

IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS INSTITUTE
DEPARTMENT OF CIVILIZATION STUDIES

MASTER THESIS



**THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DISPLACED SYRIAN MEN IN
ISTANBUL**

MOHAMAD ZEINO

THESIS SUPERVISOR: ASST. PROF. NURSEM KESKIN AKSAY

ISTANBUL, 2022

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MOHAMAD ZEINO

A thesis submitted to the Alliance of Civilizations Institute in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Civilization Studies

THESIS SUPERVISOR: ASST. PROF. NURSEM KESKIN AKSAY

ISTANBUL, 2022

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Civilization Studies.

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Date of Submission

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ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

YERİNDEN EDİLEN SURİYELİ ERKEKLERİN İSTANBUL'DAKİ YAŞAM DENEYİMLERİ

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Yerinden edilmenin psiko-sosyal ve kültürel etkisi üzerine çok sayıda çalışma olmasına rağmen, genç erkek mültecilerin yerinden edilmeden önceki koşullara kıyasla erkeklik algılarını sosyal sorumlulukları ve rolleriyle ilişkili olarak nasıl yorumladıklarına dair yaklaşımlar yetersizdir. Bu etnografik çalışma, bu dinamiği anlamak için mülteci erkeklerin yaşam deneyimleri üzerinden ve “geleneksel erkeklik” temel algısı” bağlamı olmadan kendilerini nasıl tanımladıklarına ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır. İstanbul’da kartopu örneklem yaklaşımıyla 16 yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme gerçekleştirdim. Saha verilerinin ve bulguların tematik analizi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu analiz, Türkiye’de yerinden edilen Suriyeli erkeklerin ilişkin kamusal söylemin, onların kendi erkeklik algıları üzerinde önemli bir etkisi olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Suriyeli erkeklerin Türk basınında sıklıkla itibarsızlaştırılmasının ve Suriyelilerin Türkiye’deki konumunun siyasi olarak sorgulanmasının aidiyetsizlik ve korunmasızlık hislerine sebep olduğu görülmüştür. Aidiyetsizlik hissinin etkileri, katılımcılarımın Suriye’de erkeklerin içinde bulduklarını öne sürdükleri “geleneksel sosyal aile rollerin” kesintiye uğramasıyla daha da artıyor. Katılımcılarıma göre destekleyecek çekirdek bir aileleri olmadan , birbirine bağlı geleneksel aile toplulukları tarafından sağlanan güven ve koruma duygusu ortadan

kaldırılmış ve uygun eşler bulmakta güçlük çeken Suriyeli erkekler, erkeklik algılarını yeniden formüle etmek zorunda kalmaktalar. Yerinden edilme aynı zamanda kadınlara daha fazla özgürlük, seçim ve sorumluluk vererek Suriye toplumundaki geleneksel cinsiyet rollerine meydan okumuştur. Bu durum, mülteci erkeklerin, erkeklik düşüncelerini korumada daha da zorlanmalarına sebep olmaktadır. Bu tez, erkeklik kavramındaki bu değişikliğin Suriyeli erkekler üzerinde ve gelecek nesiller üzerindeki etkisi ve kendileri ve aileleri için gelecek inşa etme fırsatları hakkında daha fazla araştırma yapılmasını önererek sona eriyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erkeklik; İstanbul; Mülteci; Suriyeli Erkekler; Yaşanmış Deneyim; Yer değiştirme



ABSTRACT

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DISPLACED SYRIAN MEN IN ISTANBUL

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While there are numerous studies regarding the impact of displacement on the psycho-social and cultural impact of displacement, there is a paucity of understanding regarding how young, refugee males view their perceptions of masculinity as it relates to their social responsibilities and roles compared to pre-displacement conditions. This ethnographic study seeks to understand this dynamic, shedding light on the lived experience of refugee males through understanding how they view themselves considering a lack of context about their “conventional keystones of manhood”. I conducted 16 semi-structured interviews through a snowball sampling framework within the location of Istanbul Turkey. Several fieldwork findings were analyzed through thematic analysis. This analysis found that the public discourse in Turkey regarding displaced Syrian men has a significant impact on their perceptions of their own masculinity. Syrian men are often disparaged in Turkish press, and the position of Syrians in Turkey is often questioned politically and leads to feelings of impermanence and vulnerability. The impacts of this impermanence are compounded by disruptions to what my participants had suggested as ‘traditional socio-familial role’ occupied by men in Syria. According to my participants, without a nuclear family to support, difficulty finding suitable spouses, and the removal of traditional safety and security provided by

their close-knit home communities, men have been forced to reformulate their perceptions of masculinity. Displacement has also given more freedom, choice, and responsibility to women, challenging traditional gender roles within Syrian society. This has further forced men to challenge their notions of masculinity. This thesis concludes by suggesting that further research be conducted into the impact that this shift will have on themselves and future generations and their opportunities to build futures for themselves and their families.

Keywords: Displacement; Istanbul; Lived Experience; Masculinity; Refugee; Syrian Men



DEDICATION

To the young Syrians who have not been born yet!



