

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF AFGHAN MIGRANTS BEFORE AND AFTER MIGRATION: PROTECTING THEIR RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OR SOCIAL COHESION

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the religious lives of Afghan migrants before and after migration, their religious socialization in Türkiye, the problems they face in their religious lives, and to reveal how they evaluate religious life in Türkiye. For this purpose, the Evrenseki,

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Çolaklı, Yavrudođan, Gündođdu, and Tařađıl neighborhoods of Antalya were chosen as the area for research. The study group of sixteen men and five women was formed using the snowball sampling method on Afghan migrants living in these neighborhoods and working in agricultural activities, cold storage, greenhouse cultivation, etc. The data obtained through the in-depth interview technique was analyzed using content analysis. The MAXQDA program was used for the systematic coding of the data. As a result of the coding, the article examines the subject through four themes: the pre-migration religious life of Afghans, the post-migration religious life of Afghans, the religious socialization practices of Afghan migrants, and religious life in Türkiye as seen through the eyes of Afghan migrants. Also, it discusses whether Afghan migrants are developing behaviors to protect their religious personalities or foster social integration and cohesion. As a result, it concludes that Afghan migrants have strong religious identities but generally develop integration and cohesion behavior.

Key Words: Afghan migrants, religious life, religious socialization, integration, social cohesion

Introduction

Türkiye has recently become not only a point of transit for irregular migrants but also a country of destination for them. The average of the last ten years reveals that around 165,000 irregular migrants have been caught a year. Almost half of those defined as irregular migrants are Afghan individuals, who are the subject of this study (GİB, 2022). The determining factors in international migration movements include wars, terrorism, ethnic pressure, famine, drought, natural disasters, climate change, poverty, unemployment, discrimination, inequality, and the desire to access goods and services in developed societies and to live in a democratic environment. The factors which push and attract Afghan migrants to move seem to provide sufficient motivation for this too. Indeed, these factors can even be evaluated as vital for sustaining their lives.

The status of Afghan migrants in Türkiye differs from that of Syrians. As opposed to the status of “temporary protection” afforded to Syrians, the status of “conditional refugees” is given to Afghans.

Türkiye has created a migration status to overcome the “geographical restrictions” set out in the 1951 Geneva Convention. The status of conditional refugee is given to “individuals who requested international protection from Türkiye to take refuge in third countries, by claiming that they possess the conditions set out in the definition of refugees due to incidents which occurred outside Europe.” (GİB, 2022). The migration quotas of receiving countries have steadily decreased in recent years, while the conditions for acceptance have become longer and more uncertain. This has decreased the hopes of Afghan migrants going to third countries. On the other hand, some Afghan migrants who illegally entered Türkiye have either not applied for international protection or have had their applications denied.

Although Afghan migrants (like Syrian migrants, who are also considered to be “guests”) are progressing from being guests towards becoming settlers, their relationship and interaction with settled societies have become uncertain as a result of their troubled situation. Another factor supporting this appearance of settlement is that Afghan migrants have started participating in the Turkish labor market to sustain their existence and extend their stay. Afghan migrants, who can find employment as illegal workers in the construction, agriculture, and stockbreeding sectors in particular, due to their legal status, are thus able to integrate into the settled society.

On this basis, it has become crucial to examine the relationship and interactions between Afghan migrants and the Turkish community, as well as their patterns of integration and cohesion processes. This study evaluates the settlement of Afghan migrants as a subject of study over and above the emphasis made on the identities of these groups as “guests.” The study sets off from the shared religious beliefs that unite the two societies to evaluate the appearance of the migrants becoming settled, as well as to be able to examine possible differences, discriminations, and/or isolations.

Afghanistan is an Islamic country, with 99% of its population being Muslim. The majority of the community are members of the Hanafiyyah sect. Still, apart from the Sunnīs, approximately 15 to 20 percent of the population are members of different branches of the

Shī‘ah (Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2009). Some incidents significantly altered people’s perceptions of religion and communal life. During the Soviet Union-Afghanistan war (1979-1989), the struggle against the communist regime was labeled a “jihad,” which increased the authority of religious figures in Afghan society. Other effective incidents include the Taliban movement’s presence and the teachings instilled in Afghan refugees at religious schools established for them in Pakistan. “Wahhabi thinking,” “Pashtun tribe customs and beliefs,” and “Deoband school religious beliefs and teachings” are significant factors in the Taliban’s perception of religion. Ultimately, a rigid structure of shari‘a law was propped up by violence in Afghanistan (Mohammadi 2022, 55-57). On the other hand, as stated by Büyükkara (2012, 1306), “Neither the Shī‘is, whom they refer to as ‘İrānī,’ the Salafī, whom they refer to as ‘Wahhābī,’ nor the Islamists, whom they refer to as ‘Ikhwānī’ possess a reputable place in the unique mindset of the Taliban.” Based on this interpretation, Ahmadi (2017, 128) states that there is a Khārijī mindset in the religious perceptions and practices of the Taliban. This perception of religion, defined as “Ḥanafī Salafism,” possesses a traditional, strict, and distinct structure. Therefore, while the two communities share the same religious beliefs, there are significant differences in interaction between religion and society, or in other words, in their lifestyle and religious life.

This study focuses on the religious ways of life of Afghan migrants before and after their migration by tracking these differences and aims to convey the reasons for any possible changes together with the outcomes of such changes. The study also examines how Afghan migrants perceive their religious way of life in Türkiye, their religious socialization in Türkiye, and their challenges. It also discusses whether this story is progressing as a form of social cohesion or segregation. Thus, it attempts to understand and interpret the distance between Afghan migrants and Turkish society based on religious ways of life and practices.

1. Afghan Migration from the Perspective of Social Integration and Cohesion

Afghan migration is regarded as an imperative and irregular form of migration. Therefore, three options were developed for Afghan migrants under the international protection legislation: integration, resettlement in a third country, and “voluntary” repatriation (İçduygu and Ayaşlı 2019, 1). The presence of war and conflict in Afghanistan renders discussions of the third option pointless within the context of the “principle of non-refoulement.” On the other hand, Western countries’ migration policies are becoming stricter, making the second option uncertain. Under these circumstances, the only concrete and practical option for Afghan migrants is to integrate into the host community.

Theories such as assimilation, cultural amalgamation, integration, and multiculturalism provide the primary conceptual framework in studies dealing with the settlement of migrant individuals and groups in host countries, as well as their relationships and interactions with the receiving communities (see Faist 2000; Bloch 2002; Kivisto 2002; Castles and Miller 2003; Martikainen 2013). Discussions on globalization, post-modernism, and the diaspora have been added to this notional framework recently (see Martikainen 2013). The primary conceptual framework of this study is discussions on “integration.” In contrast with assimilation and cultural fusion, integration possesses content such as “being similar,” “cultural interaction,” and “non-integration” and emphasizes difference and culture. Therefore, it includes content distinct from “multiculturalism” (see Martikainen 2013).

“Social integration” and “social cohesion” were preferred over the concept of integration within the scope of the study. This ensures that the notions complement each other rather than being used as substitutes. Social cohesion and social integration also provide a proper perspective in removing potential conflicts, isolations, exclusions, and other problems and developing solutions. Moreover, they provide a convenient conceptual framework “for examining, understanding, and defining the interaction and relationship between individuals who have obtained refugee status as a result of forced migration and the local

population at the regional level.” (Özçürümez and İçduygu 2021, 17).

Integration possesses cultural, structural, and political aspects. Structural integration consists of the entry of migrant individuals and groups into various sectors, organizations, and institutions and/or their ability to generate alternative forms at these organizations (economics, education, politics, parties, religious communities, etc.). Political integration covers the legal rights granted to migrants by the state (citizenship, residency permits, dual nationality, etc.). On the other hand, cultural integration refers to the conformity of migrant communities with local values, rules, behavior, and so on, as well as the manifestation of the cultural world of the host country to migrants (see Martikainen 2013).

This study on the integration and cohesion of Afghan migrants with the host community focuses on “cultural cohesion.” Religion is one of the variables to consider when cultural cohesion is questioned. The distance between the religious customs and lifestyle of the host community and migrant communities can impact their relationships, interactions, and thus their cultural cohesion. Accordingly, this study discusses the religious life of Afghan migrants before and after the migration under the heading “cultural cohesion.” It also examines whether Afghan migrants have developed a behavior to protect their religious identities/character or integrated their own religious identities with those of the cultural world of the host community as a result of the cultural interaction.

2. The Related Studies in the Literature

The phenomenon of international migration, which has become a global problem, is a common denominator in many disciplines. International migration is examined under some headings, such as the causes for migration movements, the pushing and pulling factors in the migration process, the patterns of integration between migrants and the local community, the migrants’ behaviors for cohesion, their problems (such as exclusion, discrimination, racism, etc.), economic activities, and political appearance. It is also addressed within legal and social rights, border security, international treaties, and cooperation.

