old. Now they work here, send money there, 5 thousand 6 thousand a month, no matter what, but he works. However, do not get me wrong, no one at that age can work hard; they just cannot collect cigarette money in their own pockets" (Nimet, Afghan, 25).*

> *"…We are not like that. In Syria, men work and responsibility begins. Everything is ready for men here; they do not think about the future until they are 18-20. Syrians who come to Türkiye are working. If his father was martyred, he worked. Our life is difficult. It probably starts at the age of 12-13. Here, they do not know money until 18-20" (Feyzullah, Syrian, 31).*

Working to support the family, no matter what the job or how old one is, becomes a function in which Afghan and Syrian men from the lower income group can quickly restore their masculinity undermined by migration. Because, for example, in patriarchal societies such as Afghanistan, providing for the family is one of the important ways for men to exercise their masculinity (Hakimi, 2022). In this process of restoring masculinity, refugee men negotiate with local men and masculinity codes. While local men prioritise saving for the family, Syrian men prioritize supporting their family even in poor working conditions (Leyla Kuzu, 2023). The legal status and age of refugees are important variables in this negotiation. It is frequently revealed in field studies how especially young Afghans try to be "invisible" to reduce tensions when entering the labor market (Karadağ, 2021; Bozok & Bozok, 2019). The jobs that refugees can work in Türkiye are generally low-paid and insecure. Afghan Cem and Syrian Mahmud, who work in one of these jobs, state that their jobs are difficult, risky, and low-paid, but they have to work.

> *"Even though it is a risky job with long working hours, I love my job. Men must work. The important thing is to be happy with your family... Since my parents are separated, I have to take care of the house... Being a courier is a difficult job that requires working long hours. You get paid for overtime. I have to work" (Cem, Afghan, 22).*

> *"The expectation is that we just go. Why do they tell Syrians to go? I am a stranger here; they do not want us to work. Maybe they do not want us because we work cheaply, but I have to, I have to pay my house rent. You go to Syria and fight. I fought for two and a half years. Who did we fight with? Everyone is brother. My brother is a soldier of Assad; I have to become a soldier of the free army. Who should I shoot, my brother? (Mahmud, Syrian, 28).*

Although men's participation in the labor force poses various challenges, such as low wages, women's employment is not generally accepted; on the contrary, a traditional gender-based division of labor is idealised. In some studies, the migration process seems to create the potential to transform the gender division of labor (Pease, 2009). In some cases, Syrian women are negotiating their positions and gaining opportunities to work in paid jobs (Körükmez, Karakılıç & Danış, 2020; Leyla Kuzu, 2020). However, looking at the Afghan men in our sample, it is not yet possible to say that the gender-based division of labor has changed. The Afghan participant expresses that there are certain professions in which his wife can work:

> *"If my wife had graduated from university and had a job, she could do it, but I do not allow her to work in cafes, restaurants or as a caregiver because I live, I exist. If I cannot do it, I sit down with my wife and talk about housework, sewing, etc., if our situation is terrible. After all, we live together, that would be it, but other than that, as long as I'm alive, I will not let it" (Şahin, Afghan, 25).*

Syrian participants also state that it is men's responsibility to work and bring bread to the house:

> *"Working, helping to make ends meet. I do not want my wife to work. I must be responsible for the maintenance of the house. "I would never want my wife to work" (Kadir, Syrian, 24).*

> *"A man is a man, a woman is a woman. Both of their jobs are different. Everyone should do their job" (Mahmud, Syrian, 28).*

While men work and earn a living, women have to do the housework, and this naturalizes the saying "Women are women and men are men". However, in field research in different regions of Türkiye, there are also studies showing that the perceptions of femininity of both Afghan and Syrian women from lower-income groups change with migration (Leyla Kuzu, 2023; Sallan Gül S., Türkmen E. & Kahya Nizam Ö., 2020). Even though Afghan and Syrian men's everyday encounters in Türkiye, especially during their migration journeys, are different, they seem to naturalize their gender-based roles. Even though men migrating alone do their work or, in some interviews, men use the phrase "I help my wife," it is impossible to say that this is a widespread and radical change.

5. REFUGEE MEN'S MASCULINITY PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES

For Syrian and Afghan refugees, working has a masculinity-building function. In the Turkish employment market, refugees encounter different situations even though the available jobs to them are not the jobs that undermine their masculinity (on the contrary, they are jobs dominated by men, such as construction and courier work). Immigrants develop strategies to overcome or alleviate treatments such as long working hours in the employment market, lower wages than local men, wage cuts or not being paid, as well as stigmatisation in everyday life. We can summarise these strategies as 'not getting involved in the problem and social distance', 'ignoring and trivialising, stigmatizing words in everyday life', and finally, 'constructing discourses that restore their masculinity'. Although all these strategies take place in different forms and levels among Syrian and Afghan refugees, they appear as common practices in everyday life.