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Allhamudililah.
Mohamad ZEINO
Istanbul, 2022

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“I feel as if living in Istanbul has taken away my sense of masculinity” reported Waseem as he drank tea with me in Istanbul’s Fatih neighborhood. He added “I am not actualizing my masculinity or my true character.” This sentiment is tragically common amongst Turkey’s Syrian male displaced population. However, as this thesis will outline, their stories are often forgotten in favor of heart wrenching tales of family separation and the suffering of children. The way in which academia, NGOs and other stakeholders view and portray the lived experience of the refugee crisis lacks a critical element; a focus on the lived experience of Syria’s young men forced into exile in Turkey. As a Syrian myself, I have felt and experienced this. Despite comprising around 55% of Syrian refugees in Turkey,¹ there is a paucity of research conducted into how statelessness and displacement has impacted men’s socio-psychological understanding of themselves, and even less conducted by Arab men. I, as a Syrian, intend to change this through this thesis by listening to, recording, and analyzing the stories of men like Waseem within a broader body of literature that seeks to understand the socio-psychology of ‘refugeeness’.

This thesis is an assessment of Syrian men in Istanbul with all their layered experiences of legal status, displacement consequences and issues that exposes them to a set of challenges in belonging and their relations to the family. It will argue that these challenges pertain to self-awareness of the perception of the ideal ‘Syrian masculinity’, the otherizing and discrimination among the refugee communities within Turkish society, and the emotional experience of displaced men. Therefore, this thesis not only tells the story of these first generation of displaced Syrian males, but argues that nostalgia for lost family and hometowns, and discourse between ideals of masculinity and self-identification have resulted in the construction of new dynamics of masculinity and self-identification better adapted to the context of displacement.

¹“GEÇİCİ KORUMA,” accessed February 23, 2021, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>.

The negligence of issues pertaining to men and their personal identity transformation after being forcibly displaced omits the experience of Syrian men whose stories are almost never revealed or critically understood. Academia on this subject reflects the common saying that 'men do not cry'. Almost all attention and research has been focused on women and children as they are arguably the most vulnerable and fragile members of the Syrian society in Turkey.² In order to fill this gap, (further explored later in this thesis) this thesis will examine and critically assess Waseem's current situation, together with those of other Syrian men's experiences in Istanbul, to discuss the impact of forced migration on daily life experiences and gender norms.

Waseem is a graduate of Istanbul University Cerrahpaşa Faculty of Medicine and he continues to work in the surgery department as a resident doctor at the same university hospital. As the world enters a new stage of the "new normal", Waseem is rarely socializing as he is taking care of COVID 19 patients in the hospital where he works 100 hours a week. Waseem is leading a rough lifestyle in which Ziyad, his brother, was requested to join the family in Gaziantep and leave Waseem alone fearing that he gets infected. Waseem cannot meet up with his family nor can he take a leave for some days to relax as the general situation has not improved throughout the past period, and all medical doctors are on call and a leave of absence is not allowed. Waseem is one case of many Syrian men who are enduring the situation patiently, becoming accustomed to the displacement and the difficult conditions of living in the era of COVID19.

Looking at the situation of Waseem and many other Syrian men who work for long hours per shift so that they can achieve and assert themselves as well as make ends meet living in Istanbul. The city hosts Waseem and other hundred thousand Syrians whose daily life stories are pretty untold. In Istanbul, Waseem and I met at one of the football games

² Lewis Turner, "Are Syrian Men Vulnerable Too? Gendering The Syria Refugee Response," Middle East Institute, November 29, 2016, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/are-syrian-men-vulnerable-too-gendering-syria-refugee-response>.

playing with an international group of friends in Fatih district, (which is known for Syrians as a little Syria due to the number of Syrians who inhabit its small backstreets). Both friends reminisced about the old-shared memories of Aleppo even though they did not meet back there. The two friends have exchanged views of how life is experienced in Istanbul and the differences and similarities between the two cities, and stories of successful and careless Syrian men ending up with a question of who we can define the “real man.”

In qualitative research, ‘lived experience’ is defined as “a representation and understanding of a researcher or research subject’s human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one’s perception of knowledge.”³ Thus, subjective identity making factors includes the socio-political, cultural and economic preferences and behaviors which determine how Syrian men live their daily lives.⁴ Shedding some lights on the largest displaced population in Istanbul can help in bridging these unaddressed gaps and ultimately lead to Syrian men in the metropolitan city of Istanbul being supported.

Through the ethnographic approach, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of the displaced Syrian men in Istanbul by going beyond objective analyses of statistics or media reports. This research addresses displaced Syrian men in Istanbul through gaining comprehensive information about their lived experiences. As such, it will seek to answer one core research question: **How do Syrian men’s lived experience affect their perception of masculinity post displacement, and what factors contribute to this perception?** This question will be explored by understanding the following sub-research questions: To what extent has the Turkish public and political discourse about Syrians influenced on the emotional experience of Syrian men? To what extent does nostalgia to family and loss of hometown and community have on male Syrian refugees? To what