Transnational migration movements toward Turkey have increased the number of studies in this field. However, a significant portion of these studies focuses on Syrian migrants. Examining the studies on Afghan migrants to Türkiye reveals that a large number of studies discuss the conditions and attributes of Afghan migrants' irregular journeys (Kaytaç 2016); their reasons for the irregular migration, processes of migration, reasons for choosing Türkiye, the way they appear in Türkiye and the potential outcomes of this migration for Türkiye (Ökten 2012; Koç 2017b; Cankara and Çerez 2020; Özgün 2021; Tümtaş 2022; Üstün and Vargün 2022); their lives in Türkiye, difficulties, needs, and opportunities (Yıldırım 2018; Hashemi and Ünlü 2021; Karakaya and Karakaya, 2021); their outlook in the labor market (Güler 2020a); the perceptions and attitudes of the local population (Akkaş and Aksakal 2021); their plans and expectations for the future (Koç 2017a; Doğu 2022); their representation in the media (Erol and Göktuna Yaylacı 2022; Wakili and Cangöz 2022; Şit 2022); their use of the health services (Alemi et al. 2017); their mental health (Alemi et al. 2016); the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (Bozok and Bozok 2020); their status as victims of human trafficking (Alakuş and Uzan 2020); the necessity for readmission agreements in the fight against irregular migration, based on the circumstances endured by the Afghans (Boran 2021); Afghan migration within the context of the management of migration (Kurğer, Yetgin, and Türksoy 2021); the position of unaccompanied Afghan migrant children (Bozok and Bozok 2018); the cohesion programs for Afghan children (Bozkurt et al. 2020); and the inter-cultural experiences of Afghan students (Selvitopu and Gün 2020) in Türkiye.

Numerous theoretical and empirical studies examine and discuss the social integration patterns and behavior directed at the cohesion of the migrant groups in Türkiye (Kaya 2014; Taşçı and Kara 2019; Güler 2020b; Çalışkan Sarı et al. 2021; Ok Şehitoğlu 2021; Cantekin and Taşbaş 2022). Syrians have been chosen as the subject of a significant portion of the studies on the integration, social acceptance, cohesion, etc., of refugee and asylum seeker migrant groups (Erkan 2016; Yaman 2017; Süleymanov and Sönmez 2017; Yıldırım, İslamoğlu, and İyem 2017; Duğan and Gürbüz 2018; Erdoğan 2018; Barın 2019; Duman 2019; Koçan and Kırılıoğlu 2020;

Yıldırım and Dinler 2021; Maqul, Güneş, and Akin 2021; Shaherhawasli and Güvençer, 2021; Taş 2021; Çevik and Buz 2022; Şallı 2022). However, studies albeit limited in number on Afghan migrants' integration, social acceptance, cohesion, etc., are also available (Yeler 2021; Coşkun and Çetin 2022; Kan and Köroğlu 2022).

Similar to this study, some studies examine the religious lives of migrants, their socialization, the changes in their levels of devoutness before and after migration, and their religious adaptation, based on the relationship among religion, migration, and cohesion (Connor 2010; Diehl and Koenig 2013; Yavuz 2013; Friberg and Sterri 2021; Khoudja 2022; Schensnovich 2022). Yet, a limited number of studies have been conducted on the Syrians in Türkiye, and their content overlaps with the scope of this study within this scope (Erkan 2016; Özcan 2019; Yakut 2019; Yaralıoğlu 2019; Yaralıoğlu and Güngör 2020).

In contrast to the previous studies, this study examines the relationship among religion, migration, and cohesion based on Afghan migrants in Türkiye. No other studies examine this relationship from the perspective of Afghan migrants, which makes this study distinctive in the academic literature. It is also the only one in which Antalya was selected as the study area.

3. The Purpose of the Study

The study aims to present information concerning the religious ways of life of Afghan migrants, who reside in rural areas, participate in the area's labor force and enter into relationships with local individuals and organizations before and after their migration. It also attempts to illustrate the changes in this regard, determine their opinions on the religious life in Türkiye, and provide a thematic analysis of the actors and practices in their religious socializations in Türkiye. Thus, it tries to determine whether the actions and behavior of Afghan migrants are geared toward preserving their religious character/identities in their home country or fostering cohesion. Under this framework, the following study issues were identified:

- How do Afghan migrants assess their religious life before migration?
- How do Afghan migrants evaluate their religious ways of life after migration? What changes have been made to the religious ways of life? How do they evaluate these changes?
- What do Afghan migrants think about the religious lifestyle in Türkiye? What are the similarities and differences with Afghanistan?
- What are the actors/agents that stand out in their religious socialization in Türkiye? What religious socialization tools/practices do they use? What kind of challenges do they face in their religious socialization?

4. Method

4.1. Study Pattern

This study employs a phenomenological study design and focuses on the experiences, lifestyles, and perceptions of a group of migrants who have encountered a phenomenon such as international migration and are endeavoring to continue their religious life within a different location, culture, and lifestyle. As a pattern of qualitative studies, phenomenological studies focus on the personal lives of individuals and groups in connection with the matter in question. The goal is to portray the meaning of the individuals and groups in relation to what they have experienced. However, “phenomenology is not only a portrayal but also an interpretational process whereby the researcher comments on the meaning of experiences which have occurred.” (Manen 1990, relayed by Cresswell 2007, 59). This study attempts to comprehend the impact of migration experience from participants’ subjective world on religious lives. Also, their religious life, socialization, and practices in Türkiye have been interpreted from the participants’ point of view.

4.2. The Study Group

The Evrenseki, Çolaklı, Yavrudoğan, Gündoğdu, and Taşağıl neighborhoods in the Manavgat district of Antalya were selected as the study area. This location was chosen because the researchers

live there, have local connections, and have long observed it. Firstly, Afghan migrants' neighborhoods, social settings, places of employment, etc., were identified. The researchers visited these places in person to carry out their observations. The periods of the observations were kept flexible to obtain more detailed information. Thus, they found the opportunity to observe the migrant groups in the different environments in which they live. The information and impressions obtained on the subject during these observations were documented by taking notes in accordance with the study's objectives. The study, which follows a phenomenological pattern, aims to understand the social reality of the socially constructed community, so the field studies are conducted over a long time. An easily accessible area was chosen to compensate for the extended period.

The neighborhoods selected as the field of the study are located within the other regional tourism locations and on either side of the D400 highway. Accommodation facilities such as all-inclusive hotels, guest houses, holiday homes, and apart-hotels can be found in the settlements to the right of the road from Antalya to Manavgat. Tourists, local tradespeople, and those with vacation homes frequent these areas. On the other hand, the other road areas host the local population and migrants who have come to the region to work. In essence, the study field comprises this region with rural characteristics. Afghan migrants primarily concentrate on agricultural production rather than the tourism sector. Thus, Afghan migrants, who are employed in cold storage facilities, greenhouse cultivation, and other agricultural activities, were determined as the research group of this study. The snowball sampling method was selected in the study to reach individuals and groups experiencing and reflecting the phenomenon under investigation (religious life, which is changing and transforming together with the experience of migration). Interviews were held between June and August 2022 with sixteen male and five female Afghans.

4.3. Data Collection Tool

As phenomenological studies aim to obtain in-depth information and make inferences on the question, in-depth interviews are frequently preferred as the data collection method. Both in-depth

interviews were held, and field observation notes were taken in this study to collect data on how individuals perceive and experience social realities. The narratives describing the migration experiences of Afghan migrants were also used as data in the study.

4.4. The Study Group

The interviews were recorded using a recording device, transcribed, and transferred onto a computer. Each interviewee's data were coded as G1, G2, and G3... to ensure their anonymity. The content analysis technique was utilized for the analysis of the data. The content analysis aims to collect similar data within the framework of certain concepts and themes and systematically structure the data so that the reader can understand and interpret them (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2005, 227). The MAXQDA program was utilized to perform these procedures. The following steps constitute the data analysis process:

- Structuring raw data and completing incomplete statements to ensure that they can be understood;
- Transferring interviewee-organized data to the MAXQDA program;
- Coding the data (that is, the selection of words or phrases, conceptualization);
- Associating the coding and conceptualization, and theming;

Classifying the findings under themes and interpreting them.

4.5. The Limitations of the Study

As each study is conducted at a particular place/time or on a particular subject, there is always the possibility of certain limitations. One of these limitations is the failure to conduct lengthy interviews for various reasons (such as language problems, unsuitable working environments, illegal employment, and the uncertainty of their migrant status). The researcher lived in the same region, which helped establish an atmosphere of trust. The researchers set a positive interaction with the interviewee, encouraging them not to be shy or embarrassed and attempting to allay their fears. The interview questions are intended to be adaptable. And the probes were designed to ensure that the potentially ambiguous questions were adequately understood.

Nonetheless, the responses were brief (single sentences). This resulted in the study process becoming longer, and the researchers felt they had reached saturation point only after interviewing 21 individuals. The interviews were conducted in Turkish. The assistance of a translator was sought for statements that could not be understood. A significant proportion of Afghan migrants are male, which explains why there are fewer women among the participants.