While Syrian men in Türkiye are under temporary protection status, some Afghan men are 'international protection applicants and status holders'. Despite these differences in legal status, both groups shape their business and social lives to prevent their deportation from Türkiye.

According to data obtained from the field, Afghan men seem more reluctant to meet among themselves than Syrian men. A man from Afghanistan:

> *"I do not have many friends; I sleep at home in my leisure time. I have Afghan friends, but we are not close. I do not like very much. It was not like this in Afghanistan; I knew him; he was my relative. If I go on the road with a man I am not related to, whom I do not know, and if there is a crime, it will be on me. There is evil among Afghans, among in Syria, and Turks. No one trusts anyone" (Nimet, Afghan, 25).*

As in the example above, it is understood that Afghan men generally do not make friends or develop friendships with any Afghans, even if they are from their own country, unless they are relatives or acquaintances. Although some Afghans express it as 'there is no time', it is understood that Afghans consciously stay away from other Afghans. Similarly, in her study, Akis Kalaylıoğlu (2014: 196) found that regular Iranian immigrants in Ankara keep their distance from irregular Iranian immigrants. However, in our field research, Afghan men consciously stay away from Afghans to avoid deportation, even though they have similar legal status. The following participants clearly state that they consciously prefer to be alone:

> *"Why am I living alone now? Because I am afraid. For example, I am fine. If I bring a friend with me as a roommate; if a man sells drugs while I am going to work, the police come, the house is on me; that is why I live alone; I cannot trust anyone" (Hasan, Afghan, 24).*

> *"I do not have any Syrian-Afghan friends. I do not want a stranger. There are 600 numbers on my phone; 600 numbers are not stranger. There is only my mother, father, brother and sister. I do not interfere at all. There are already many Syrians in the Friday market and Alibaba. I do not know anyone. Just grocery, how are you, are you okay, that is all. I do not want friends" (Mahmud, Syrian, 28).*

Afghans avoid any behaviours that would jeopardise their status (fear of deportation) when they seek international protection, while being evaluated, or are irregular immigrants. This situation is also decisive in immigrant men's encounters with local men. For example, men evaluate the negative expressions they encounter both on the street and in the workplace as 'ignoring' or 'jokes' and produce strategies to protect their masculinity. The following participant expresses how he evaluates the statements directed at him by local men:

> *"Sometimes, while I was working at the pancake shop, they would joke around and say, 'We are fed up with you; why don't you go back to your hometown?' I was also saying that I would marry a Turk. I have an engagement party next week, and they were surprised, too. Who gives you girls, bro? What do I lack? I work and earn. Why wouldn't anyone give? Then the person there said, 'The young man was joking,' we were getting along like that. Even if he tells the truth, I accept it as a joke" (Hasan, Afghan, 24).*

As can be understood from the statement above, while the participant describes the questions asked to him as 'joking', it is understood that he wants to move up his position in the masculinity hierarchy by saying, 'I will get engaged next week'. Van Raemdonck, in her ethnographic study conducted in the Jordanian cities of Ramtha and Irbid, makes a discussion about Syrian men's socio-economic adaptation efforts and marriage hopes. Van Raemdonck focuses on the term "waithood", which Singerman uses to express the long-time men in the Middle East spend to save money for marriage and their economic dependence on their families. The concept refers to men in the Middle East gaining economic independence, getting married, and establishing a home for themselves. However, the refugee status of Syrian men prolongs this process even further, and the author calls this situation "double-waithood". As the author states, during this period, the refugee remains an active individual who looks for a job, works, and supports the family rather than being passive (2023: 696-697). Therefore, while refugees are waiting to finalise their legal status, they are also putting their marriage wishes on hold. It is possible to see the "double waiting" situation in this research. Hasan expressed his desire for marriage as follows: "I go to weddings, but I go home and sit and think, will you be a groom one day or not? It is an impossible thing. Because my current situation is obvious." Although Hasan's situation seems to involve waiting for legal or economic improvement, it

is closely related to cultural differences and the negative image of immigrants in Türkiye. For example, in a study focusing on the experiences of men migrating from Latin America to Australia, "having a family is a fundamental indicator of a man's identity" (Crossley & Pease, 2009: 123). Therefore, for immigrant and refugee men, getting married and starting a family is upward social mobility or an indicator of masculinity. For men, starting and maintaining a family in their new settlement becomes an experience that confirms their masculinity.

