

GENDER, MIGRATION AND URBAN LIFE: A STUDY ON AFGHAN WOMEN IN ERZINCAN¹



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Funda KEMAHLI
GARİPOĞLU
Assoc. Prof. Dr.
Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University
Faculty of Economics and
Administrative Sciences,
Erzincan, Türkiye
fkemahli@erzincan.edu.tr
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8768-776X

Ayşem SEZER ŞANLI
Assoc. Prof. Dr.
Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University
Faculty of Economics and
Administrative Sciences,
Erzincan, Türkiye
asezer@erzincan.edu.tr
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-9954-4811

Duygu YILDIZ KARAKOÇ
Assoc. Prof. Dr.
Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University
Faculty of Economics and
Administrative Sciences,
Erzincan, Türkiye
dyildiz@erzincan.edu.tr
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9396-5917

ABSTRACT

Due to interruptions in the political regime, instability and occupations, Afghanistan has long been a country of migration to many countries. Türkiye, in its role as a transit nation, has emerged as a significant destination for Afghan migrants. Women migrants face heightened challenges during the migratory process and are subject to various forms of oppression in the countries they migrate to. Intersectionality, a foundational concept in feminist theory, provides a crucial framework for analysing the interplay between migration and gender. In this study, which aims to analyse the urban life experiences of female migrants on the basis of gender and migration, the urban life experiences of Afghan women living in Erzincan were examined through qualitative research and in-depth interviews. The findings reveal that migration and adaptation processes of migrant women are made more difficult by intersecting dynamics such as gender, class belonging and migrant identity.

Keywords: *Intersectionality, Afghan migration, urban life*

JEL Code: D63, J61, Z10

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¹ It has been declared that the relevant study complies with ethical rules.

TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET, GÖÇ VE KENTSEL YAŞAM: ERZİNCAN'DA AFGAN KADINLAR ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA



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Funda KEMAHLI GARİPOĞLU

Doç. Dr.
Erzincan Binali Yıldırım
Üniversitesi
İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi,
Erzincan, Türkiye
fkemahli@erzincan.edu.tr

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8768-776X

Ayşem SEZER ŞANLI

Doç. Dr.
Erzincan Binali Yıldırım
Üniversitesi
İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi,
Erzincan, Türkiye
asezer@erzincan.edu.tr

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-9954-4811

Duygu YILDIZ KARAKOÇ

Doç. Dr.
Erzincan Binali Yıldırım
Üniversitesi
İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi,
Erzincan, Türkiye
dyildiz@erzincan.edu.tr

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9396-5917

ÖZ |

Siyasal rejimdeki kesintiler, istikrarsızlıklar ve işgallerden dolayı Afganistan uzun zamandır pek çok ülkeye göç veren bir ülke olagelmektedir. Transit ülke olması bakımından Türkiye, Afgan göçmenlerin temel güzergâhlarından birisidir. Kadın göçmenler, göç deneyimini çok daha zorlu koşullarda yaşamakta, göç ettikleri ülkelerde göçmen kadınlar olarak farklı baskılanma dinamiklerine maruz kalmaktadırlar. Feminist kuramın temel kavramlarından kesişimsellik, göç ve toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkisini analiz için önemli bir yaklaşım sunmaktadır. Toplumsal cinsiyet ve göç temelinde kadın göçmenlerin kentsel yaşam deneyimlerini analiz etmeyi amaçlayan bu çalışmada, Erzincan'da yaşayan Afgan kadınların kentsel yaşam deneyimleri nitel araştırma ve derinlemesine mülakatlar yoluyla incelenmiştir. Bulgular, göçmen kadınların göç ve uyum süreçlerinin toplumsal cinsiyet, sınıfsal aidiyet ve göçmen kimliği gibi kesişen dinamiklerle daha da zorlaştığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kesişimsellik, Afgan göçü, kentsel yaşam

JEL Kodları: D63, J61, Z10

1. INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan has a long history of internal unrest and political instability. The prevailing climate of insecurity and violence has compelled numerous Afghan citizens to seek refuge elsewhere. The search and migration process commenced with the invasion of Afghanistan by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the early 1980s and continued throughout the civil war between 1992 and 1996. The pressures brought about by the Taliban regime, which ruled from 1996 to 2001, also served to accelerate the migration process (Brodsky, 2004, pp. 3-4). Following the terrorist attacks of 2001, the Taliban regime was overthrown as a result of a military operation launched by the United States of America (USA) against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. However, after 20 years of war, the Taliban regained control of the country with the withdrawal of the USA and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Dashti, 2021, p. 201). In 2021, with the Taliban's return to power, there has been a notable rise in the number of both internally displaced individuals and those seeking refuge outside the country. The primary cause of this situation is the escalation of violence and the emergence of security concerns within the country. A second significant factor is the high level of discrimination faced by women and girls (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Women & Women Count, 2022).

While neighboring countries such as Iran and Pakistan are among the countries to which Afghans migrate most frequently, the limited rights afforded to them in these countries and their lack of hope for the future have prompted many Afghans to seek opportunities in Europe (Crawley & Kaytaz, 2022, p. 5). Many Afghans express a desire to migrate to Europe after residing in countries along the transit route, such as Türkiye and Greece (Dimitriadi, 2017, p.18). The patriarchal structure in Afghanistan has continuously reinforced the subordinate position of women by strengthening men's control over labor, economic resources and reproduction, and the systematic oppression of women became institutionalized with the Taliban regime. Reforms during the liberating periods had only a limited impact and were phased out as the Taliban regained power (Schütte, 2013, p. 1179). During its previous period in power, the Taliban regime adopted policies that restricted women's participation in education, work and social life (Brodsky, 2004, pp. 3-4). Ultimately, these restrictions resulted in women's lack of access to economic opportunities and deep poverty (Farhoumand-Sims, 2007, p. 649). The oppression of women under this regime has had a serious impact on their psychosocial health, causing them to suffer from anxiety or severe depression (Neyazi et al., pp. 10-11).

The migration experiences of women fleeing the Taliban regime are

shaped within a multidimensional network of discrimination that goes beyond gender and arises from the intersection of multiple identity elements. Excluded from economic and social life under the Taliban regime, Afghan women face many obstacles in the migration and integration process. While trying to erase the traces of their past traumas in the environment they migrate to, they also try to cope with the challenges of their new settlements. As they try to adapt to the new roles assigned to them within the family and in public spaces, they face fundamental issues of identity and belonging. In addition to their migrant identity, Afghan migrant women who are trying to reshape their position and identity face increasing pressure on issues such as ethnic identity, religious identity, and class position. These axes are also oppressive elements that directly affect women's experiences of urban space and lead to their spatial exclusion.

The study is concerned with the urban and social life experiences of Afghan women migrants in Türkiye, which is regarded as a transit country for the majority of Afghans, although it also functions as a country of destination on occasion. The study employs the concept of "intersectionality," as conceptualized by Kimberle Crenshaw from the USA, as a lens through which to examine the experiences of Afghan women migrants in Türkiye. As Sarıgöl (2013, p. 41) asserts, the evolution of intersectionality theory, which offers a feminist perspective, is achieved by examining the experiences of women from diverse identities and socioeconomic backgrounds who are situated in different contexts, with the specific aim of enhancing the theory's utility.