5. The Findings of the Study

This section of the study primarily contains information concerning the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample group and migration narratives. Then, analysis and interpretation are based on the four identified themes. Additionally, an attempt was made to present the subject matter from an integrative perspective:

5.1. The Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Group

Table 1 displays the participants' factual identities (socio-demographic and economic characteristics).

Level of Faith	Has been in Antalya for	Has been in Türkiye for	Arrived From	Nationality	Marital Status	Vocation (Türkiye)	Vocation (Country of Origin)	Academic Status	Age	Gender
Medium	9 months	9 months	Herat-Center	Turkmen	Single	Agricultural (greenhouse) worker	Baker	Primary School	24	Male
High	5 years	5 years 2 months	Faryab-Maymanah	Uzbek	Engaged	Agricultural (greenhouse) worker	Unemployed	Secondary School	22	Male
Medium	1 year	1 year	Faryab-Maymanah	Uzbek	Single	Agricultural (greenhouse) worker	Farmer	Primary School	18	Male

High	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Low
1.5 years	1.5 years	3 years	8 years	9 years	3.5 years	6 years	1.5 years	3 years
1.5 years	2 years	3 years 2 months	8 years 9 months	9 years 9 months	4 years 3 months	6 years 6 months	3 years	3 years 10 months
Kunduz	Takhar	Mazar-i Sharif	Mazar-i Sharif	Mazar-i Sharif	Takhar	Takhar	Mazar-i Sharif	Kabul
Uzbek	Tajik	Pashun	Pashun	Pashun	Uzbek	Tajik	Pashun	Tajik
Married	Married	Single	Married	Engaged	Married	Engaged	Engaged	Engaged
Agricultural (greenhouse) worker	Agricultural (greenhouse) worker	Agricultural (greenhouse) worker	Agricultural (greenhouse) supervisor	Digger operator	Housewife	Agricultural (greenhouse) worker	Agricultural (greenhouse) worker	Agricultural (greenhouse) worker
Soldier	Unemployed	Farmer	Farmer	Unemployed	Housewife	Grocery Store Clerk	Farmer	Butcher
High School	Illiterate	High School	Illiterate	Primary School	University	High School	Primary School	High School
29	31	21	24	24	26	22	27	22
Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male

Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	High	Medium	High
9 months	1.5 years	3 years	2 years	1.5 years	5 days	2 years	6 years	4 years
6 years	3 years	4 years 6 months	4 years	1.5 years	Seven years	2 years 4 months	8 years 4 months	4 years
Kapisa	Takhār	Takhār	Takhār	Samangan	Kunduz	Takhār	Takhār	Takhār
Pashun	Uzbek	Uzbek	Uzbek	Tajik	Pashun	Uzbek	Uzbek	Uzbek
Single	Married	Married	Engaged	Married	Single	Married	Married	Married
Shepherd	Housewife	Agricultural (greenhouse) worker	Agricultural (greenhouse) worker	Agricultural worker	Agricultural worker	Housewife	Agricultural (greenhouse) worker	Housewife
Unemployed	Teacher	Agricultural Engineer	Unemployed	Housewife	Machinist	Teacher	Tradesman	Housewife
Illiterate	University	University	Primary School	Illiterate	High School	University	University	Primary School
24	24	31	23	26	24	28	28	27
Male	Female	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female

Table 1. The Socio-Demographic Information of the Participants

The majority of the irregular migrants are men. When financial resources and a certain level of physical strength are required for border crossing, male migrants are known to be more active. The migrants attempt to organize themselves in the receiving country and then try to bring their families. This is also the case for Afghan migrants. Sixteen participants were male, and the average age of the sample group was 25. Statistical data concerning the socio-demographic characteristics of Afghan migrants in Türkiye has not been shared yet. However, the images in the media and our observations during the scope of the field study indicate that most Afghan migrants are young males.

When the academic status of the participants is examined, it appears that four are illiterate, six are in primary school, two are in secondary school, four are high school graduates, and five have Bachelor's degrees. It is striking that three of the female participants hold Bachelor's degrees. In this regard, it is crucial to examine whether academic standing is a determining factor in women's migration. In general, the academic standing of participants appears to be low. The participants stated that they had also received an education at a Muslim theological school. Indeed, some participants stated that their only education was at a Muslim theological school.

Examining the occupational status of participants reveals differences between their occupations in their country of origin and their target country. Before migration, the male migrants worked as baker, soldier, grocery store clerk, butcher, agricultural engineer, teacher, machinist, and merchant. After migration, they worked as a greenhouse worker, shepherd, and digger operator. The employment opportunities in the areas where the migrants reside seem to be a determining factor in their occupational mobility. On the other hand, four of the female migrants are housewives. The female participants with Bachelor's degrees who worked as teachers or course tutors in their home country state that they cannot participate in working life for various reasons, including the inability to find employment, language barriers, or issues with the equivalency of their diplomas. Ten participants are married, six are engaged, and five are single. A significant proportion of the married

reported leaving their spouses and children in Afghanistan when they emigrated.

Afghanistan is home to a large number of ethnic groups. Pashtuns are the dominant ethnic group in the country. The Tajiks, Uzbeks, Khazars, Turkmens, and other ethnic groups follow them. The ethnic identities of the participants reveal that ten are Uzbek, six are Pashtun, four are Tajik, and one is Turkmen. All of the participants identified themselves as Sunnī Muslims.

Before moving to Antalya, the participants lived in various regions of Türkiye, including Ankara, İstanbul, İzmir, Konya, Isparta, Van, Mersin, Adana, and Bolu. On the other hand, the duration of their stay in Antalya clarifies why Afghan immigrants should be evaluated as “settlers” rather than “guests.” This is confirmed by the presence of a migrant who has lived in Türkiye for nine years and is currently employed.

5.2. The Migration Narratives of the Sample Group

For a variety of reasons, such as domestic turbulence, political uncertainty, social crisis, war, ethnic pressure, and famine, people may migrate to different countries, either individually or en masse, thus becoming a part of the mobility which exceeds borders. Their narratives encompass their experiences before, during, and after migration. Who decided to migrate? What triggered or drew them to migrate? What did they experience during their migration? When considering matters such as intermediaries, the manner of the journeys, those they left behind, adaptation, separation, and the reunification of families, it is evident that each migration story is unique.

The participants were compelled to undertake a hazardous journey and abandon their homes due to the long-standing violence in Afghanistan, the Taliban’s oppression, and the prevalence of unemployment and poverty. The existence of an unsafe tremulous atmosphere seems to have removed their sense of belonging to this geographical region, which was already difficult to live in:

I went from Van to Ankara and then to Antalya. It took me approximately 9-10 days to get here from Iran. We gave one thousand dollars to the smugglers. I came from Pakistan to Iran. It was a challenging journey for us. We encountered no

police in Iran. I waited for one night in a house at the border. I came by coach from Doğubayazıt to Ankara. We bought tickets. There are many smugglers –maybe around 20– who brought us here. We had no choice but to travel on tough roads and encountered many difficulties. What could we do? They would have killed me if I had stayed there. The Taliban came and expelled us away from our homes. We had no choice. My father told me to go. I came to Iran. I am not happy with Iranians, but I am happy with Turks. I came to Türkiye, worked, earned a living, fed myself, and even sent money to my children. Thank you. You are our brothers. We will not do any wrong to you. (G4, Male, Uzbek)

The migration narratives indicate that the experience of crossing borders led the migrants first to Pakistan and then to Iran. Both of these countries serve as transit points for migrants. Afghan migrants, unable to access adequate economic resources, migrated to Türkiye from this geographical region after being oppressed and frozen out in these countries, labeled as “unwanted guests” and factionalized. Even though their final target is not Türkiye, they mostly end up in Türkiye due to their difficulties, the high fees they pay to traffickers, or because they have been subjected to violence during their travels. Türkiye seems to serve as a “buffer zone” between the East and West for refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrant groups.