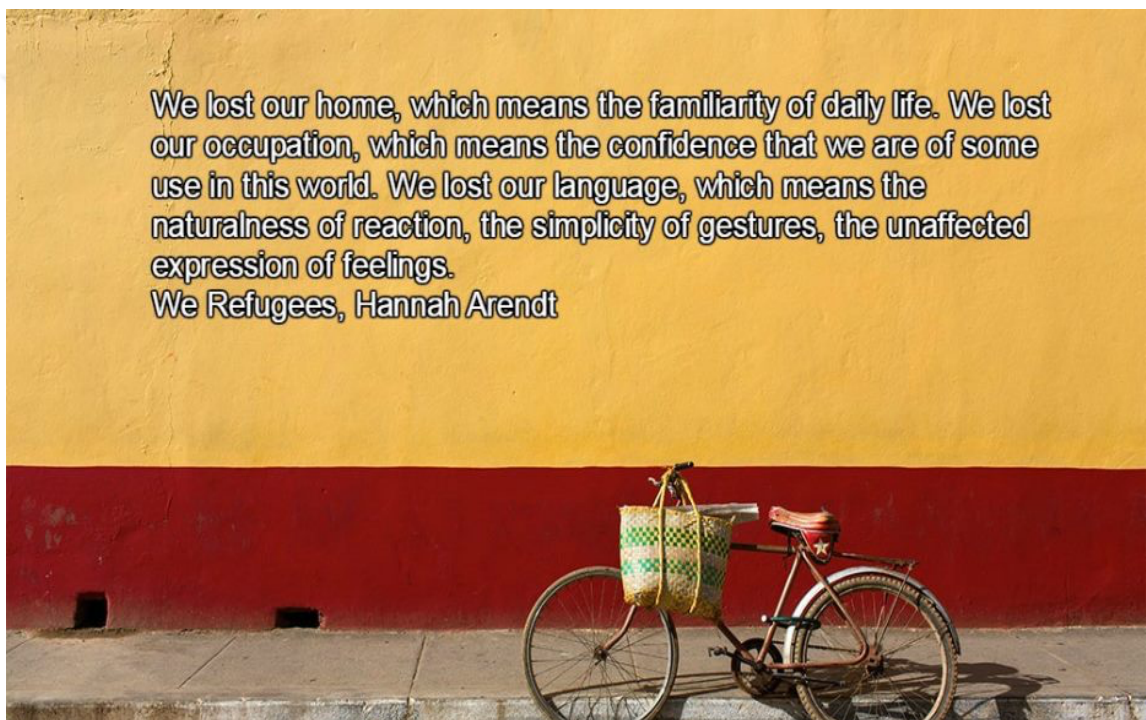
³“Lived Experience,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, by Lisa Given (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n250>.

⁴“Lived Experience.”

extent has displacement changed notions of masculinity and self-identification? And how do Syrian men navigate a new discourse on masculinity within their lives in Istanbul?

1.1. "Refugee *Misin?!'*" The Legal Context of Displaced Syrian Men in Istanbul

To better understand the lived experience of Syrian men in Istanbul, I will explain their legal status as well as the historical contextualization of the Syrian displacement to Turkey. This will help understand the back story of how Syrian men in Istanbul experience their lives.



(Husayn's Facebook profile cover page)

This quote is posted as a cover page's picture on Husayn's Facebook profile page. Husayn is a Syrian man, MBA Master's student at Marmara university, 31 years old, single, and has been living in Istanbul for 4 years. As reflected in the quote, Husayn is one of the many Syrian men displaced by forced migration, having lost their home, becoming foreigner, feeling strange. This self-consciousness of oneself as forcibly migrated brings

up certain challenges related to language, integration, and the ability to articulate oneself and feelings among others.

Many comments for the photo in Husayn's cover page have expressed empathy and support. Another Syrian friend commented in English to the post that "our thoughts are still free." Husayn replied in English to the comment: "I killed all my thoughts!" "Refugee misin?" another comment from another Syrian friend, denotes "are you a refugee?." It could be realized that within the phrasing of the question, using two languages English and Turkish does signify the ambiguous legal status Syrians have in Turkey.

After a decade of the Syrian uprising, Turkey has the largest refugee population in the world.⁵ The historical background is difficult to thoroughly review as many intricate political and societal reasons have induced anger leading to extensive protests throughout the country. In March 2011, Syrian government security forces crashed public demonstrations in Daraa city. Syrian protesters in the city of Daraa took over the streets to protest the arrest, and torture and killing of children who painted anti-government graffiti in schools. These demonstrations did not call for the overthrow of the government but rather demanded freedom and end to corruption. Government forces smashed the demonstrations by force and killed some civilian protesters by firing live ammunitions.⁶ Those actions provoked other cities and protests permeated all over the country. By June 2011, over 500 people were killed, and thousands of Syrians fled to Turkey.⁷ By 2013, a UN commission of inquiry⁷ concluded that the regime and some rebels groups are guilty of war crimes.⁸

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Figures at a Glance," (UNHCR, June 18, 2020), <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

⁶ELIZABETH FERRIS and KEMAL KIRIŞCI, "The Context, Causes, and Consequences of Syrian Displacement," in *The Consequences of Chaos, Syria's Humanitarian Crisis and the Failure to Protect* (Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt1c2cqws.6>.

⁷FERRIS and KIRIŞCI.14

⁸FERRIS and KIRIŞCI. 15.

As violence increased, families began to flee. By March 2013, the UNHCR reported more than one million people had fled Syria.⁹ Since then, Syrians lost their faith in changing the government because of the one ruling party's policies and lack of political representation and international support for the opposition groups.¹⁰ Consequently, the aforementioned reasons resulted in transforming the uprising into a proxy war involving imperial countries such as Russia and the USA who have different interests on the Syrian ground.¹¹ Countries' interests in Syria have not put into consideration the Syrian people's interest in their agendas. Thus, Syrians have fled all over the world and have settled in large numbers in Turkey. Syrian men are 53.8 percent of the Syrian population in Turkey.¹² The directorate general of migration management in Turkey states that 3.7 million registered Syrians were given temporary protection status as of December 2021.¹³

Syrian migrants who came to Turkey could be classified into three legal categories. The first group consists of Syrians who applied for the temporary protection system. Holders of temporary protection ID cards are regarded as 'guests' and cannot travel from Turkey and come back as their status will be terminated if they exit the country.¹⁴ They do not hold the status of a 'refugee' which otherwise would have put them under the international protection law. The reason for this is that Turkey signed the Geneva Convention on Refugees in 1967 which stated that displaced people who come outside of Europe are not entitled to obtain refugee status in Turkey.¹⁵ Consequently, Syrians in

⁹ "Syria Refugee Crisis Explained," How to Help Refugees - Aid, Relief and Donations, accessed November 30, 2020, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>.