Another issue where immigrant men try to restore their masculinity is the insinuating questions frequently asked of them, both in the media and in everyday encounters. Immigrant men face indirect and direct questions such as 'Why did you leave your homeland?', 'Why didn't you fight for your homeland?' and 'Why did you run away from your homeland?' in their new place of residence. In Erdoğan's (2022: 103) *Syrians Barometer* study conducted across Türkiye, it is seen that the expression "they are people who cannot protect their own country" is widely used to describe Syrians. Participants, whether Syrian or Afghan, stated that there was no rationality in fighting and described the war in their country as 'brother killing brother'. In these discourses of men, rather than rejecting war in principle, 'uncertainty of the enemy' is placed, and they uphold the traditional masculinity norm that one should fight if necessary.

> *"When we say I am from Afghanistan, their faces change, but they do not say anything to us. This makes us feel like we have been insulted. Some even said it to our faces: Why... You came to our hometown, wasn't there any other place? We do not leave our hometown. Our situation is different. We did not run away from a war. I would not run away if our enemy were known. I did not run away, my family forced me" (Kamil, Afghan, 33).*

Although the common accusation that immigrant men left their homeland instead of fighting is made to both groups, the immigrants themselves also make this accusation that weakens masculinity to other groups. While explaining his situation, the Afghan participant explains in detail why he is different from Syrians:

> *"Our war is not like the Syrians; we fled during the war, we did not surrender the country because ISIS took over Syria completely, but in our country, there are seven tribes there are Turks, Turkmens, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, we are Tajiks. Now it is our war; he says it is my country; he says it is my country. However, now it is like rape, let America come, Russia come, let the British come, I will fight now. Now brother cannot kill brother" (Nimet, Afghan, 25).*

The uncertainty of the enemy and the 'advantage' of migrating rather than fighting was stated:

> *"…I did not want war. There are too many sides; our enemy does not come from outside, so I did not want war. That is why I left [the country]. I never wanted this war... It is more advantageous to come to Türkiye than to stay in Syria because after staying at home there for a year or two, you go to war…" (Feyzullah, Syrian, 31).*

> *"For example, if someone were to stop me, he would say, 'You did not fight, etc.' I was already a 12-year-old child when I came to the country. If I were to go now, they all work with the intelligence service, and I do not want to be a mercenary in the hands of someone; I cannot be a martyr for their interests" (Kadir, Syrian, 24).*

Yuval-Davis (2007: 43) recalls Andersan's statement that "…just like the family, the nation can demand sacrifice– including death and killing." However, for the participants, it seems like the struggle for the homeland has been replaced by struggle for the family. However, as Hearn points out, although men individually suffer from war (in our example, men generally flee from war and conflict), "men's collective structural tent to increase rather than decrease" (Hearn, 2011: 50). Although it is seen that men are individual victims of war and conflict in their migration narratives, the issue of discussion is not the denial of war but the 'uncertainty of the enemy'.

6. CONCLUSION

Immigration to Türkiye from Syria and Afghanistan is due to violence, conflict, and economic instability in these source countries. As a result of the forced migration from Syria to Türkiye since 2011, approximately 3.5 million Syrians live in Türkiye. The migration of Afghans, some of which is irregular, has increased exponentially since 2018. Although Syrian and Afghan immigrants are discussed in the political, economic, and security context in Türkiye, their experiences as immigrant men are ignored. While men have to flee from their source countries due to conflict, insecurity, and poverty, they participate in the everyday life of the country they have just settled in, not only as immigrants but also as immigrant men. Although the migration patterns and statuses of Syrian and Afghan immigrants in Türkiye are different, men from both groups face expectations such as supporting or starting a family in their everyday lives. This study focuses on the challenges Syrian and Afghan men face while trying to maintain traditional gender roles in their new country and the masculinity-restoring discourses they develop. The discourse that supporting the family is a constituent of masculinity continues after migration. However, this time, they must confirm or continue their masculinity by finding a job in a new country. However, Syrian and Afghan men encounter and are affected by the gender order of the host society in various ways in everyday life. Although the transformative effect of the migration process on gender roles was observed within the scope of the field research, we can say that Syrian and Afghan men continue to tend to preserve traditional gender roles. Immigrant men strive to strengthen their positions by developing strategies such as 'not getting involved in the problem and social distance', 'ignoring and trivialising' and 'building discourses that repair their masculinity' against the discourses directed at them from the local people in everyday encounters. It is noteworthy that immigrant men observe social distance among themselves due to the attitudes they encounter every day, especially the uncertainty of their legal status in Türkiye, and that they adopt the rule of 'not getting involved in problems'.

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