I worked in a grocery store when I was in Afghanistan. I was earning around 5000 a month in our own money. Ours is a very large family. That is approximately ten people... We recognized that the money we were earning was insufficient. It was acceptable when my brothers and sisters were young... But after a few years, it was no longer sufficient. Life was becoming increasingly challenging. We are still young. We also wanted to get married, buy our own homes, and so on. Then, I said to myself, “That will not occur here.” So we had no other option. I came to Iran and worked there for two to three years. I was also able to send some money from there. We bought some land in Afghanistan and had a house built; we could not complete it. Then the value of the Iranian currency decreased too. So, I moved on to Türkiye. Thus, I

came here, now work here, and send money to my family. But life is also difficult here now because the value of the currency has also declined here. I am not considering any other countries, because going to Europe is very difficult. If we wanted to go through illegal means, they would charge us 8,000 Euros. Where will we obtain so much cash? I hope we will be able to return to our native country. (G10, Male, Tajik)

Located at the center of the Eastern Mediterranean route of migration, Türkiye frequently experiences an influx of migration from the Middle East and Central Asia. Moreover, migrants do not view Türkiye as a transit country in recent years. The participants' responses indicate that they see Türkiye not only as a transit but also as a destination country. Some migrants use Iran and Pakistan only as transit points but aim to reach Türkiye directly through their social relationships and networks. From their accounts, it appears that the decision to migrate was made by their families. Due to the high risk and expense of the journey, men attempt migration first, followed by their families:

My husband came to Türkiye first. His Turkish boss invited him. I was invited a year later, but I was pregnant, so I could not come then. We had to arrive through illegal means later. My father sent me as far as Iran. I arrived in Iran with my uncles. I had given birth four months earlier. My older brother picked me up from Iran and brought me to Türkiye. Then my husband picked me up in Van, and we flew to Ankara... (G21, Female, Uzbek)

According to the migrants' narratives, the decision to migrate is influenced by motivating or triggering factors than by factors that make the receiving country appealing (that is, the war, conflicts, endeavoring to escape oppression, and the desire to continue their existence, rather than economic expectations). Migrants who can afford the cost of migration and accept the risks of a difficult and uncertain journey intend to use the money they earn to support the families they have left behind and eventually bring their families to Türkiye. The presence of social networks and the ability of traffickers to operate without problems in this region also contribute

to the continuation of the migration movement and the migration flow.

5.3. The Religious Lives of Afghans Before Migration

The practice of a religion may vary depending on the circumstances of a given time and place. In other words, even though the essence of religion possesses the same content, the practice of religious beliefs may vary to a different extent from person to person, community to community, culture to culture, and region to region. Therefore, religious practices may also change to some extent due to a cross-border move, which profoundly impacts an individual’s biography and changes their lifestyle. Participants were asked “how their religious life was before migration” to determine the direction and degree of this possible change.

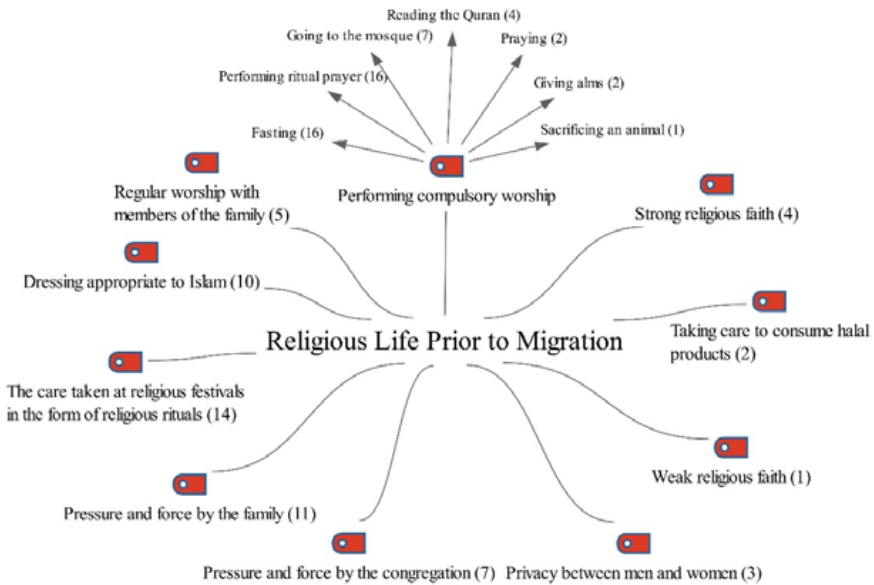


Figure 1. A Hierarchical Code and Sub-Code Model Concerning Religious Life Before Migration

The majority of respondents who claim to be devout and have a solid religious identity define this by their capacity to perform their required worship. The participants report performing their religious duties, such as “fasting,” “performing the ritual prayer,” and “going

to the mosque” more intensely before migration. They also performed other compulsory religious duties, such as “reading the Qur’ān,” “praying,” “giving alms,” and “sacrificing an animal for God”:

Religion is highly significant in Afghanistan. For instance, I performed the ritual prayer five times a day there. I attended the mosque, and I fasted too. I was not working when I was there anyway. I was constantly at the mosque or the theological school. No one told me to perform the ritual prayer – I was doing it anyway. (G13, Male, Pashtun)

I performed the ritual prayer five times a day and fasted. I would fulfill my religious duties. (G9, Female, Uzbek)

I was attending the theological school there. I read the Qur’ān. We would give alms. For instance, we owned a vineyard and would give alms from what we made there. The tradesmen would close their shops at Friday prayer time. We would go to pray even if we were working. (G2, Male, Uzbek)

The participants also report differences in their practices during special religious days, nights, and festivals. For instance, Afghan migrants state there was greater enthusiasm for holy days, nights, and festivals in their native country. People of all ages and social strata acted in a particular way. However, after migration, they could no longer feel this enthusiasm and importance in Türkiye. They also note differences between Türkiye and Afghanistan in the rituals observed during religious festivals (such as the sacrifice of animals and distribution of meat).

The Ramadan Feast and the Festival of the Sacrifice were more vehement there. We gave all our meat to the poor at the Festival of the Sacrifice. None of that exists here... We run out of meat on the first day of the festival. I have resided here for seven years. We never experienced anything like that in our family in Afghanistan. We usually sacrificed three or four animals in our family. Here, meat is expensive, and we are only able to consume meat a few times per month. I never had a festival here when someone gave me meat. (G18, Male, Pashtun)

The people that attend the festivals in Afghanistan are very happy. The three days are delightful, and everyone feels very happy. Family members come and go. Here, it is no different from a normal day. In Afghanistan, the sacrificed animal is divided into three shares. Here, our neighbor has a daughter. She came to us. We sliced the meat and stored it all in the freezer. I asked myself, "How is this possible?" It is a scandal for us. (G19, Female, Uzbek)

Childhood lays the groundwork for a lifelong devotion to traditional worship and entrenched belief patterns. Thus, family members are the primary religious socialization agents for children. A child whose religious education began and developed within the family environment acquires a system of religious beliefs that becomes increasingly permanent over time. Religious worship strengthens it further, ensuring that the individual develops a religious sense of belonging. The participants who state that they possessed a strong religious identity and that they were also firmly religious provide evidence of this through their living environment, the teachings of their family members, and their way of life:

I formerly felt strongly Muslim. But I do not exactly so here. I lived in the center of Kunduz. My father used to describe religion to us. He would tell me to perform my ritual prayers and fast. He would not force me, but they would fast and perform their ritual prayers. We were young and witnessed it from them, so we also learned it. If the parents are religious, the child will be religious as well; otherwise, the children will not perform their prayers either. My parents performed their ritual prayers five times daily, and they fasted. They would advise us to do the same too. (G18, Male, Pashtun)

In contrast to the participants who assess their lives before migration positively and report having a strong religious identity and belief, some participants describe their religious life in Afghanistan negatively. According to these participants, religious life in Afghanistan is one of the limitations, restrictions, oppression, and violence by the government, the community, and the family. This suggests that these people practiced religion more out of fear and to avoid oppression and being ostracized rather than out of a

feeling of religious belonging. These participants had no solid religious identity previously. They report a decline in their religious practice after the migration due to the lack of social pressure:

I used to perform the ritual prayer five times daily but would sometimes miss one and do it later. I would attend the mosque and listen to the sermons of the congregation, but I would not go to their gatherings. My parents would force me to go to the mosque. This is not something that you can do by force. My father would threaten to beat me. I do not think that is right. (G3, Male, Uzbek)

For instance, our fathers would compel us to attend ritual prayers. If you are in the shop, they hit you with a stick and beat you, forcing you to go to the mosque and pray. If you do not go, someone else tells you they did not see you at the mosque. They beat you too. That is too much. If Türkiye becomes like Afghanistan, too, it will be very difficult. (G5, Male, Tajik)

Another factor that impacts the religious lives of migrants is the relationships and interactions in religious communities. They state that the religious communities and ruling authorities in Afghanistan (primarily the Taliban) keep religious life under control and employ practices of violence, oppression, force, and punishment to ensure the performance of worship:

Before they arrived, I was doing things how I wanted to. I was already performing my ritual prayers and fasting. No one interfered. I would go to the mosque. But after attaining power, they compelled everyone. People reacted negatively, making it more difficult to do. (G4, Male, Uzbek)

I always used to go to the mosque. The mosques were filled to the brim. If you had not attended the mosque, your friend would have forced you to do so. Now the Taliban maintains attendance lists at the mosques and punishes those who do not attend. (G16, Male, Uzbek)

It is known that religion has written and oral doctrines and rules. Establishing a religious organization and sustaining its consistency are influenced by values as well. Religion eventually becomes an

effective mechanism for controlling and supervising communities. Religious orders and prohibitions can be used as a point of reference in constructing a community based on certain limits and restrictions –or in other words, oppression– on social life in particular. Individuals in such a situation may react by “adapting” or “assenting” to the existing situation or by “withstanding” it or “running away” from it. Afghan migrants state that religion impacted their social life, principally concerning their clothes, over and above performing their compulsory worship. Dressing according to Islamic principles is subject to strict rules and sanctions in Afghanistan. For men and women Islamic clothing constitutes covering up, wearing a veil, and concealment. Within this scope, the women state that they were required to wear long dresses and wear a *ḥijāb* or a *burqab*, and the men say they could not wear clothing such as shorts there (in Afghanistan):