The extant literature on this subject is limited, with only a small number of studies addressing the urban experiences of Afghan women migrants living in Türkiye in the context of gender. Kılıç and Çakmak Karapınar (2021) conducted a study with a focus on the migratory experiences of Afghan women in Erzurum. Coşkun and Çetin's (2022) analysis examined the impact of changes in gender roles and spatial utilisation on the cultural adaptation of Afghan women of Uzbek origin following migration to Türkiye. This analysis was conducted through in-depth interviews in Hatay-Ovakent. The qualitative study with a focus on gender conducted by Ünlütürk Ulutaş and Topaloğlu (2023) on Afghan migrants living in Denizli is one of the rare studies examining the relationship between migration processes and gender. The study conducted by Arpacı (2020) on Afghan migrant women in Erzincan is of great significance in terms of addressing the relationship between international migration and gender. The study addresses the gender inequalities to which Afghan women are exposed during the process of transnational migration, focusing on how these inequalities are reproduced both during and after the migration process.

The present study, however, is distinct in its approach, which is grounded

in the intersectionality paradigm – a foundational concept within the domain of feminist theory. Its objective is to examine women's migratory experiences by exploring not only the gender dimension, but also the intricate interplay of multiple intersecting factors, including class and migrant identity. Furthermore, the study focuses on the experiences of migrant women in urban environments, examining their relationship with the city, their everyday practices, and the strategies they employ to adapt in the post-migration period. In this respect, although the study focuses on a similar sample, it makes an original contribution to the literature in terms of its theoretical and thematic scope. Therefore, the primary motivation of this study is, beyond filling the gap in the literature, to approach the experiences of migrant women from a multidimensional perspective rather than through unidimensional approaches. In this regard, the study enables a discussion of the gender inequalities, integration dynamics, and economic participation that Afghan women face in the pre- and post-migration processes within an intersectional framework.

This study aims to examine migrant women's urban experiences shaped by the multi-layered practices of oppression inherent in their gender and migrant identities, with a special focus on Erzincan province. The research aims to understand the daily life practices of migrant women in urban space by addressing the multiple forms of discrimination experienced by both women, migrants and economically disadvantaged individuals within the framework of intersectionality theory. In this context, the main focal points of the research are the perception of safety that migrant women experience while using public spaces in the city; how factors related to urban space such as environmental, physical and access to public services affect their lives; and their experiences of social exclusion. Based on these experiences, the study aims to make visible the structural problems experienced by migrant women and to contribute to relevant social and urban policies by developing solutions to these problems. In addition, one of the primary objectives of the study is to shed light on the women's dimension of the migration phenomenon and to make the unique position of women in migration processes visible at the academic level.

In this context, the study is structured in the form of qualitative research, with the concepts of intersectionality, gender and migration forming the theoretical framework. A purposive sample of Afghan women residing in Erzincan province will be established in order to obtain concrete data. The rationale behind the selection of Erzincan province as a subject of this study is that it facilitates a more micro-level analysis of women's experiences. In contrast to larger cities, where migrant groups often become homogenised or where the dynamics of their migration are less evident, in a medium-sized city such as Erzincan, the everyday

practices of migrant women, their gender roles, and their relationship with the urban environment are more observable and traceable. Furthermore, Erzincan is a city where Afghan migrants have settled in significant numbers and where there is active interaction between the local population and the migrant community. In this context, Erzincan provides a suitable and meaningful setting for analysing migrant women's urban experiences through the lens of intersectionality, particularly in relation to gender, class, and migrant identity.

The study's structure is organised around three principal headings. The initial section of the study examines the concept of intersectionality, which provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the oppression experienced by migrant women. The second part of the study presents an analysis of the urban experiences of Afghan migrant women based on a review of relevant literature. In the third part of the study, the findings of the field study conducted in Erzincan province are subjected to in-depth analysis, with a view to elucidating the urban experiences of Afghan women. These findings are then compared with the relevant literature, with a view to identifying similarities and differences.

Notwithstanding the robust theoretical interest intersectionality theory has garnered in feminist academia, this interest has concomitantly given rise to numerous debates. These criticisms are centred around three main issues. Firstly, there is the question of the applicability of the theory. Secondly, there is the question of which categories should be included in intersectional analysis. Thirdly, there is the question of the limits and theoretical priority of these categories. In particular, the contention that the unregulated multiplication of categories of difference has the potential to perpetuate fundamental forms of inequality, including but not limited to race, class and gender, within the confines of theoretical discourse (Davis, 2008, p. 75). In consideration of the aforementioned critique of the unchecked proliferation of axes, the present study is predicated on the three primary axes (gender, immigration status and class) that have been identified as the most salient determinants of the experiences of migrant women. The analysis is thus conducted within the confines of this overarching framework. Secondary categories, including age, language skills and marital status, are then analysed in relation to these overarching axes.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As stated in the introduction, the conceptual framework of the study is based on the migration axis of intersectionality. In this respect, this section is structured under two sub-headings; the first deals with the intersectionality approach. In the second part, Afghan women's experiences of migration and urban life in different cities and countries are discussed with different examples from the literature.

2.1. Multiple Axes of Intersectionality: Being a Migrant Woman

Following the 1980s, the development of feminist theory saw an increase in criticism of the uni-axial approach to women's issues. This new focus on different intertwined forms of domination, oppression and discrimination represented a significant shift in the field. In her 1989 article, Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) conceptualized the concept of "intersectionality" as an approach to analyzing discrimination against Black women in American society. This approach reveals the different forms of domination, oppression and discrimination that Black women experience. In her 1989 article, Crenshaw (1989) proposed the concept of intersectionality as a means of analyzing the multiple forms of discrimination and domination experienced by women, including racial and gender-based oppression. Subsequently, the intersectionality approach has been employed as a pivotal analytical instrument in research endeavors to comprehend women's subjective experiences in accordance with gender, race and class, and to scrutinize the intricate dynamics of multiple forms of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991; Jordan-Zachery, 2007; Nash, 2008). The intersectionality approach, which demonstrates that the dynamics of women's experiences in social, cultural, economic and political contexts are shaped by a multitude of simultaneous and interactive axes of social organization (Stasiulis, 1999, p. 347), is frequently employed in the analysis of diverse women's experiences, transcending the boundaries of black feminism and critical race theories.

The intersectionality approach has also become an important analytical tool in the analysis of the identity of women who are migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. This constitutes another dimension of women's problems involving multiple forms of oppression (Davis, 2014; Lutz et al., 2016). The recognition that women's lives and experiences are shaped not only by gender but also by other social categories has proven effective in analyzing the experiences of migrant women. These experiences, which encompass axes of oppression such as gender and racism in migration studies, have begun to be addressed from a theoretical and empirical perspective (Bastia, 2014; Lutz et al., 2016, p. 8).

In examining how intersectionality has been used in the field of migration studies, Bastia (2014, pp. 240-241) asks, "Female Migrants: The New Subject of Intersectionality?", notes that the intersectionality approach provides a flexible approach to analyzing complex categories of identity. Similarly, Ludvig (2006) employs a narrative life interview with a woman who migrated to Vienna to analyze the interaction and intersection of categories of difference and identity. The categories of difference under examination include gender, class and ethnicity, and the study reveals how these categories are positioned in time and

space. Ludvig (2006, pp. 255-256) posits that the intersections of gender with categories of difference constitute the specific nature of gender identity at a given time and place, and therefore the relative prevalence of each varies. Furthermore, the intersectionality approach in migration studies provides a framework for understanding how social categories are culturally constructed (Bastia et al., 2023, pp. 467-468). The experiences of migrant women are significantly diverse, shaped by a multitude of intersecting factors including living conditions, status, racial and ethno-religious differences, skill level, age and education in their countries of origin, transit points and destination countries (Anthias, 2012, p. 102, 106).