¹⁰ Aslı Ilgıt and Rochelle Davis, "The Many Roles of Turkey in the Syrian Crisis," MERIP, June 17, 2016, <https://merip.org/2013/01/the-many-roles-of-turkey-in-the-syrian-crisis/>.

¹¹ FERRIS and KIRIŞCI, "The Context, Causes, and Consequences of Syrian Displacement." 17.

¹² "Numbers of Syrians in Turkey July 2020 – Refugees Association," accessed March 1, 2021, <https://multeciler.org.tr/eng/numbers-of-syrians-in-turkey-july-2020/>.

¹³ "GEÇİCİ KORUMA."

¹⁴ "Temporary Protection in Turkey," accessed December 29, 2021, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection-in-turkey>.

¹⁵ Sebnem Koser Akcapar and Dogus Simsek, "The Politics of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A Question of Inclusion and Exclusion through Citizenship," *Social Inclusion* 6, no. 1 (March 29, 2018): 177, <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v6i1.1323>.

Turkey are not regarded as refugees under international law but treated as a population under temporary protection. As such, to emphasize the complex condition of the legal status of Syrian in Turkey, I will utilize the ‘displaced Syrians’ term instead of ‘refugees’ which does not have the legal implications. The connotation and feeling accompanied by labeling them as displaced persons have featured them as vulnerable, overwhelmingly burdened by blame on anything that happens, and in need of sympathy by the hosting community. Ghayth, a refugee in The Netherland, a former university student in economics from Aleppo city, gives his testimony of being a refugee in a book entitled *Voices From Syria* as the following:

Today, the word “refugee” is used in a horrible way. It’s something either to be pitied or blamed for everything. Overpopulation? It’s the refugees. Rents going up? It’s the refugees. Crime? It’s the refugees. If you label people refugees, they remain refugees for the rest of their lives. For that reason, the organization I work with here doesn’t use this word. Instead, we say “newcomers.” After a while, they are no longer newcomers—just members of society. Ghayth, former student (Aleppo).¹⁶

As discussed earlier, characterizing displaced Syrians in Turkey as “guests” has boosted the sentiment of uncertainty. During my stay in Istanbul and interaction with beneficiaries working in NGOs, it can be seen that many displaced Syrians did not register officially in Turkey because of a feeling that they will return to Syria one day, and the number of unregistered persons is still unknown. The reason behind this ambiguity of the label “guest” brings about misunderstanding for Syrians and the Turkish people. According to Memişoğlu, the uncertainty is caused by the lack of general awareness among the public about refugee legal framework and temporary protection and the lack of effective communication channels between Syrian refugees and local authorities.¹⁷

¹⁶Wendy Pearlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and It Trembled: Voices from Syria*, first edition, 211, (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017).

¹⁷ Dr. Fulya Memişoğlu, *The Syrian Community in Turkey Perspectives, Prospects, and Policies | REPORT | PODEM*, 2018, <http://podem.org.tr/en/researches/the-syrian-community-in-turkey-perspectives-prospects-and-policies/>.

The second category includes some Syrians who have residence permits that are also known also as tourist residence permit, and 103.975 Syrians are registered under this regulation until December 2021.¹⁸ A tourist permit entitles its holder to travel anywhere as long as visas are issued. The third category are those Syrians who have got acquired Turkish citizenship and there are 92000 of them as of late August 2019.¹⁹ Half of this number are of children.²⁰ While the number of displaced Syrians who settled in Istanbul is 521.000, one in two Syrians in Turkey think that they will not return to Syria according to a recent survey conducted by the Migration and Integration Research Center of Turkish-German University in Istanbul.²¹ Waleed, 39 years old, is registered under the temporary protection status. He misses feeling happy in Syria and feels that he is under constant anxiety, and describes his experience in Istanbul as follows:

Istanbul is beautiful. I lead a peaceful life. I do not socialize with anyone. I have no problems with anyone. However, I always feel that I am under psychological pressure. I always feel distressed. I say: is it possible that I would be happy again as I used to feel in Syria. Something is missing, I do not know what it is.

The highest number of Syrians are registered under the temporary protection scheme compared to the other two categories. Not being recognized as ‘refugees’ which has international legal status put their life trajectories under constant uncertainty and in fear of deportation. Labeling Syrian refugees as ‘guests’ constitutes a major problem for Syrians in Turkey as this condition puts them in a liminal situation. Being under the temporary protection system entitles Syrians to have access to public health care and basic education. However, traveling outside the city where they have been registered is

¹⁸ “GEÇİCİ KORUMA.”

¹⁹ Displaced Syrians cannot apply for Turkish citizenship by themselves as the (Directorate general of migration management) does not take any applications, however, the migration management selects Syrians based on having an educational and economic capital, and calls them for interviews and to submit forms.

²⁰ “Turkey Granted Citizenship to over 92,000 Syrians,” accessed March 2, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/turkey-granted-citizenship-to-over-92-000-syrians/1548106>.