It would not matter if you were covered up before the Taliban. That was not a problem in urban areas. After the Taliban’s arrival, everyone must cover themselves. They must wear the *ḥijāb*. (G8, Male, Pashtun)

Our arms were not uncovered anyway, there. Our sleeves were long. After the Taliban, even going to the market requires a male companion. If he is not present, they will beat you. (G14, Female, Uzbek)

Other indicators of an Islamic lifestyle include privacy, the separation of men and women, and the consumption of halal products. These sensitivities can also transform with the migration process:

I did not use to dress like this in Afghanistan. If I had dressed as I do here, no one would have said anything in Herat. 20% wear trousers. In the center, the females are also covered normally. We sit separately if there are people we do not know, but we sit together with guests if we know everyone. (G1, Male, Turkmen)

The changes in performing their compulsory worship appear at the top of the differences in religious life and practices expressed here (in Türkiye) and there (in Afghanistan). This propounds the acceptance of a new religious order that individuals have

constructed in their semantic world in line with the place to which they have migrated and the conditions they encounter there. It is also clear that Afghan migrants have a strong religious identity. This cannot be explained solely by the deterministic influence of religion on the social life of their native country. Having a traditional structure and strong family ties also strengthens their religious identity and increases their level of religiosity. Those who report living according to their religious beliefs and principles before migration also state that holy days, nights, and festivals were celebrated more intensely and specifically there (in Afghanistan).

On the other hand, they cite force and violence as negative aspects of their religious lives before migration. Numerous religious orders and restrictions inevitably became mandatory in their daily lives due to the determining influence of religion on communal life. Religion, which evolves into a mechanism of control and supervision over the community, may also provide power and authority to structures such as the Taliban. Women are affected more by this situation than others. Some participants who rate the impact of religion on social life in Afghanistan as unfavorable view the religious life in Türkiye as more favorable. Certain restrictions on clothing in Afghanistan, especially for women, seem to make Türkiye more attractive to them.

5.4. The Religious Lives of Afghans After Migration

The act of migration creates significant changes and trouble areas for individuals and locations. Different structures and systems may emerge according to the cause, scale, and process of migration from the perspective of the place left behind and the location of the migrants' final destination. The economic, social, political, and cultural consequences of migration may affect the community and individuals. Some issues may arise in the receiving country, such as the process of cohesion of the migrants, the acceptance of the migrants by the local population, the spiritual, social, and cultural values of the region where the migrants have moved, and the integration and social cohesion of the migrants with the existing population.

Like other cultural elements, religion is also one of the burdens migrants bring to their new country" (Özmen 2012, 77). At this

point, it becomes necessary to examine the extent to which migrants have been able to preserve their religious identities and religious practices. To find out the changes in their religious feelings, thoughts, lives, and practices, participants were asked, “How are your religious lives following migration?”

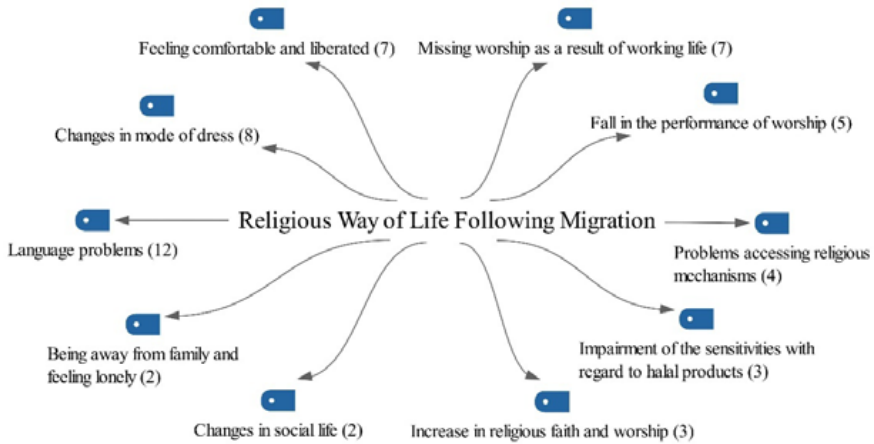


Figure 2. A Hierarchical Code and Sub-Code Model Related to Religious Life Following Migration

According to the participants, the “language barrier” is the most crucial problem they face in their religious lives after migration. Insufficient knowledge of the Turkish language negatively impacts personal communication and, consequently, social lives. On the other hand, language is not merely a means of communication; it also transmits material and spiritual values, which affects religious life. The language barrier may cause additional problems, such as the inability to communicate sufficiently at religious venues, receive religious education, take advantage of religion-related services, and understand religious leaders’ discourse, statements, and prayers. The participants report developing strategies to overcome these issues, such as going to sacred venues more often and spending more time with the congregations there. This effort is likely to help migrants integrate into the local population and develop an adaptation behavior.

I was in Istanbul at first. I could not understand the sermon. I arrived during Ramadan, three years before this festival. I

prayed there, in Istanbul, during the Ramadan Feast. That is to say, I went, prayed, and left. I did not understand the language. I sat there and did not understand what they were saying. (G6, Male, Pashtun)

Religion was a major issue. You feel embarrassed. You do not understand the imam's words during the sermon. You cannot read the religious regulations here. We did not understand the language, so I thought to myself, "If you go to the mosque more frequently and listen more, you can learn the language faster." (G16, Male, Uzbek)

The participants cite their "inability to perform their worship" as another obstacle they faced in their religious lives after migration. Possessing the identity of a refugee or migrant may entail an insecure existence among the domestic population. Afghan migrants, who are a part of the domestic population's labor force but are employed without security, are defenseless and, therefore, subject to their employers' initiative. The participants who state this is also reflected in their religious lives report difficulty performing their worship. Some participants even had to change or quit their jobs to fulfill their religious duties:

I left my job twice because of this. For instance, sometimes Fridays were very busy, and I had to perform my ritual prayer at work; I could not go to the mosque. But I left my job in Akseki because of that. I was told, "We have much work. If you fast, this will affect it." So I asked for my wages and left. That sort of thing cannot happen in our country. (G6, Male, Pashtun)

There is work to do here, so I cannot go. I cannot leave here when there is work to be done. If I left and something were stolen, I would be responsible. I would have to answer for it. (G2, Male, Uzbek)

A significant number of the individuals in the sample group work in the agriculture sector, including fields, greenhouses, and cold storage facilities. Therefore, their workplaces may be some distance from town centers and, consequently, places of worship such as mosques. Some participants cite this as the reason why they have not been able to attend a mosque for a long time. Thus, "access to a

sacred venue” can be mentioned as another issue that participants face daily:

The mosque is far from here. I have not been to a mosque for a year. (G3, Male, Uzbek)

We do not go to the mosque anyway. We do not attend Friday prayers because the mosque is too far away. (G11, Male, Pashtun)

Some participants state that they could not perform their worship due to the conditions of the domestic population, and their motivation for this was reduced. Their interest in human matters had increased, and they behaved sinfully due to their concerns about “adapting to the current conditions.” Some participants also report feeling shame and regret because of this:

No ritual prayers or fasting are practiced here. Everything has been lost. You get up at five o'clock in the morning. Isn't it dark? And you do not know when you will finish work in the evening either. (G7, Male, Pashtun)

I came here, and we can sometimes perform our ritual prayers three times a day, sometimes even less. I always managed to fast, though. I even managed to pray five times a day during Ramadan. But after that, the ritual prayer changes according to the circumstances. The reason is not the work either. We do not have that much work. It is simply laziness. (G11, Male, Pashtun)

Some Afghan immigrants have abandoned practices aimed at retaining their religious identities and adopted local cuisine. By distancing themselves from their religious identities, they have embraced local consumption habits and adjusted to their cultural values. Thus, they become, in a sense, a part of secular social life. This shock to their world of belief inevitably leads migrants to question their lifestyle. On the other hand, this situation of some participants is interpreted as an act of cohesion with the local community, thus legitimizing their lifestyle in a way. For instance, some participants who were highly sensitive to alcohol consumption before migration now view this as an act of cohesion:

I drink alcohol here. It would have been better if we had not formed this habit. But what can we do; it happened. (G8, Male, Pashtun)

Does a man consume raki there, in Afghanistan? Does he pour it into a glass? We do not drink from that glass. We break it. That is, no one talks to this man. A man is drinking raki from a glass here. I drink water from this glass. (Laughs) That is exactly what has happened to us here. It has been three years. We have become more relaxed, inevitably. (G12, Male, Tajik)