Given that migration is a gendered process shaped by gender, class and race (Mora & Piper, 2021), the intersectionality approach is regarded as an invaluable instrument for elucidating the experiences of migrant women (Domaas, 2023, pp. 259-260). As Domaas (2023, pp. 249-250) observes, the multifaceted identity of migrants and the manner in which this interacts with prejudices and discrimination in the host country are pivotal elements to consider when examining the underlying causes of the disparate treatment of different groups of migrants.

In her discussion of the study of mobilities in the context of modern transnationalism and the new forms of migration associated with these mobilities, Anthias (2012, p. 105) notes that until approximately thirty years ago, migrant women were often treated as dependents of men in migration literature. In contrast, men were regarded as prototypical migrants, characterized as decision-makers (making individual rational choices) and family breadwinners in the push-pull model based on neo-classical economic theory. Recent research indicates that women are active participants in the migration process, supporting their families through gainful employment (Izaguirre & Walsham, 2021). However, Anthias (2012, p. 106) emphasizes the importance of examining the positioning of migrant women within the migration process through the lens of economic integration within global capitalism. Migrant women occupy specific roles within the service and light industrial sectors, performing secondary, inexpensive, and adaptable labor, with male and female positions remaining distinctly segregated. This settlement gives rise to an ethnically and gender-divided labor market. It is therefore important to consider social reproduction and class belonging when examining the positioning of migrant women in the migration process. In their role as primary caregivers, migrant women serve as the primary carriers of ethnic culture, responsible for the reproduction of cultural traditions and the maintenance of religious and familial structures and ideologies (Anthias, 2012, p. 106; Izaguirre & Walsham, 2021).

Conversely, Stasiulis et al. (2020, p. 8, 10) highlight the capacity of intersectionality to address migrants' justice-related concerns and the injustices engendered by the migration process. They argue that an intersectionality approach is also crucial for grasping the intricacies of power relations, inequalities and forms of social oppression among migrants, as well as the structural elements inherent in border and migration policies within a social justice framework. With regard to the comprehension of structural forms of inequality, including the interconnections between capitalism, colonialism, racism and hetero-patriarchy, the intersectionality approach offers a conceptual framework for political awareness, with the objective of elucidating the oppression of women in national and transnational migration policies and guaranteeing social justice (Stasiulis et al., 2020, p. 10).

2.2. The Urban View of Being a Migrant Woman: Identity, Integration and Gender

In Afghanistan, international migration is usually carried out by men who are held responsible for providing for their families. For young men, migration is seen as a process of proving their masculine identity and making the necessary material and moral preparations for marriage and family leadership (Monsutti, 2007, p. 184). For women, migration represents either an individual search for a new life or a way of life under the sponsorship of men. Although women with higher levels of education are more likely to be motivated to leave the country for better living conditions, they rarely migrate alone (Danish Refugee Council, 2017). One of the key factors preventing women from participating in the migration journey is their lack of necessary economic resources. In addition, increasing human trafficking makes it difficult for women to migrate safely. In the process, women may face the risk of violence, sexual exploitation and even forced into prostitution. For women with children, the dangers of the migration journey can reinforce their decision to stay at home (Freedman, 2015, pp. 25-26). Although women manage to complete the journey of migration, their struggles continue wherever they go. In the process of displacement, women sometimes find a mud house, a dark rented room or a tent. The experiences of these diaspora groups in search of a safe and livable place are mostly shaped in hospitable camps or temporary shelters in cities (Gaur Singh, 2010, p. 14). For migrants trying to temporarily shelter in these difficult living spaces, the effort to transform their accommodation into a habitable home is a very intense process both physically and emotionally. Migrants who do not speak the language, have different cultures and are insecure need to learn to take root in their new home in order to adapt to their new environment and regain a sense of trust (van Liempt & Staring, 2021, p. 309).

For women migrants trying to take root in a new home, connecting with urban spaces and being present in public spaces is an important step that reinforces a sense of belonging. However, migrant women have stated that their mobility in public spaces is restricted and they face the risk of harassment due to their gender and migrant status. Unsafe spaces and social tensions in the neighborhoods they live in keep women away from these spaces (Linn, 2020, p. 36). Feeling unsafe in urban areas is seen as one of the most important problems for migrant women. For example, a study (Welsh & Brodsky, 2010) emphasized that the biggest problem faced by Afghan migrant women in urban life is the lack of security. The study revealed that these individuals prefer to stay at home to feel safe, keep their doors permanently locked and choose not to share their thoughts with anyone.

While many migrant women spend their leisure time with extended family ties or neighborhood relations, those who do not have these connections feel “foreign” and lead an isolated life (Linn, 2020, pp. 36-37). However, spatiality is an indispensable part of migrant life and the home, neighborhood and public spaces of the city have special meaning for women migrants. In a study conducted in India, it was pointed out that Afghan migrant women want to maintain their daily lives by using the public spaces of the city. These women, who wanted to establish a strong connection with the city, went beyond their migrant neighborhoods and organized trips and picnics in public spaces in big cities; thus, they tried to develop a sense of belonging to their new spaces (Rajan, 2023, p. 379)

These efforts to establish a presence in public spaces and strengthen a sense of belonging place Afghan women at the center of the process of interacting with and adapting to the settled society. Afghan women who are expected to conform to the values and dominant norms of the host society, feel various social pressures due to this expectation. The quality and intensity of women's interactions with the host society stand out as a critical factor determining their level of integration. In order to understand this integration process and its level, it is of great importance to analyze Afghan women's urban daily life practices in depth (Tafaraji, 2020, pp. 173-174).

One of the most fundamental obstacles that migrants/refugees face in everyday life is the process of learning the language of the host country. Language is a critical element not only for communication but also for social, cultural and economic inclusion, social participation and a sense of belonging. However, refugees face greater obstacles in this process than voluntary migrants due to traumatic backgrounds, family recovery processes and practical difficulties related to settlement (Atwell et al., 2009, pp. 678-679; Gheisareh-Dehi, 2017, p. 35). Moreover, a large proportion of Afghan migrant women face severe time

constraints in improving their language skills or attending classes regularly due to childcare obligations and the need to care for sick or elderly relatives. Another major obstacle to language learning is the negative attitudes of family members towards women's literacy (Sharifian et al., 2021, p. 73).

The process of language learning for migrants is a multidimensional process that is not limited to individual efforts and requires the host country to provide adequate support mechanisms. However, the social and cultural dynamics that shape language acquisition also increase the complexity of the process. For instance, parents' aspirations for their children to live a life free from traumatic pasts and in harmony with the settled society may be undermined by the emotional tensions created by the children's different racial, linguistic, and religious backgrounds (Mirvahedi, 2023, p. 427). Furthermore, Afghan girls must contend with the identity constructs imposed upon them in their efforts to establish a sense of belonging within society. The presence of gender and ethnic-based prejudices represents a significant impediment, particularly in the context of their educational pursuits. To illustrate, in Iran, Afghan students are prohibited from sitting for examinations, whereas in Canada, the academic achievements of Afghan girls elicit astonishment. Such approaches serve to reinforce the alienation and exclusion experienced by these women. These factors contribute to the complexity, emotionality and multidimensionality of the language learning process and social adaptation efforts, which in turn weaken the sense of belonging to the country of settlement (Hashemi & Amiry, 2024, pp. 68-71).