²¹ Bülent Sarıoğlu, “One in Two Syrians in Turkey Will Not Return to Homeland, Says Report - Turkey News,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, November 27, 2020, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/one-in-two-syrians-in-turkey-will-not-return-to-homeland-says-report-160365>.

not allowed unless they have permission from the migration directorate, nor they can return and visit their relatives in Syria.²² Moreover, destruction, oppression, and safety concerns in Syria have contributed to their decision to remain in Turkey. However, being unable to return and visit Syria, leaving their families and relatives behind, not having equal legal rights with the other refugees, and being oblivious of the political future both in Turkey and Syria have left displaced Syrians in limbo. This protracted waiting period has established a perplexed condition wherein they still hope for a change, and has inhibited Syrians from feeling settled in the country. Understanding the legal circumstances in detail can assist in better viewing the reality of Syrian men's lived experiences in Istanbul.

As a result of geographical proximity, cultural affinity and open-door policy,²³ Turkey has received 3.7 million Syrian until 2021.²⁴ Many responses from my interlocutors show that staying in Turkey is more convenient in terms of being able to practice Islam than it is in Europe, and that Turkish and Syrian's cultural and societal norms are quite similar. For them, Turkey is a middle way and mild option, they informed. European countries' cultural and societal differences is compensated by securing legal and economic stability being under the internationally protected status as a refugee. However, the study's distinctive nuance is that the temporary protection scheme in Turkey is a peculiar case to the Geneva refugee convention, as discussed earlier. This, in turn, affects the way Syrian men perceive their masculinity in post displacement life legally, psychologically, and socially.

1.2. Doing Ethnography During the Time of COVID 19 as an Insider

²²Bitte Hammargren, "Syrians In Turkey: Guests without a Future?," 18, (SKL International, 2020), <https://sklinternational.se/syriansinturkey.1001.html>.

²³Kilic Bugra Kanat, Kadir Ustun, and Ekonomi ve Toplum Arařtırmaları Vakfı Siyaset, *Turkey's Syrian refugees: toward integration*, 2015.

²⁴United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Syria Emergency," UNHCR, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>.

Before proceeding to the fieldwork, I have decided to utilize the ethnography method as I was interested in the topic as previously explained in the introduction. Consequently, I have thought, considered, and written possible factors related to the impact of Syrian displacement or migration to Istanbul on daily life experiences and Syrian men's emotions. As having talked with many academics and friends about the research topic, these factors were identity, integration issues, scarcity of job opportunities, difficulties in pursuing higher education, among many other factors. Being a Syrian, man, displaced, and having settled for 5 years in the city has made it convenient to befriend, live, converse, observe and conduct interviews with fellow Syrian men. As such, misconceptions related to the Syrian men's situations and hardships contribute to choosing the ethnographic method which will examine, in this case, the situation from the Syrian men's point of view. For this reason, informal conversations and participant observations were used in data collection. The development and analysis of relevant theories occur after data collection. I have initiated field work without any preconceived theories so to ensure that my focus is directed on data collection. While being in the field, I have attempted to keep in mind a "theoretical sensitivity" which "indicates an awareness of subtlety from the meanings conveyed by the collected data."²⁵

Consequently, interviews, fieldwork observations, and analysis have shifted my attention slightly to focus more on how Istanbul transformed their perception of who they are and to how they perceived masculinity. Thus, Syrian men lived experiences and views about being displaced and on masculinity can reveal insights into the possibly severely damaging impact this negligence can have on men individually as well as to society at large. For this reason, I have attempted to explain the existing circumstances which necessitate explaining and examining the stories of lived experiences, COVID 19 implications, and delicate conditions of the interrelation between the author and the topic.

²⁵Lily Orland-Barak, "The Theoretical Sensitivity of the Researcher: Reflections on a Complex Construct," *Reflective Practice* 3, no. 3 (October 2002): 263–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462394022000034523>.

I have also collected information from media resources which is related to political and societal debate of the Syrian presence in Turkey. As the article 'Analyzing New Media' suggests that "daily life is often punctuated with mediated experience".²⁶ People utilize mass telecommunication to keep updated of a sense of self and place.²⁷ Accordingly, Syrian men have explored through telecommunications and media technologies "the pleasures and dilemmas of everyday life".²⁸ Thus, the purpose of analyzing media texts is navigating the contexts of production and reception – which means exploring the interrelated legal, political, and media contexts of the Syrian presence in Turkey.²⁹

After conducting the interviews, I have transcribed and translated most of the recordings from Arabic to English. Then, the Quirkos application have facilitated the coding of the information. I have utilized the Interpretation-focused coding strategy adopted by Philip Adu.³⁰ It necessitates identifying important information in the data to be coded as empirical indicators. The strategy's main characteristic is understanding and deducing the information in a way that contributes to 'meaning making'.³¹ I have labeled and categorized themes.³² Nostalgia and displacement, socio-familial attitude to masculinity, and configurations of masculinity among others were some of the themes that were deciphered according to the interlocutors' extracts. I filled the gap between the themes and writing by using analytical memos to represent the data.³³ Finally, I compiled and integrated all categories under the research question into a theoretical framework.³⁴

²⁶Darrin Hodgetts and Kerry Chamberlain, "Analysing News Media," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, by Uwe Flick (1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2014), 381, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243.n26>.

²⁷Hodgetts and Chamberlain. Ibid.

²⁸Hodgetts and Chamberlain. Ibid.

²⁹Hodgetts and Chamberlain. Ibid.

³⁰Philip Adu, *A Step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Coding*, 32, (London New York: Routledge, 2019).

³¹Adu. Ibid.