Some Afghan migrants attempt to preserve their religious characteristics. Some participants report fighting for existence within the local community after migration. They adhered more closely to their religious beliefs, prayed, resorted to God, and performed their other worship and rituals more frequently due to experiencing “mental and spiritual problems” and “feeling a regression in the spiritual sense.” Possible causes for these issues include their longing for their home country, family, and social surroundings, loneliness, and the misfortune they had suffered during this period. This can be interpreted as the behavior of a typical community of migrants designed to preserve their identity, culture, beliefs, etc., within the local community:

I began to worship more after coming to Türkiye. I feel alone here, as I am far away from my family. So, I resort to God. I pray more and give thanks for what I have today. We are illegal immigrants here. If we are apprehended, we will be immediately deported. Praying is our only hope. (G9, Female, Uzbek)

I pray more here. You have gone through great difficulties to reach here. Some people call us foreigners when we do not speak Turkish. The statements about the Afghans upset and sadden us. That is why I have grown much closer to God. (G21, Female, Uzbek)

Clothing is another indicator of the change and transformation that also concerns the religious lives of Afghan migrants. The migrants' clothing contains traditional and cultural aspects and is a deterministic parameter of their religious identity. It has also changed after migration:

Nothing has changed with my worship, but my dressing style has obviously changed. I used to wear long clothes there; I had to because that is what the elders and the family desired. They do not want fine attire. They do not wish your body to be visible. They want thick, long dresses. We used to wear long dresses. But I wear shorter ones here. There is no problem with that. (G14, Female, Uzbek)

There is perpetual fear there. For instance, I cannot go out in Afghanistan in the clothes I wear here. They would look at us and scold us. But, if we wear our native attire here, the people here look at us and think we are strange. We have to adapt wherever we go. We have no choice. (G16, Male, Uzbek)

Statements of the participants reveal that Afghan migrants behave in a way that aims to preserve their religious characteristics while also attempting to adapt to the established order. Some individuals who continue their religious practices and adhere to their beliefs report changing attire styles, both because they are no longer subject to the impositions of an authoritarian regime and have fitted in with the local population. When the state restrictions in public areas and pressures from family, the religious community, and society on women in Afghanistan are considered, the situation in Türkiye can be described as a process of liberation, especially for Afghan migrant women. On the other hand, ostracizing and estrangement are understood to impact Afghan women's attire. Field observations also confirm this. It can be observed that their clothing, color choices, and even the manner they wear their headscarves are identical to those of local women. Some participants who want to "bring up their children like Turks" reveal that they altered their children's attire to fit the current conditions. The Afghan women who want to be "accepted" by the local community say they only wear their indigenous clothing among themselves during religious festivals, special days, and nights.

The participants' sense of peace and freedom after the migration is correlated with their attire and affects the other aspects of their social lives. Indeed, this is also the primary factor that prevents them from returning to Afghanistan: escaping from an authoritarian and

oppressive atmosphere to a democratic and peaceful one! Female participants, in particular, referred to the difficulties of being women in Afghanistan. The female migrants, previously excluded from public areas and treated as second-class citizens in Afghanistan, view the ability to go out independently and communicate with the other community members as a gain. On the other hand, the male migrants also share the emphasis on an atmosphere of peace and freedom:

I am very comfortable here, thankfully. I can take my children and go to the park. We could not live there if we returned now. We have got used to living here. (G14, Female, Uzbek)

If I returned there in this state, with tattoos on my arms, they would cut off my arms... My family was very angry when they saw the tattoos. Afghans do not get tattoos very much. Here, however, we desire to be like the Turks. If we return to Afghanistan, we will miss the relaxed atmosphere here. (G8, Male, Pashtun)

I never spoke to girls like this in Afghanistan. But I am here in Türkiye, and I am talking to you. There, if a girl were to arrive, I would have to leave. (G12, Male, Tajik)

Afghan migrants' religious lives, feelings, and thoughts have undergone significant changes and transformations after their migration. The female migrants are more careful to preserve their religious characteristics than the male migrants. Women's experiences during and after migration have prompted them to adhere more closely to their beliefs and intensify their worship. On the other hand, the male participants have attempted to conform to the religious lives of the local population and to construct a new religious life for themselves. Male migrants can be said to have more opportunities to integrate with the existing community and develop cohesion behaviors due to their greater presence in public life.

In contrast to Afghanistan, where religion dominates the social structure and relationships, the presence of a secular social order in Türkiye has increased the visibility of migrant women in public life. The portrayal of Turkey as a more peaceful and liberated country in migrant women's statements confirms this. On the other hand, some participants view this negatively, saying that it leads to

degeneration, a departure from spiritual values, identity, and culture.

5.5. The Religious Socialization Practices of Afghan Migrants

Migration encompasses not only a location change but also the process of acquiring the cultural values, semantic world, and religious codes of the location to which the migrant moves. Integration with the local community, the development of cohesion behavior, and the generation of communication and interaction rely heavily on the practices of religious socialization. In addition, contact with religious groups and institutions can serve as a “buffer mechanism” for the individual, compensating for the compelling effects of migration. The study examined the relationship between religious socialization and cohesion, asking Afghan migrants, “What are the practices of religious socialization after migration?”

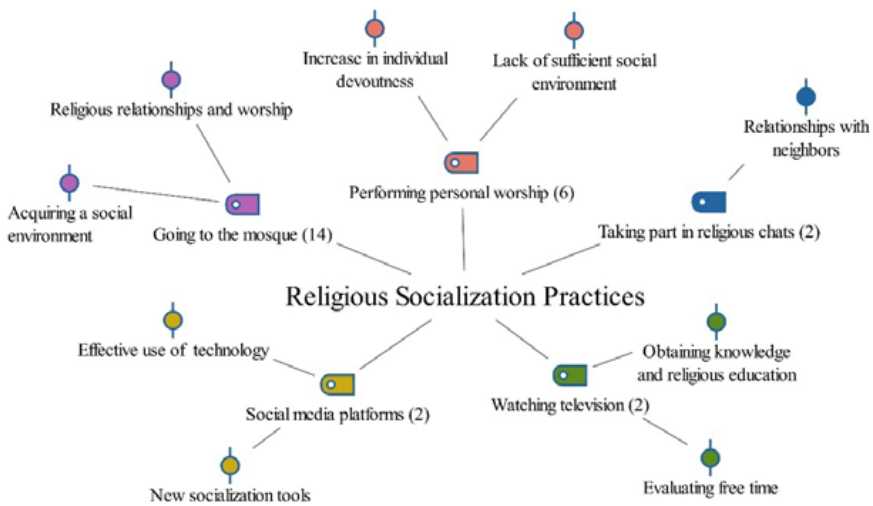


Figure 3. Code– Sub-Code Parts Model Related to Religious Socialization Practices

Afghan migrants view mosques not only as places of prayer but also as sites for their religious socialization practices. Mosques are evaluated as venues for establishing communication and interacting with the local community for Afghan migrants, who are subjected to new socialization practices. Thus, mosques are special places for the two groups to come together and gain mutual understanding. In other words, this is the practice of acquiring a social environment,

refreshing religious knowledge, preserving religious beliefs, and developing cohesion behavior. Male migrants utilize mosques more frequently than female ones, which enables male migrants to overcome their integration processes more easily and quickly. It is also clear that religious socialization facilitates acquiring the local community's language. Considering the opportunities offered by structures such as mosques to migrant individuals during their process of "transition," one can refer to this process as "structural cohesion" (Yaralıoğlu and Güngör 2020, 153).

I do not know any associations, but I attended the mosques in previous workplaces. I joined the congregation and met its members. I examined carefully whether our religious practices differed in any way. (G3, Male, Uzbek)

Since we are alone here, attending the mosque feels good. (G10, Male, Tajik)

I attend the mosque to socialize. I have met lots of people older than me and my age there. I have made many friends within the congregation. Everyone is treated equally in mosques. No one is better than anyone else. No one cares whether you are Afghan, Turkish, or Kurdish. Enter and leave as you please. It is the house of God. (G20, Male, Uzbek)

Some participants have not been able to find sufficient opportunities for religious socialization after migration. Those who could not attend mosques reported worshipping at home. Language barriers, ignorance of religious institutions and organizations, and issues with access to sacred sites (mosques) have been cited as obstacles to religious socialization. From this point, one can argue that the unity of the congregation in Afghanistan has been replaced by an "individualistic" and "introverted" perception of religion in Türkiye.

I am unable to attend the mosque, but I do pray. (G1, Male, Turkmen)

I cannot attend the mosque at the moment, but I worship on my own. (G2, Male, Uzbek)

I am unable to attend the mosque. I do not know any associations. My husband and I pray at home. (G17, Female, Tajik)

The restricted appearance of migrant women in the public arena also affects their (religious) socialization. However, migrant women can achieve social communication and interaction through active neighborly relationships. Afghan women can establish their own “habitus” in the local community by forming neighborly relationships with local or migrant women. Neighbors support their religious socialization and impact their integration and cohesion patterns. Afghan women state that they meet with their neighbors regularly and participate in activities such as reading the Qurʾān, holding Islamic memorial services, and engaging in religious conversations.