Afghan women's identity conflicts can also lead to tensions in neighbourly relations between migrants and host communities. In India, for example, Afghan migrant women face the problem of Hindu neighbors or landlords objecting to them cooking meat (Rajan, 2023, p. 384). In this context, it appears to be an easier option for Afghans to migrate to countries that share similar cultural characteristics or religious beliefs. For example, the fact that Iran and Afghanistan have similar cultural characteristics, only 'halal' food is consumed, and both cuisines are close to each other, facilitates adaptation. However, despite this adaptation, reasons such as widespread unemployment and the high cost of living increase the vulnerability of migrants (Kavian et al., 2020, p. 7). Similarly, while some Afghan migrants prefer to stay in Türkiye because they share the same religious beliefs, others want to migrate to other countries because they are worried about their future (Ünlütürk Ulutaş & Topaloğlu, 2023, p. 170). Therefore, the determinants of integration and belonging after migration are not limited to having a common culture or religious beliefs.

Although the Afghan community continues to socialize among themselves, they need to develop relationships with the settled society. Through

social networks and neighborhood relationships, migrant women strengthen their social integration processes and their sense of belonging. Regular visits and social interactions are essential for individuals to connect with each other and build a sense of belonging and home in exile (Belabbas et al., 2022, p. 216; Rajan, 2023, p. 379).

As Afghan women try to adapt to a new environment, their interaction with the society in which they settle, and the freedoms and opportunities it offers, can lead to a change in their intra-household relationships. It has been observed that in a freer social environment, migrant women tend to move away from their traditional roles and are more open to cultural and social change than men. However, this process of change may not occur at the same pace or with the same dynamism for all women. However, Afghan society is generally resistant to change, and in a male-dominated social order, women's empowerment increases men's concerns about losing their authority (Afrouz et al., 2023).

These changes in gender roles in the lives of migrants are defined as a phenomenon that can increase domestic violence. Women's work outside the home due to economic obligations may increase control over resources and equality in the home, but it may also create tensions within the family by threatening male authority. Men whose authority is challenged and weakened may be more likely to use violence as a result of their loss of role. In this case, men may use the migrant status of women, who are more vulnerable and isolated in a foreign country, to consolidate control. Women's experiences of violence as migrants are exacerbated when they do not speak the language, lack information about their legal rights and fear deportation (Azizi et al., 2023, pp. 766-767). Economic dependence on male family members and limited employment opportunities perpetuates this power imbalance (Mehraj & Bashir, 2024, p. 524). The study by Stempel and Alemi (2020) found that the level of education, age group and wave of migration had an impact on the employment of Afghan migrant women. The study found that the employment level of Afghan women is generally lower than that of other immigrant groups, that even among women with university degrees, not all have equal employment opportunities, and that the employment opportunities of women who arrive after the age of thirty are much lower than those who arrive at a younger age. This makes Afghan migrant women a mass that is unable to convert their cultural capital into economic capital. Similarly, a study conducted in Pakistan (Groenewold, 2006) found that the employment rates of women living in urban areas lag far behind those of men. Working women tend to be employed in manual, low-income jobs such as carpet weaving, tailoring or embroidery. Similarly, in Türkiye, Afghan women have very low employment rates and are mostly employed in the textile sector. Women

join the labor force mainly after the death of their husbands and find jobs through social networks. The reasons for not working are mostly related to childcare and women earn income by doing contract work at home (Habibullah, 2023). At this point, it is important to highlight the specific challenges faced by older migrant women. In addition to challenges arising at the intersection of gender, ethnicity and migrant identity, older migrant women experience serious limitations in accessing economic opportunities due to increased age-related health problems, difficulties in language acquisition and unpaid care work obligations (Ekoh & Okoye, 2022, p. 39). As supported by the field data in the next section of the study, the problems faced by Afghan women living in Erzincan Province are largely similar to those experienced in different cities and countries.

3. METHOD

This study is designed as a qualitative research to understand the urban life experiences of Afghan migrant women from a gender perspective. The main purpose of the research is to understand the forms of relationship that migrant women establish with the city, their perceptions of security, their experiences of social exclusion and their level of access to public space. In this context, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used in the research process and the data obtained were evaluated by thematic analysis method.

3.1. Sample Selection

The research was conducted through in-depth interviews with 10 Afghan women residing in Erzincan between December 2022 and January 2023. It is estimated that approximately 2,500 Afghan migrants are residing in Erzincan, with a significant proportion of this population consisting of women (Cumhuriyet, 27.09.2021). Despite the fact that the sample size might be regarded as being limited for qualitative research, the in-depth data obtained from the 10 participants provided a comprehensive opportunity to analyse the urban life experiences of Afghan women migrants in Erzincan. In this respect, the sample exhibited a high level of representational power and generated rich data, aligning well with the objectives of the study. Consequently, in order to ensure that the women's relationship with the city was more grounded and observable, one of the primary sample criteria was that participants must have resided in Erzincan for a minimum of one year.

A purposive sampling method was adopted, and participants were selected from among those willing to share their experiences. In accordance with the stipulated requirements of itinerant fieldwork, the study was grounded in interviews in which migrant women constructed and narrated their own life stories. In order to ensure a diversity of narratives, purposive sampling was employed during the selection of participants. As F. Baiju Thomas (2022, p.2)

emphasises, the most significant factor in purposive sampling is the selection of interviewees willing to articulate their experiences. Michael Quinn Patton (1990) was among the early theorists to emphasise the significance of sample selection in case studies, noting the existence of various sampling techniques (Patton, 1990). In this study, typical case sampling was utilised. The term 'typical' in this context does not imply random selection, but rather indicates that the participants were chosen based on their capacity to reveal different dimensions of the issue at hand and to allow for comparative analysis of the data.

Consequently, the women constituting the sample were selected from diverse neighbourhoods within Erzincan. In accordance with the principles of typical case and purposive sampling, the study also included women from different age groups. The objective of the sample structure was to provide representative and comparable data reflecting the diverse segments of Afghan migrant women in Erzincan. All participants were in possession of regular migrant status.

3.2. Ethical Permissions for the Research and Ethical Principles

This study was prepared in accordance with the rules of scientific research and publication ethics with Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University Human Research Social and Humanities Ethics Committee approval document dated 22/12/2023 and numbered 11/13 Protocol.

Throughout the research process, strict adherence was maintained to the established ethical principles. All participants were enrolled in the study on a voluntary basis, and verbal consent was obtained prior to each interview. During the interviews, particular care was exercised to ensure respect for the personal privacy and emotional/psychological boundaries of the participants, especially in relation to topics that could be emotionally sensitive. The participants' identifying information was kept confidential, and they were all anonymised by being assigned numbers from P-1 to P-10. This approach was adopted in order to ensure the reliability of the data and the protection of participants' rights to safety and privacy.

3.3. Data Collection Tool and Analysis Process

The main tool used in the data collection process is a semi-structured, in-depth interview form. Consisting of open-ended questions, this form covers both individual and structural-level dynamics, focusing on multidimensional issues such as the daily lives of migrant women, their willingness and ability to work, their access to public services, and their perceptions of security and social relations.

As emphasized by many qualitative researchers, in-depth interviews are central to uncovering the frameworks of people's meanings and ways of thinking.