³²Adu. Ibid.

³³Adu. 84.

³⁴Adu. 340.

This research is mainly adopting the narrative method in forced migration utilizing an article on “Stories as Lived Experience” by Marita Eastmond.³⁵ In anthropology, personal stories are considered to give voice to social categories that are regarded as not important or vulnerable enough as we have displaced Syrian men as an example to this end.³⁶ Contrary to the realist approach in dealing with facts and subjects as objective materials, the interpretive narrative approach is to investigate lived experience and the subjective aspect of social life. Doing so necessitates contemplating and digging into the meanings of displaced Syrian men experiencing the reality of the new country through their accounts.

After utilizing this method, I contend that the Syrian men’s stories and experiences in the transformative journey from Syria to Istanbul account for the position Syrian men have about themselves and how they are perceived by the host community. Investigating the question of masculinity and what does it mean to be a man and the classifications on manhood may lead to a better understanding on to what extent Syrian men can assert themselves primarily as individuals and ultimately as displaced vulnerable men settling in a different environment.

Reflexivity

I have attempted to benefit of being an interlocutor's friend and its impacts on facilitating a normal flow of conversations and stories. Moreover, James M. Freeman stated the role of the researcher in inducing the story is not “an interference with the data, but rather an integral part of it, indeed is the data.”³⁷ The researcher’s role and position to the interlocutors were made clear and emphasized continuously. Thus, understanding the

³⁵ M. Eastmond, “Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 248–64, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem007>.

³⁶ Eastmond. 248.

³⁷ James M. Freeman and David L. Krantz, “The Unfulfilled Promise of Life Histories,” *Biography* 3, no. 1 (1980): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2010.0829>.

interlocutors' stories from the narrator, insider, and outsider perspective can give multiple interpretations in understanding the larger context of the discussed issues.

To understand experience through its expressions in migration contexts, we have to understand the meaning related to the phenomena utilizing the lens of the people's experiences through the expressions they give.³⁸ The way the narrative is produced can be induced from different settings such as observing social interactions or having informal conversations during fieldwork. My interaction with the subjects in daily life conditions has offered an opportunity to unfold more narratives, ask more questions for blurry responses, and observe how crucial these notions are in constructing daily life interactions with the lived community. As the author lives with a displaced Syrian man and spent many curfew weekends in interlocutors' apartments, a symbolic feature of "alleviating suffering and changing their situation" was activated according to Eastmond.³⁹ That symbolic feature has possibly occurred as having the same origin, language, coming from similar social and cultural backgrounds, understanding social cues, and observing the social norms.

Eastmond argues that sharing daily life experiences can be inhibited by suffering; as scarcity of job opportunities and lack of social interactions for migrants may contribute in showing that their suffering is less severe as it is not visible among the society.⁴⁰ Syrian men are overloaded by the demand of greater responsibilities to life in Istanbul. Telling their stories and expressing oneself can change perspectives and ultimately lead to mitigate tensions with prejudiced people. This idea could be best represented by Ayyub's words during a fieldwork interview:

Some Turkish people may look down on you in a racist way. You have no right to live here. These people may be a minority here. On the other hand, some people are understanding and considerate of your

³⁸M. Eastmond, "Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 249, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem007>.

³⁹ Eastmond, "Stories as Lived Experience." 249:251.

⁴⁰ Eastmond. 252.

conditions when you speak to them. You will also encounter people who look down at you. But those same people's opinions may change if they listen to you telling your circumstances.

Shedding some light on Ayyub's lived experiences along with other Syrian men in Istanbul will lead to a better understanding of the struggles, hopes, calamities, and opportunities. Sharing the stories and issues of these lived experiences assist in relieving unspoken pain and contributing to making a change in their situations as suggested by Eastmond.

Data Collection

In conducting the qualitative research, I have utilized semi-structured interview, fieldnotes and participant observations as the primary sources of data. Doing so necessitates having a touch base contact with interlocutors. The interview's objective was mainly to experience and live with the interlocutors for the day the interview was conducted. Spending a day with the subject made it convenient to know the person in-depth, and to build rapport and trust with the subject. The interviews I did were mostly with interlocutors whom I have known and befriended since coming to Istanbul, and some others who I have met them back in Syria. Therefore, interlocutors were not only approached by a researcher in the first place but also by someone who is already a good friend to them. As examined by Owton and Allen-Collinson, friendship in ethnographic research may diminish the hierarchical separation between the researcher and interlocutor(s), however, it does not fully reduce or negate the power imbalances such as socioeconomic class, age. etc.⁴¹ Being a friend to the interlocutor(s) helps maintain a dialogical relationship which invites expressiveness, emotion, empathy, mutual participation and recognition between the researcher and interlocutors.⁴² However, it is

⁴¹Helen Owton and Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson, "Close But Not Too Close: Friendship as Method (Ology) in Ethnographic Research Encounters," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 43, no. 3 (June 2014): 286, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241613495410>.

⁴²Owton and Allen-Collinson. 301.

important to recognize the limitations that arise when understanding the power roles between I as a researcher and the research participant.