The neighbor women gather in the building for religious conversations, but I cannot understand the language. That is a significant obstacle. You feel inevitably ashamed. (G9, Female, Uzbek)

We hold memorial services with the Turkish and Afghan neighbors. It is fruitful, and it is at home. We commemorate God. (G21, Female, Uzbek)

The actors and practices involved in religious socialization have become increasingly diverse in recent years. The opportunities of the digital age, in particular, also impact the religious arena, and people can obtain their religious knowledge and practices from digital religious platforms. By transferring religious culture to the digital environment and presenting it to their liking, “individuals and groups confirm their virtual presence in the online environment, as well as their existence in the offline world” (Dereli 2019). Some participants support religious socialization by benefiting from traditional, new, and social media opportunities:

Social media and the mosque. I watch religious videos of Turkish imams. (G7, Male, Pashtun)

I watch television. We have some imams who are great scholars. (G15, Male, Uzbek)

The actors and practices that support the religious socialization of Afghan migrants vary according to gender. Male migrants work in the labor market, are more visible than women in the public arena, and can use prayer venues, such as mosques, more frequently, influencing their religious socialization. While performing their worship, male migrants meet the congregation at mosques, have opportunities to chat, meet their need for religious knowledge, and at the same time, contribute to their social cohesion processes (acquiring a social environment and learning the language of the local community). In contrast to male migrants, female migrants retain fewer opportunities for (religious) socialization, integration, and cohesion because their lives are more restricted and limited to their private lives (homes). Female migrants have no contact with religious institutions or groups and perform their worship at home. As a result, their piety is experienced more on a personal level. Some female participants attempt to overcome their limited public appearance through their relationships with their neighbors. They can integrate with the local community in this way while simultaneously supporting their religious socialization. In their present conditions, the participants seem to benefit from the opportunities of digital platforms and utilize media tools in their religious socialization practices. However, the effects of this type of religious socialization on integration and cohesion are unknown.

5.6. The Religious Life in Türkiye as Perceived by Afghan Migrants

The migrants, who participate in a new socialization experience with migration, attempt to adapt to the social order of the local community in this way. It can take time for them to accept and interiorize the degrees of difference between their identity, culture, beliefs, and world of values and those of the local community. Their shared religious beliefs can strengthen the processes of migrants' integration and cohesion during the transition period. On the other hand, the differences in the religious ways of life, as well as other differences, between the two countries can harm the cohesion process and lead to the migrants questioning and criticizing their own religious lives or those of the local community. Researchers asked Afghan immigrants, "What are your views on religious life in

Turkey?" to reveal the differences and understand how immigrants interpret these differences.

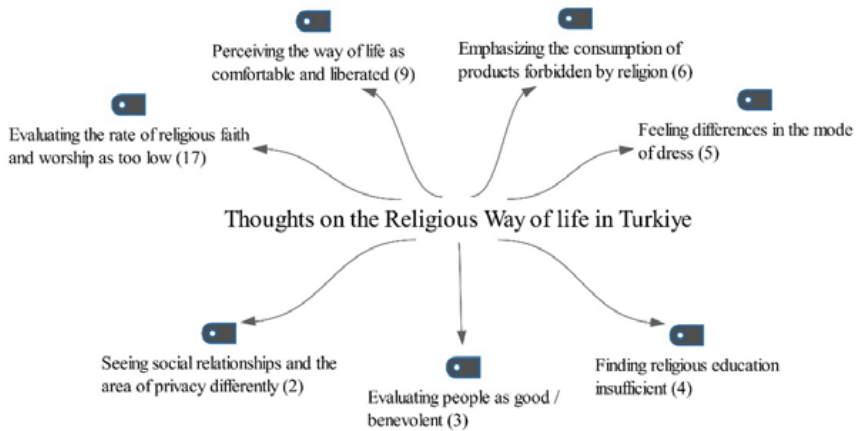


Figure 4. Hierarchical Code – Sub-Code Model Concerning the Opinions about the Religious Way of Life in Türkiye

5.3. The Migration Narratives of the Sample Group

The participants made a series of observations concerning the religious lives of the Turks. According to the participants, Turkish religious identities and sense of belonging are weak, and Turks are not religious and do not even perform their compulsory religious duties.

People experience their religions freely here. Women who want to wear a veil do so, and those who do not wish do not wear it. Everyone experiences religion according to their own beliefs and wishes. It is acceptable if it is done in moderation, but young people are too liberated. They say, “no one interferes with anyone else,” but is that desirable? If someone does not tell himself the truth, we are responsible for him too. He will be proceeding toward the flames in front of our eyes. It is our duty as brothers to tell him to stop. For instance, wouldn't you tell me to stop if I were to make myself ill here? They do not say anything here, but if society is corrupted,

how will you restore it? My father was a learned man. This is how he used to describe the state of Islamic lands. We say that Türkiye is our savior. If corruption is to occur, then Türkiye is the last place that should be corrupted. Isn't that so? (G9, Female, Uzbek)

Some participants emphasize that Türkiye is a more free country than Afghanistan, but this freedom negatively affects aspects of religious life. Despite their perception of the religious life in Afghanistan as oppression and violence and the religious life in Türkiye as peace and freedom, they criticize religiosity in Türkiye regarding protecting religious personalities and fulfilling religious practices. While they have no hopes for the situation in Afghanistan, they have expectations for Türkiye, which confirms that. The participants, in particular, criticize Türkiye for the lifestyle and religious lives of the youth. However, their criticisms seem to be based on the information obtained from social media rather than their social circles, which is another issue that needs further investigation.

The participants evaluate the religious life in Türkiye based primarily on the country's lifestyle and consumption habits. They take a critical stance on various issues, including the sale of alcoholic beverages, the use of alcohol by Turks, the consumption of products that should be forbidden, the relationships between men and women, the invasion of privacy, and especially the attire of young people. Such an assessment is understandable among individuals raised in an authoritarian and oppressive social order where regulations and restrictions are strictly and harshly enforced.

Another issue that is wrong in Türkiye is the sale of alcohol. We are Muslims. This is wrong. (G2, Male, Uzbek)

For instance, there are numerous differences between Afghan and Turkish youth. I observed a lot of things at my university. Approximately 80% of the students in our class had boyfriends or girlfriends. Consider it in this light. (G20, Male, Uzbek)

Another expectation of the participants for their religious life in Türkiye includes "religious education" and "religious services." After evaluating the religious education and services in Afghanistan, some

participants claim that the situation in Türkiye is insufficient. They state that religious socialization supported primarily by the family, as well as the mosque and religious schools, is not present in Türkiye. Children do not receive religious education, and religious instruction is insufficient within the education system. Some participants even report enrolling their children in institutions that provide religious education. They believe that religious schools should also be present in Türkiye. In addition, each participant states that they are unaffiliated with any religious foundations, institutions, or organizations in Türkiye. They receive no aid and do not participate in any events of these institutions:

The Qurʾān is not taught in the school here, but that is not the case in Afghanistan. We have lessons on the Qurʾān in the school, of course. And I am not referring to religious schools. I receive lessons on the Qurʾān every day. We also study the languages of Pashtun and Farsi. I attended the mosque early every morning until the age of 14-15. Every child in the village attends the mosque. We read the Qurʾān until 07:30 - 08:00... I look at the situation here. For me, 90% of the children here are zero. But, in Afghanistan, they attend religious school until the age of 15. My brother is 14, and he is a *ḥāfiẓ* of the Qurʾān. He is continuing to learn now. (G6, Male, Pashtun)

I am currently teaching a little bit at home. I would send my kids to a religious school if one existed. My son attends Friday prayers with his father. We do whatever the laws of Türkiye require. I will let my daughter live as do Turkish girls... They have their own rights and regulations. It is the same in the Qurʾān as well, though. It is what God said. I will express what I believe. She is free to do it or not at her discretion. I will guide her as her mother. (G14, Female, Uzbek)

Some participants view the Turks' religious life favorably. According to the participants who describe the religious life in Türkiye as comfortable and free, a spirituality founded on freedom is more valuable than a religious way based on oppression, violence, and fear. Their statements about the Turks include that they have "pure hearts," they are "good people," and they are "benevolent," which could be seen as a result of their experiences

in Afghanistan and during their migration. Some participants embrace the lifestyle in Türkiye, evaluating the devoutness in Türkiye as individual devoutness and finding it pleasant.