In this respect, it is important for understanding how respondents make sense of the social environment, the external world and their mental structures, and provides an important experience in which they tell their life stories in their own language (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003, p. 139). Steinar Kvale (1996) refers to the widely used metaphors of 'miner' and 'traveler' when explaining the interview technique. The miner-type researcher deciphers the interview data and tries to discover an untold event or concept, like a miner digging deep into an area to find a valuable mineral. The traveler researcher, on the other hand, is someone who, at the end of the day, wanders for a long time among the various stories that have been told to him/her, and when he/she returns home, he/she has a story worth telling.

The interview questions were designed to understand individual and structural dynamics. The aim was to obtain comprehensive information from the participants about their daily lives, their desire and ability to work, the challenges they face in the city, their experiences of accessing public services, their perceptions of security, and their social relationships.

The interview form was structured around three main thematic topics:

Urban Life in the Context of Gender and Perception of Security; This theme discusses issues such as lifestyle and gender perception transformations after migration, levels of participation in the public sphere, gender-based limitations encountered in the city, the distribution of domestic responsibilities, freedom of movement, and the perception of security. This section questions women's freedom of movement in the public sphere, their attitudes towards male-dominated spaces, and their perceptions of individual autonomy.

Experiences of Social Exclusion and Belonging in Urban Life': This theme questioned the discrimination and exclusion experienced at the intersection of migrant identity and gender, as well as the structure of social relations and neighbourhood relations, and the sense of belonging in the city. The participants' relationships with the social environment and their emotional ties with the city were analysed.

In the context of the interview process, one-to-one interviews were conducted with a total of ten women, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews took place in the women's own homes, where they would feel safer. After obtaining verbal consent from all participants, the interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and later transcribed. Participants' identities were anonymised by numbering them from P-1 to P-10, and the principles of confidentiality and privacy were meticulously observed.

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. First, the audio recordings were transcribed, followed by open

coding in line with the participants' statements. The axial coding phase was then started by identifying the relationships between these codes, and the main themes were structured based on repetitive patterns. During thematic analysis, each theme was contextualised by considering the similarities between individual narratives and common experiences. The analysis was conducted in line with the research's theoretical framework and objectives.

The main themes that emerged from the coding process were: feeling safe in urban spaces; women's identities and the spaces available to them in public; discrimination and exclusion due to migrant identities; individual experiences of accessing public services; and the reproduction of gender roles in domestic responsibilities. These themes are analysed under the following four main headings in the article: 'Reasons for Arrival and Migration to Türkiye', 'Life in Türkiye Relations between Men and Women, Family, Work and Social Environment', and "Urban Life: Being an Afghan Woman in Erzincan" and "Future Visions of Migrant Women: Returning or Staying".

In conclusion, the study aims to reveal the multidimensional relationships that Afghan women migrants in Erzincan establish with the city through in-depth interviews. The analysis of the data aims to identify the specific aspects of the stories of oppression presented, rather than making generalisations that standardise and uniformise the experience of Afghan migrant women across the country based on those living in the Erzincan province. The individual narratives of the participants are analysed in detail to reveal how the mechanisms of oppression inherent in the identity of migrant women are shaped by urban experience.

The table below presents demographic data on the age, occupation and income status of the participants interviewed during the fieldwork. In order to ensure the authenticity of the stories and to include a variety of experiences, attention was paid to the different statuses of the women, such as widowed or divorced, married (monogamous or polygamous) and single. It is worth noting that some of the women worked as tailors or hafiz in their home towns, but were unable to work after settling in Türkiye. In this context, it can be seen that all the women, except 2 students, continue to live as housewives in Türkiye. It is also noteworthy that almost all married women have many children (more than 2). One of the commonalities among the women is that they had to drop out of school because of the Taliban threat in their country. It is important to note that two students were able to continue their education in Türkiye after migrating. Under the heading of income, all the married respondents said that their husbands could work if they found temporary jobs such as dishwashing, construction work, painting, whitewashing or tiling. This is referred to as 'irregular income'. Only

the husband of one of the participants works as a carpenter and has a regular 1: income. The title “income” refers to the class axis of intersectionality, as it shows that the participants are poor and disadvantaged in addition to their identities as migrant women.

Table 1: Demographic Information on Interviewees

Participant Code	Age	Marital Status	Number of Children	Profession	Education Status	Income Status
P1	22	Married	3	Hafiz/ Housewife	Primary School	Red Crescent Card, Child Support and Irregular Income of Spouse
P2	39	Married/ Polygamous Marriage	8	Tailor/ Housewife	Never Went to School	Red Crescent Card, Child Support and Irregular Income of Spouse
P3	18	Single	0	Student/ Intern	High School	Father's Irregular Income and Internship Fees
P4	18	Single	0	Student/ Intern	High School	Father's Irregular Income and Internship Fees
P5	34	Widow (Spouse Deceased)	5	Housewife	Never Went to School	Red Crescent Card and Child Aid
P6	76	Widow (Spouse Deceased)	9	Housewife	Never Went to School	Red Crescent Card
P7	24	Married/ Polygamous Marriage (2 nd Wife)	3	Housewife/ Cleaning Worker	10th Grade Dropout	Red Crescent Card, Child Support and Irregular Income of Spouse
P8	27	Married	3	Housewife	7th Grade Dropout	Red Crescent Card, Child Support and Irregular Income of Spouse
P9	37	Married	5	Housewife	5th Grade Dropout	Spouse's Regular Income
P10	29	Widow (Divorced)	2	Housewife	5th Grade Dropout	Red Crescent Card and Child Aid

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Reasons for Arrival and Migration to Türkiye

It is clear from the interviews that most of the interviewees fled the Taliban and came to Türkiye to leave behind difficult conditions. P6 expresses this situation in the following words: *“The Taliban were coming, raiding houses, forcing widows and young girls to marry.”*

P2 describes the difficulty of life for women in Afghanistan with the following words: *“There is war in Afghanistan. The men in Afghanistan are very bad. All the men sit together in the cafes, looking around. That’s why my parents never sent me to school. They said, “My daughter, you are a girl, don’t go out. The men see you. You are going to get married, don’t let them find fault with you. I always stayed at home. I told them not to take me to Afghanistan no matter what. My husband took women there, there is polygamy. Girls are not allowed to study. Everything is very difficult there.”*

The 8 respondents who participated in the study fled Afghanistan and came to Türkiye, while 2 respondents first sought refuge in Iran and then came to Türkiye. The women who said that they had made very difficult journeys emphasized that these conditions were much worse for women and children.