My previous work experience with an NGO has granted me access to a large number of personal contacts. Thus, I have utilized purposive sampling as a means of selecting participants. This is based on my judgement about who may potentially be the most related participants.⁴³ I have ultimately followed a snowball sampling strategy. I have conducted sixteen interviews in Arabic with displaced Syrian men living in Istanbul whose ages range from 21 to 39 years old. Six interlocutors are married and three of them are married to non-Syrian wives. All participants have lived in Istanbul for at least for three to seven years, which is a period critical to observe any changes in the participant's daily life over a longer time. It is important to highlight that 15 interlocutors' nuclear families are in Syria. The attached appendix page shows the list of the interlocutors' ages, marital status, and location of interviews. (See Appendix page 99)

As COVID 19 cases rose at the time, it took me one month until I was able to conduct the first interview on December 15, 2020. I have encountered many obstacles because of the following limitations because of the newly applied state regulations and restrictions on November 17, 2020, coffee houses, tea gardens, and football fields were closed. On December 1, 2020, a general curfew was implemented; every weeknight from 21:00 pm to 05:00 am Monday through Friday. On December 4, 2020, a weekend curfew was enforced, starting from 21:00 pm on Friday to 05:00 am Monday. Therefore, interviews took place mainly in 3 locations: interlocutors' apartments, interlocutors' workplaces, and at MEDIT Medrese – Ibn Haldun University Campus. As the COVID 19 measures were observed, these locations are familiar to the interlocutors and have enabled them to feel safe and relaxed as they are in an environment they know.⁴⁴ According to Seligmann and

⁴³Albine Moser and Irene Korstjens, "Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 3: Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis," *European Journal of General Practice* 24, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375091>.

⁴⁴Zichner, Happ, and Bruns, "Dealing with 'Lived Experience'. Benefits and Limitations." 299.

Estes, characterization of the fieldwork, “Home is often where centers of political power emanate from.”⁴⁵ As such, lockdowns and curfews have mostly made the interlocutors’ apartments the research’s fieldwork. This helps draw a better understanding of Syrian men’s social dynamics and behaviors observed at their ‘homes’.

Accordingly, COVID 19, lockdowns, and curfews introduced inconveniences in conducting interviews in the winter; during cold weather conditions, meeting up in cafes or restaurants or at the parks was not suitable nor available. Conducting online interviews was about to be brought to the table. However, online meetings appear to be less effective as they lack nonverbal communication, and cause difficulty in reading body language, facial expressions and gathering field data.⁴⁶ After I have conducted two face-to-face interviews that went well, I have realized that the humane interactions and spontaneity which have been built with interlocutors have been tremendously essential in understanding the human feelings of interlocutors’ subjects. I have also noticed that utilizing participant observation process through spending weekends with the interlocutors have assisted in building trust, establishing rapport.⁴⁷ Thus, face-to-face interviews and meetings have continued as they sustained a flow of spontaneity to whatever was offered and suggested by the interlocutors. The interest was not made only to make interviews but rather to keep beneficial spontaneous sincere human interactions between the researcher and the interlocutors.

In all conducted interviews, significant amount of participatory activities were done throughout the time spent with interlocutors such as assisting in cooking, cleaning dishes, relaxing and drinking tea, going for a walk, and bringing along Syrian or Turkish

⁴⁵Linda J. Seligmann and Brian P. Estes, “Innovations in Ethnographic Methods,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 64, no. 2 (February 2020): 178, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219859640>.

⁴⁶Sarah Dodds and Alexandra Claudia Hess, “Adapting Research Methodology during COVID-19: Lessons for Transformative Service Research,” *Journal of Service Management* 32, no. 2 (August 10, 2020): 209, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-05-2020-0153>.

⁴⁷Barbara B. Kawulich, “Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method,” *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 6, no. 2 (May 31, 2005), 13, <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-6.2.466>.

desserts to the interview venue as a Syrian custom. According to Barbara Kawulich, establishing rapport is related to the issue of reciprocity.⁴⁸ Giving back to the interlocutors in return for sharing their life with the researcher can be done through many ways such as gifts, physical labor, time or research results.⁴⁹ Therefore, the mutual activities have allowed us to have a helpful flow of information and stories, and to live and experience unspoken meanings of the lived experience through sharing food and discussing topics unrelated to the interview. The time we started the interview was a continuation of the already held discussions and catch-up conversations.

As a result, a sense of friendship was maintained as I became part of the social setting. I have felt that having conversation in a relaxed atmosphere made participants speak naturally and comfortably rather than having a formal setting where the researcher asks and the subject answers. This helped tremendously keeping memories vivid, cherishing lovely old times spent together as friends as well as gaining trust, confidence, and comfort. Thus, participant observation is not only about 'hanging out' with the interlocutors in their daily life activities but it also includes constant questioning to decipher the meaning of these activities.⁵⁰

According to Eliss, examining introspection as a sociological process allows generating interpretive materials from one's self and others.⁵¹ The researcher's essential goal is not to conclude how the subject unconsciously functions, rather it is to unveil the conscious experience of both subject and researcher.⁵² Utilizing surveys and questionnaires to ask subjects how they perceive a particular situation deemed not to be adequate; self-stories, participant observation, and phenomenological interpretation should be altogether studied.⁵³ Hence, examining one's self introspection will not only induce to

⁴⁸Kawulich. 14.

⁴⁹Kawulich. 14:15.

⁵⁰Kawulich. 14.

⁵¹Carolyn Ellis, "Sociological Introspection and Emotional Experience," *Symbolic Interaction* 14, no. 1 (February 1991): 23, <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.1991.14.1.23>.

⁵²Ellis. 30.