I like some of the things my Turkish friends do. For example, there is a wedding, a mosque, and a restaurant here. No one interferes in anyone else's life. For me, religion cannot be forced. People run away from that. I have seen here that fathers take their sons by the arms and lead them into the congregation... No one stares at women who do not cover their heads here. I do not look at them, nor does anyone else. In our country, if these girls were to pass by, everyone would stare. That is not the case here. What is important is to have a pure heart. I would be comfortable here if I brought my wife and children over. It is nice that people are liberated. (G4, Male, Uzbek)

I think the Turks have a pure heart. They help any children or poor people they see here. That is not the case in Afghanistan. (G15, Male, Uzbek)

When the religious life and the degree of devoutness among Turks are evaluated from the point of view of Afghan migrants, significant differences appear. Afghan migrants view their religious characteristics and devoutness as stronger than that of the Turks. Some participants state that religious life in Türkiye functions more on an individual level and value the country's peaceful and free atmosphere. In contrast, some participants evaluate this as a lifestyle damaging religion and a degenerated or corrupted culture. They note deep-rooted differences in dress, the relationships between men and women, and perceptions of privacy. On the other hand, some participants, especially those who have lived in Türkiye for a long time, have integrated and adopted its religious life, lifestyle, and consumption habits after migration. Their beliefs and spiritual world are more flexible and adaptable.

Conclusion and Discussion

Migration encompasses not only the physical act of moving from one location to another or the movement of bodies and objects but also the process by which identities, cultures, beliefs, and values

move from one place to another. The issue is the togetherness of migrants and the host country's native population. The story emanating from this togetherness (integration, acceptance, cohesion or exclusion, alienation, and discrimination) is determined by the relationship that allows the two communities to understand each other.

With the experience of cross-border migration, migrants who find themselves within a new location, culture, lifestyle, etc., are unavoidably forced to adapt to the order of the local community. For this reason, human movement can bring significant changes in the world of migrants who are part of the continuity of daily life. Otherwise, if migrants bring their culture, lifestyle, and so on from their home country to the receiving country as is, they will be marginalized, excluded, and isolated, which can lead to a dispute over their position.

The religious lives, identities, feelings, and thoughts of Afghan migrants have undergone a distinct transformation. This change and transformation can be evaluated in terms of integration, the development of cohesion behavior, and community acceptance and approval. The changes in the performance of compulsory worship are the most notable aspects of the religious life and practices here (in Türkiye) and there (in Afghanistan). Previously possessing a solid religious character, living according to their religious beliefs and principles, and leading an intensive worship life, some migrants said this changed upon migration. While some felt uncomfortable and regretful because of this, others have embraced this "new" lifestyle.

Some participants define Afghanistan's religious life as restrictive, prohibitive, authoritarian, oppressive, and propped up by violence. They describe the religious life in Türkiye as comfortable, peaceful, and free. While some participants evaluate it as a move away from religion and toward a degenerate lifestyle, others see it as an opportunity. Considering the restrictions and prohibitions on women's public appearance in Afghanistan and the pressure exerted by the family, congregation, and society, the situation in Turkey may be viewed as an emancipation opportunity, particularly for Afghan women. This is regarded as valuable not just in

connection with women's dress but also their ability to participate in the public sphere, establish employment relationships, and benefit from educational opportunities. On the other hand, female participants are more diligent than their male counterparts in preserving their religious characteristics. The study by Yakut (2019) that examined the thoughts of Syrian migrant students on migration, religion, and integration revealed that the female students were more attached to their religion and had a more intensive life of worship than their male counterparts.

Some individuals may feel they are losing their identity, culture, and spiritual values due to this process of change and transformation that accompanies the settlement of migrants in the receiving country. Therefore, they may embrace their religion more profoundly and pursue a more intense life of worship to preserve what they have (identity, culture, values, and so on). And they attribute significance to the process they experience (the things that have happened to them, being away from their home country, loneliness, exclusion, discrimination, being an unwanted subject, etc.). According to a study conducted by Özcan (2019) using Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghan migrants as the study group, migrants embraced religion more closely and performed practices aimed at increasing their religious motivations, such as resorting to the creator and worshipping more frequently to cope with the migration process.

The male migrants seem more involved in the public sphere (for instance, mosque attendance, employment, ability to develop social networks, etc.) than their female counterparts. That gives them more opportunities to develop patterns of integration and cohesion with the local community. According to Coşkun and Çetin (2022), Afghan males are more engaged than their female counterparts in employment, venue utilization, cultural contact, and social relations. Coşkun and Çetin provide various explanations for why women encounter more challenges in cultural integration than men. First of all, women do not participate in the social arena. They stay in their homes and rarely visit other places. They have no or insufficient means to overcome the language barrier.

It is evident that the "language barrier" is the primary challenge Afghan migrants face in their religious lives. Despite their effort to

learn the language, the participants encounter difficulties, particularly in mosques, due to their inadequate Turkish language skills. As stated by some other studies (Erkan 2016; Yıldırım and Dinler 2021; Kan and Köroğlu 2022), the language barrier is a crucial difficulty in migrants' social integration and cohesion. According to Selvitopu and Gün (2020), similar cultural attributes, language, and ethnic and religious roots positively impact the stress, cohesion, and integration with the social environment of the migrants. These similarities play an essential role in their choice to come to Türkiye and facilitate the migration. Studies (Yeler 2021) indicate that, as a result, no great social discord or conflicts have been observed, nor have circumstances such as alienation, exclusion, and labeling occurred.

Another issue that stands out in the study is insufficient access to sacred venues. Some participants state that they cannot obtain permission from their employers to attend the mosque because their workplaces are too far away or because they are illegally employed. Diehl and Koenig also found similar results in their study (2013). The study on participation in religion and piety of the Turkish Muslims and Polish Catholics who migrated to Germany revealed that the rate of participation in worship decreased after migration among both groups. Similarly, Khoudia's study (2022) discovered a decline in the religious beliefs and practices of migrants in the Netherlands.

According to gender, the actors and practices supporting the religious socialization of Afghan migrants vary. Attending the mosque for men and neighbor relations for women facilitate religious socialization. Afghan migrants are observed to have any contact with religious institutions or groups, and their religious life is generally confined to their homes. At this point, it is possible to assert that the congregational life and intense worship in Afghanistan have been replaced by an "individual" and "introverted" perception of religion in Türkiye. Digital platforms play a significant role in the religious socialization of Afghan migrants.

Afghan migrants find religious education and services in Türkiye to be insufficient. The participants mention an intensive religious

education, beginning with the family and continuing in mosques and religious schools in Afghanistan. They emphasize the insufficiency of religious education in Türkiye provided only in schools. A similar finding was also confirmed in studies that examined the religious socialization of Syrian migrants at the institutional level and focused on the structural cohesion of the migrants (Yaralıoğlu 2019; Yaralıoğlu and Güngör 2020). Both of these studies were carried out using sample groups in the province of Kilis. They disclosed that the Syrian participants received a religious education principally from their own families and in mosques and religious schools, whereas there is no comparable model for religious education in Türkiye. Moreover, they did not believe that the existing religious education was adequate. Indeed, the Syrian migrants even petitioned the associations in Kilis concerning this. On the other hand, our study reveals that Afghan migrants have no ties to any foundations, institutions, or organizations (in terms of membership, receiving support, participating in activities, etc.) and have no demands in this regard.

In evaluating the religious life in Türkiye and the level of religiosity of the Turks, some Afghan migrants consider their religious character and piety stronger than that of the Turks. The study by Friberg and Sterri (2021) measured the religious cohesion of the migrant youth in Norway and compared it to the domestic population and other migrant groups. This study also found that the migrant youth from outside Western Europe, particularly those from Muslim countries, were more religious than local and western youth. It also asserted a decline in religiosity and a continuous religious individualization process among migrant youth in Norway. However, this occurred more slowly among Muslims than among non-Muslims.

Some participants criticize the religious lifestyle in Türkiye (such as dress, the relationships between men and women, consumption habits, and the perception of privacy). On the other hand, some participants evaluate the religious life in Türkiye more favorably and embrace the Turkish lifestyle and consumption habits. The latter group of participants reports having a more flexible and adaptable world of belief and spirituality. Similar conclusions can also be

found in the literature. Kan and Koroğlu (2022) examined the cultural problems of the Afghan youth in Uşak province. They conclude that the religious life in Türkiye, from the eyes of Afghan migrants, is more comfortable and liberated and that women are most affected by the religious oppression and coercion implemented by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The study by Erkan (2016) focused on the cohesion, comparisons, and similarities in the religious ways of life of the Syrian migrants living in Gaziantep. It contained the participants' statements that religion is more dominant in Syria, that the traditionalist, submissive, and resigned perception of religion was in charge, and that worship and religious rituals were more intense and enthusiastic there (in Syria). Religious rituals were more intense and enthusiastic there (in Syria). This study also revealed the decline in Syrians' religiosity, worship, and the visiting of sacred venues after migration as well as the changes in dress and the relationships between men and women. These conclusions are consistent with the findings of our study too.

This study examines Afghan migrants' appearance of "settlement" rather than their identities as "guests." It concludes that the social integration and development of cohesion behavior are the more dominant aspects of this process. However, despite this pattern of integration and cohesion, it is clear that Afghan migrants continue to be in a "distraught" state due to the lack of legal and institutional mechanisms supporting the process of becoming settled. It appears that legislation and institutional support are necessary to facilitate employment and community integration of Afghan migrants.

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