P3 expresses these problems as follows: *“We suffered a lot as migrants until we settled in Erzincan. We came here illegally. We paid money to middlemen. Before we found a house in Erzincan, we slept in parks and mosques. It was winter. We stayed 20 days in Ağrı, the middlemen and smuggler took all our money. We stayed on the streets and slept in parks. From there we went to Erzurum, the police took us there and sent us to Erzincan.”*

P7 expresses the difficult traveling conditions in the following words: *“When I was 8 months pregnant, I gave birth at the terminal in Ağrı while I was smuggled on foot. We were waiting outside; the cars would not let us in. We did not have ID cards. When we arrived in Ağrı, we went to the hospital and they said they would not take you because you did not have an ID. So, I gave birth at the terminal. After the birth, they took me to the emergency room by ambulance, it was very bad.”*

Interviewee P1 also expressed similar difficulties: *“I had a 5-month-old child in my arms at that time I had a lot of difficulties. My child got sick; I spent 8 days in the hospital in Ankara with my child. The police took us and sent us to Ankara with a document. Travel conditions for migrant women were very harsh in every way, we also got our periods on the road, even going to the toilet could be a problem, most of the time we had to use the toilet in open places by watching each other, there were no closed toilets.”*

P9 and P10, who came to Türkiye from Iran, stated that Afghans are not welcome in Iran and that life is very difficult for women there as well. P10 stated that she started having problems with her husband in Iran and was subjected to severe physical violence, but she was able to obtain legal protection in Türkiye: *“If I was in Afghanistan or Iran, I would never have been able to get a divorce. I was able to get a divorce because I was here. When I filed a complaint against my husband, the police gave me his phone number and told me that if you see your husband around here, let them know, he cannot even pass by your door.”*

P5 states that Türkiye is safer for women and her priority is to seek refuge in Türkiye with her daughters: *“I came here with my daughters. My 3 boys stayed in Afghanistan with their uncles, I haven’t seen them for 3 years. Their uncles didn’t let me bring them. My eldest son sometimes reproaches me, saying, “You kidnapped your daughters, why didn’t you take us, why did you leave us here? If I had the chance, I would like to bring them here too.”*

Although in some interviews it was emphasized that living conditions were better than in Afghanistan and Iran, some interviewees stated that they had to deal with discriminatory questions in Türkiye when they first arrived. P1's statements reflect the critical attitude towards migrants in Türkiye: *“Sometimes some women ask why you came from Afghanistan, why you didn't live there, why you were afraid, why you fled, why you didn't fight.”*

All of the interviewees who came to Türkiye from Afghanistan stayed in different cities such as Istanbul and Yozgat for a while before coming to Erzincan, and stated that they found Erzincan safer and more livable. This can be seen in the narration of P5, who has been residing in Erzincan for 3 years: *“We stayed in Yozgat for the first year; we have been here for 3 years. But it is better here than there. There were many Syrians in Yozgat. It is not so mixed here. There, help did not reach us, everything was coming to Syrians. Conditions are better here.”* One of the reasons for finding Erzincan livable is the absence of other migrant groups.

P1 expresses that this city is calmer and safer with the following words: *“We are very used to this place, we like it very much, we don’t want to go anywhere else. Because we lived in another place for a year, in Yozgat. It was very difficult there. When we came here, everything was cheaper. Everything was so expensive there. My husband did some work and they didn’t pay him.”* To summarize, Afghan migrant women cite the much more favorable living conditions in Türkiye, especially for women, as one of the main reasons for their migration.

4.2. Life in Türkiye: Male-Female Relations, Family, Work and Social Environment

All of the women interviewed within the scope of the research stated that relations between men and women in Türkiye are much better than in Afghanistan, that women have certain rights and that they live comfortably. It was emphasized that the most important thing that provides this comfort is monogamous marriages. P4's narrative supports this: *"We have seen here that a man lives with one woman, but in Afghanistan a man lives with four or five women."* Again, all interviewees stated that Turkish men are very helpful to their wives in childcare and domestic responsibilities.

P1 describes this situation as follows: *"After my husband came here, he saw the behavior of men here and he changed. For example, in Afghanistan they do not care much about women. When they come here, they see how much men love women and take care of children. So, these things have also changed now. It has been very good."* P2 expressed a similar situation as follows: *"My husband used to beat me, but he never beat me in Türkiye. If he beat me, I would call the police, but I cannot call the police there, and even if I did, the guards would come, they would say everything is right for the husband, do whatever the husband says, they would reconcile, give advice and leave."* The same interviewee stated that in Afghanistan, giving birth to a girl child is also perceived as a misdemeanor attributed to women and that there are differences in this perspective in Türkiye as follows: *"In Afghanistan, they used to say to me, why didn't you give birth to boys, you always give birth to girls. I always said that Allah gave them to me. Here, it seems like a girl child is better. I have never seen such a bad view of those who give birth to girls here."*

P5, on the other hand, states that life is more comfortable for widows (widowed or divorced) in Türkiye: *"In Afghanistan, widows are forced to beg. It is much better to be a widow here. If I had been a widow there, they could have forced me to marry someone else, when men decide, you have to. You don't have the option to say no there. However, I definitely do not want to get married again. I am comfortable here; I am not afraid."*

P3 and P4, both high school students, say that the best thing about being in Türkiye is being able to continue their education: *"We could not go to school in Afghanistan, but in Türkiye we can get an education. Both my mother and father supported us to study because they were not educated. We already fled the war in Afghanistan. We came to Türkiye to study and to be safe. Living conditions are better here. There was also a lot of forced marriage there, even if you were underage, families would forcibly take their daughters at the age of one or two to see what would happen. We got rid of these situations here."*

P10, who came to Türkiye from Iran, underlines that human relations, family life and relations between men and women are much better in Türkiye compared to both countries: *“Here, men treat women and children well. Here, a man cannot say anything to his wife and children, but in Afghanistan it is not like that, there are pressures such as not going out on the street. In Iran and Afghanistan, in case of divorce, the children are given to the father. I could not send my daughters to school there.”*

Although the Afghan women’s observations on social and family life are positive, it is noteworthy that almost all of them have very limited communication with their Turkish neighbors in the neighborhoods where they live. While the situation of not visiting each other’s houses is expressed by almost all the interviewees, they state that their Turkish neighbors are good people, but communication remains at the level of greetings. Women in particular, who are harassed by their landlords because they have many children, are also afraid of being thrown out of their homes.

P8 expresses that the hosts are very prejudiced because they are immigrants with the following words: *“They don’t want guests to come. Too many guests come, they say no. They don’t want the children to make noise outside. These houses are basements, there are no closets or anything. Our house is always concrete. The house is already old, even if we clean it, it is no good.”* P7 summarizes a similar situation as follows: *“When there is a problem here, our children are always blamed. They say your children are naughty, they did it. Sometimes other children scratch cars, they say it was the Afghans’ children, even though our children never go out. They blame us for everything. We respect them, we say you are right. If I say my child did not do it, they say evacuate the house.”* A few interviewees stated that their children were occasionally discriminated against in the schools they attended. In general, one of the main reasons for exclusion is that they do not speak the language. In the interviews, women stated that they went to language schools in very limited times when they first arrived but could not continue because of their children, and for this reason they could not move outside their own Afghan migrant circles. In some interviews, not knowing the language is also expressed as a form of self-criticism, but it is frequently mentioned that Turkish is a very difficult language, as well as the care of children and household chores leaving no time to attend a language course. P6 expresses the language problem in neighborly relations as follows: *“A neighbor came, he looked at me and I looked at him. I didn’t speak the language, we couldn’t get along. If we spoke the language, we would have become friends. That’s why our relations didn’t improve”.*

P1 states that they receive criticism from Turkish women especially in

terms of giving birth to many children and that they feel unwanted: *“Sometimes some women ask why you came from Afghanistan, why you didn’t live there, why you were afraid, why you fled, why you didn’t fight. But we don’t care much.”* Having many children also poses a problem for women in accessing health services. The same interviewee expresses the discrimination she experienced at the hospital in the following words: *“For example, I went to the hospital and the doctors were not very interested. I felt sorry for him, but we are used to it. Not that he was not interested, but I was in labor. He yelled at me a little while I was in labor.”* P2, who experienced the same problem, describes the situation in the following words: *“I gave birth to eight babies; they didn’t even give me a single injection. They said you have given birth to eight children; you will give birth to this one too. Why did you give birth to so many children? I said God gave them to me. A Turkish woman could not talk to a patient like that, because she would put them in their place.”* As can be seen, Afghan women cannot participate in social life sufficiently in the axis of migrant women’s identity, cannot deepen their human relations due to language problems and are exposed to various dynamics of exclusion.

Another important point is that the structural unemployment problem in the country poses a greater problem for migrant workers, as they cannot participate in working life due to the care of children and the elderly, and their husbands do not have a regular income. The fact that only one of the participants’ spouse has a regular income reveals that the class axis of intersectionality should not be ignored. While comparing Afghanistan, Türkiye and Iran in terms of living conditions, P9 said, *“Türkiye is very comfortable. I would be more comfortable here if there was a job and my husband worked”* shows that the class axis is important for migrants to establish a foothold in another country. In this respect, women can adopt a critical attitude towards the labor policy of the country in terms of their husbands’ inability to find jobs that would bring regular income. In this respect, the fact that P9’s husband wanted to flee to Greece and then to Europe in order to find a job shows that they do not find their income, living conditions and welfare in Türkiye sufficient. In many interviews, even though they find the living conditions in Türkiye better when comparing their homeland with Türkiye, moving to Europe when the opportunity arises emerged as a desirable situation in this regard. In this context, Türkiye remains a transit country for migrants.

4.3. Urban Life: Being an Afghan Woman in Erzincan

Afghan women are unable to socialize sufficiently in their living environment due to language barriers, large numbers of children and inadequate income levels, which results in their inability to interact directly with urban spaces and get to know the urban environment. According to the interviews, the

women's relationship with the city centre (which they describe as the bazaar) is extremely limited and they socialize within their own neighborhoods. Their engagement with the urban space is realized as an extension of their roles as mothers and housewives, such as shopping in the markets closest to their homes, taking their children to and from their schools, which are also closest to their homes, and taking their children to the hospital when necessary. Some respondents indicated that they visit their relatives who live in different neighborhoods. In this respect, visits within their own migrant communities stand out. Another form of spatial socialization takes place when migrants go to security units at certain intervals and register. Interviewees whose Turkish was not good enough stated that they could not go out alone and that they could only go out with one of their children who spoke Turkish well. While all the married women reported attending parent-teacher meetings, the single participants stated that they regularly attend school, do work experience at workplaces arranged by the school, and sometimes meet up with their friends from school in places such as cafes. Again, as can be seen from the interview data, the women have never been to the places of interest in the city where they live, and almost all of them said that they only went to Atatürk Park in the city center. The women stated that they had picnics in this park from time to time, that their children enjoyed playing in the park, and that the park was within walking distance. In this respect, expenditure items such as money spent on eating and drinking out and public transport fares are barriers to women's socialization.

The most important point on which the interviewees agreed was that in Afghanistan they could not go out without a man, whereas in Türkiye they felt very free. All the participants said that as a woman they do not feel afraid to go out alone.

P7 expresses the difference between Afghanistan and Türkiye in this regard as follows: *"Women are very safe here; they go out freely. When I was a child there, we used to go to school, this was before the Taliban came. We were only allowed to go to school. We went to school with our parents and we were not allowed to go out on our own. Because it is not a safe place. Here the situation is better for women and children."* A similar narrative is also expressed by P5: *"One of my daughters gets out of school at 18.30, I go to pick her up, it is dark most of the time. I don't feel anxious, the lighting is good outside. In Afghanistan, the streets were darker, but what difference does it make? There we could not go out in the evening anyway."* P4, a high school student, draws attention to his father's change in behavior between Afghanistan and Türkiye: *"I go to cafes with my fiancé. We travel the same way as the Turks do. It would not be like this in Afghanistan. My father allows it here."*

All of the interviewees stated that the services provided by the municipality in the city are adequate, that the lighting is good, garbage is collected on time and that the city is clean. Again, all of the women preferred not to go out after dark in the evening and when asked why, they stated that they had not experienced any direct harassment, but they still felt uneasy. The biggest source of fear of the city is expressed as stray street dogs. Some interviewees also mentioned that the fears left over from their life in Afghanistan are triggered at night and they do not want to be out in the dark. This can be seen in the narration of P3: *“I am afraid of people, especially men. It might be a fear left over from Afghanistan. Especially at night. For example, I go to school alone, but in the evening, I want someone to be with me, I get scared.”*

Some interviewees stated that due to the long winter in Erzincan, they do not prefer to be outside after a certain time in the evening to avoid being affected by the cold. In the interviews, the reflex of using the main street and avoiding side streets if they need to be outside in the evening or at night for some reason was a frequently repeated statement. Some interviewees, on the other hand, tend to maintain the same rules as in Afghanistan in Türkiye. For example, not going out without a man is important for P8: *“I always go with my husband. I go to the park with my husband. I go shopping alone, but I don’t dare to go to other places. I am not afraid of anyone, no one bothers me. Not because I am in a foreign place, I used to go out with my husband in my hometown too.”*

4.4. Future Visions of Migrant Women: Returning or Staying

The questions exploring the source of oppression or discrimination experienced by the Afghan women interviewed during the fieldwork in urban life and social life in general were developed on the basis of being a woman in Afghanistan and being an immigrant in Türkiye. All the women said that it was harder to be a woman in Afghanistan, whereas in Türkiye life was easier for women, and that being an immigrant was the hardest thing. However, when comparing the two, they clearly stated that it was much harder to be a woman in their home country. In this respect, when we examine the dynamics of oppression in the intersectional clusters in relation to the problem of the study, it should be noted that being a migrant is the main axis of intersectionality. The identity of migrant women poses separate challenges as a second axis (different from those of migrant men), while class affiliation emerges as a third axis.

The following quotes illustrate different dimensions of intersectionality. P8: *“Being a migrant is more difficult for me. I would prefer to be in Afghanistan. There was no war before, if there was no war, I would like to be in Afghanistan. We were living in Kabul; I miss my family very much. My husband was a soldier. We had to come because the Taliban killed the soldiers. My brother was*

martyred, but we survived and came to Türkiye.”

P4: *“Immigration is a bit difficult, but I do not have difficulties in Türkiye because I am a woman. I experience some difficulties because I am a migrant.”*

P3: *“It is more difficult to be a migrant here. In Afghanistan it is more difficult to be a woman. Still, when I compare the two, women are not seen as human beings in Afghanistan. I cannot say the same for migrants.”*

P1: *“It is more difficult to live here as a migrant, it is not difficult to live here as a woman.”*

P5: *“Being a migrant here is much better than being a woman in Afghanistan. There, let's say your husband died and you became a widow, the people around you immediately start persecuting you. Immigration is also difficult, but the conditions there were much harsher. Even if I were a man, I would not want to stay in Afghanistan again. Here I am very comfortable as a woman. Nobody saw us as a threat, people are very nice here. They are all Muslims; they are all good people.”* As can be seen, the difficulty of the conditions in Türkiye stems from the migrant identity, and being a migrant woman means being oppressed twice. As can be understood from P7's statement *“If our income was better, I would also want to travel and go out”*, the inadequacy of their economic conditions also strongly suggests that class should be taken into consideration as an intersection axis.

As a result, the conditions in Türkiye are better for women and the desire to stay in Türkiye (as citizens, if possible) was clearly emphasized in all interviews. P10's statement clearly shows how clear women are on this issue: *“I would neither go to Afghanistan nor Iran. If I go, I will die, and if I go, let my funeral go.”* It was observed that only one of the interviewees expressed her longing for what she had left behind, saying that she would like to return if there was no war. Similarly, another interviewee worried about her male children left behind. In this respect, in conclusion, considering the harsh situations experienced as women, there is a preponderance of women who somehow endure the longing for their loved ones but do not want to return. Instead of returning, it is emphasized as a stronger desire to be able to bring those they left behind with them. The phenomenon of religion is also seen as an important factor for women to feel culturally comfortable in Türkiye. The fact that they find Erzincan city safe in general also feeds their positive attitudes towards the country. However, considering the profiles of the interviewees, the fact that none of them are Turkish citizens and that leaving Erzincan province (even within the country) is subject to permission, causes fear of deportation and strengthens their search for a future in different countries. P9's statement *“Every day I have the fear of being deported. If we become citizens, I will not have the fear of deportation”* suggests that

although the general living conditions in Türkiye are better than in Afghanistan, it harbors other challenging conditions for migrants.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the intersectionality approach of feminist theory, the study focuses on the urban, social and vital experiences of women in a triple intersectional cluster in terms of gender, migration and class belonging. The analysis of the data obtained from the fieldwork conducted with Afghan women living in Erzincan reveals findings that are consistent with the literature on migrant women. However, when some of the data are analyzed, it is seen that there are some unique and different results in terms of being a female migrant in Türkiye or being a female migrant in Erzincan.

First, the process of migrant women's escape from Afghanistan, their difficult travel conditions and their settlement in Erzincan province are similar to different examples. Due to the atmosphere of fear and threat caused by the Taliban regime, the women took all risks and experienced various difficulties during the journey. Some of these include being deceived by traffickers, travelling in vehicles without air conditioning and having to spend long periods of time in open public spaces. Again, in line with general examples, it is observed that women are accompanied by men from their own families or relatives.

Language was identified in the literature review as the most fundamental problem after establishing a settled order in the place of migration. Similarly, Afghan women emphasized the difficulties they had in learning the language, both because of the inadequacy of the facilities provided and because they had to care for children and the elderly. It was observed that the elderly had more difficulties in this process, whereas young women who had gone to school overcame the language problem more easily. Some adult women stated that the language courses offered by the municipality were insufficient. Although young people are more capable of learning the language, they also talked about the discrimination they face at school because they are Afghan, emphasizing that teachers see them as a burden because they do not speak Turkish well when they start school. In addition to all this, it was emphasized in more than one interview that Turkish is a very difficult language to learn. The language problem has made it very difficult for migrant women to adapt to the settled culture and to develop their social environment and experience of urban space; their social communication has mostly been limited to their own circle of relatives. On the other hand, since the basic dynamic of neighbourly relations between Turks and Afghans is shaped by the landlord-tenant relationship, it was expressed that Afghans are blamed for the slightest problem (noise, cleaning the apartment, etc.). Due to language barriers, large numbers of children and limited economic

resources, Afghan women socialize in parks close to their homes, and their outings into public spaces are mostly the result of domestic responsibilities based on gender roles, such as seeking health care, taking children to school and shopping. Most of the women (except those who are students) spend most of their time at home; with the exception of one person who worked as a tailor before her health deteriorated, the other women do not have a working life. One person mentioned that she cleans the stairs twice a week to contribute to the household economy. In this respect, the fact that only one of the women has a regular income and a job shows that structural unemployment problems are concentrated on migrant workers. Employment problems mainly stem from problems such as caring for the elderly and children and not knowing the language, while the inability of spouses to find a job brings structural problems such as uninsured employment of migrant workers to the agenda.

The main cultural difference between Afghans and Turks is interpreted through family relations, gender relations and parent-child relations. In this respect, Afghan women are often criticized for having too many children. While some women emphasized that belonging to the Islamic faith is a cultural predisposition, most interviewees emphasized the democratic aspects of life in Türkiye. The sharing of domestic responsibilities by men, the co-parenting of children, the legal system based on monogamy and the opportunity for girls to be educated are all much admired by Afghan women. All respondents, whether students, married women or widows, argue that relationships in Türkiye are more idealized. Widows, for example, express that they know they will not be forced to marry in Türkiye. Furthermore, all interviewees stated that in Türkiye they can participate in urban life without being accompanied by a man. In this context, it is crucial to recognise that the fundamental dynamics of gender disparity are influenced by the paradigm set in Afghanistan. Furthermore, it is pertinent to acknowledge that gender inequalities can also be observed in the relations between men and women in Türkiye. In this respect, Afghanistan is a country where, as the interviewees frequently stated, “women are not considered as human beings” and where relations between men and women develop at a very primitive level. In this respect, the manifestation of relations in Türkiye through the micro example of Erzincan may arouse admiration in women when compared to the Afghanistan example.

Although the general picture is consistent with similar examples in the literature, some specific examples show different data. For example, in the theoretical part of the study it was stated that immigration increases emotional vulnerability and may trigger men's tendency towards violence. The data obtained from the sample of the study shows the opposite situation. Married respondents

stated that in Afghanistan, men could easily use violence against women; after coming to Türkiye, there was a significant improvement in their husbands' behavior. The fact that they also stated that the legal protection for women is incomparably better than in Afghanistan points to a remarkable point in terms of migrants' access to justice. It should also be emphasized that Afghan men have been positively influenced by social relations in Türkiye and have begun to change. However, the determination of the permanence of this transformation necessitates a prolonged observation period and the meticulous collection of data. The fact that the wife of one of the interviewees continues to live polygamously in Erzincan as in Afghanistan suggests that the transformation is only embodied in terms of not committing physical violence, and that this is due to the legal functioning in Türkiye.

In conclusion, Afghan migrants who have been living in Erzincan for a long time find the living conditions in Erzincan more ideal than in Afghanistan. The fact that the city is generally safe, that there are no different immigrant groups, and that most people are Muslim and have cultural predispositions stand out in this regard. The only problem mentioned in the interviews about the city was stray dogs.

Considering the basic concepts of the intersectional approach, the fact that almost all interviewees stated that being a woman in Afghanistan is more difficult than being a migrant in Türkiye shows that the main axis is formed through gender. The intersection of gender with migrant identity causes women to face pressures in social, public and close environment relations as a secondary difficulty, while inadequate income levels reveal the role of class as a third axis. In this respect, the interviewees' unwillingness to return to Afghanistan in any way stems not from the ideal conditions in Türkiye, but from the severe oppression of women in Afghanistan. In this respect, the low-income migrant women included in the sample, who are on the triple intersection axis (gender, migration and class), find the discrimination or difficulties they experience in Türkiye more tolerable and bearable because of this comparison. However, this period of endurance does not hinder migrants' pursuit of better living conditions when the opportunity arises; indeed, some interviewees' spouses have attempted to flee to European countries and faced legal sanctions. In this respect, Türkiye is positioned, consistent with other studies in the literature, as a lesser evil for migrants.

6. DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

7. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

This study did not benefit from any funding or support.

8. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally.

9. ETHICS COMMITTEE STATEMENT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

The study complied with the principles of the ethics committee and necessary permissions were obtained in accordance with the principle of intellectual property and copyrights.

10. USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) TOOLS

This study did not utilize any artificial intelligence-based tools or applications.

11. DATA AVAILABILITY

The participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly, so due to the sensitive nature of the research supporting data is not available.

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