⁵³Ellis. 45.

comprehending the subjective part of emotion but will also clear the ambiguity and the complexity to the essence of emotional experience, and as such I have introspectively evaluated myself as a subject of the study.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, Zichner, Happ and Brunshave argued that lived experience has its limitations as “entrée” to the interview process might not be convenient when the research’s participants have few mutual qualifications with the researcher.⁵⁵ This could be overcome as the researcher positions himself appropriately to interlocutors through answering their inquisitive questions and acquiring consent from participants.⁵⁶ Consequently, before conducting the interviews, a burden was put on my shoulders as I started to contact the research interlocutors asking whether they were interested in being interviewed. The reason stems from his previous experience working as a translator and a liaison for similar research on Syrians. I have observed that interviews conducted by non-Arabic speakers have adversely impacted the interlocutors adversely. Doing interviews only for the sake of getting the data or interviews gathered and accomplished may bring about psychological trauma to the interlocutors. Approaching a vulnerable displaced person to talk about his life story or experiences is not a trouble-free mission when language barrier and cultural context are of concern.

Therefore, a genuine rapport and mutual trust between myself and the interlocutors was established and facilitated through shared knowledge and interest.⁵⁷ Besides, the most important factor which has made an effortless flow of communication was speaking the same language. Conversing in the native language has made communication much smoother, and has helped gaining access to sensitive information.⁵⁸ According to Jodie Taylor, being an intimate insider to the interlocutors may induce generating more data,

⁵⁴Ellis. 25.

⁵⁵Helga Zichner, Dorit Happ, and Bettina Bruns, “Dealing with ‘Lived Experience’. Benefits and Limitations,” *Erdkunde* 68, no. 4 (December 11, 2014): 297
<https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2014.04.05>.

⁵⁶Zichner, Happ, and Bruns. 299.

⁵⁷Zichner, Happ, and Bruns. Ibid.

⁵⁸Kawulich, “Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method.” 15.

and increase understanding the complexity of the interlocutors' past event and personal stories.⁵⁹ Focusing on the man as a "human soul" loaded with struggles and hopes rather than as a 'study subject' have made interviews more meaningful and purposeful. Moreover, having the status of being a participant's friend opened the door to share untold stories, and to listen and be able to observe first-hand self-transformation experiences.⁶⁰ Success and failure stories and challenges accompanied after coming to Istanbul were told in detail by the interlocutors. Fragility, vulnerability, and resilience are common themes of the stories told by Syrian men in Istanbul.

Taking into consideration the shared knowledge and the common culture, I have tried to put ethical consideration into account to not exploit intentionally or unintentionally my position first as a friend and second as a researcher to bring about any possible trauma or sad memories. The interlocutors are notified beforehand that they have to be interested in partaking in the research. I have reiterated that my position as a friend should not oblige them to participate in the interviews if they do not feel they want to. Making sure that they feel comfortable throughout the interview process, interlocutors were informed that I was personally asked to participate in an interview for similar research last June and rejected it because I had not felt comfortable and was psychologically tired. Audio recording permission was also taken. No photographs or videos were taken during the interviews so that trust can be maintained. Interlocutors are free to choose whether to mention their first given names or change "real names" to nicknames. They were informed that they could skip any questions for any reasons, and they could discontinue the interview at any point, and they have the right to delete the recording or disengage from participating in the research whenever they want without needing any explanations. All these points were mentioned to create a conducive environment for the participants to speaking freely.

⁵⁹Jodie Taylor, "The Intimate Insider: Negotiating the Ethics of Friendship When Doing Insider Research," *Qualitative Research* 11, no. 1 (February 2011): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794110384447>.

⁶⁰Taylor. 7.

1.3. Studies on Syrian Men in the Diaspora

Research on displaced Syrian men's lived experience and masculinity in Turkey appear to have inadequate focus and attention. However, studies on representations, perceptions, performances, and understanding of displaced Syrian men research are relatively available. The succeeding paragraphs will review across some related works regarding the Syrian man as a Middle Eastern, displaced, and a refugee in the Arab and European hosting countries.

Scholars have analyzed a broad range of topics related to men and masculinity in the Middle East such as caregiving and love through food,⁶¹circumcision, the making of men and the use of violence.⁶² Most of this research have utilized ethnographic methods to understand the interplay between various phenomena. For example, a study conducted on Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian men in the Middle East and the United States, has found that an "Emergent Masculinity" has been defined against the stereotypical notion about what Arab and Muslim men are thought to be as misogynistic and challenges the "hegemonic masculinity" label in the case of Middle Eastern men who struggle to overcome infertility and childlessness through assisted reproduction.⁶³ The book *New Arab Man* is helpful in deciphering whether a certain type of masculinity for displaced Syrian men is maintained in Istanbul and whether a new definition of masculinity has been reshaped.

The book 'Live and Die like a Man' shows how masculinity is shaped and reshaped in a low-income neighborhood in Cairo, Egypt. Ghannam explains how "masculine

⁶¹Nefissa Naguib, *Nurturing Masculinities: Men, Food, and Family in Contemporary Egypt*, First edition (Austin: University of Texas press, 2015).

⁶²Maiy Gaşüb, Emma Sinclair-Webb, and Mai Ghousoub, eds., *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, Saqi Essentials (London: Saqi, 2006).

⁶³ Marcia C Inhorn, *The New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East*, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400842629>.

trajectories” are shaped.⁶⁴ This also assists in understanding the transformation journey Syrian men have made in Istanbul and the possible trajectories Syrian men make to get accustomed to the new challenges, and to how they could perform masculinity in the context of Istanbul, Turkey. While these studies are of importance to understand the mentality of Syrian men in the period before the “Arab Spring”, the context of forced migration gives different interpretations of the way Syrian men live and experience irksome challenging conditions in the host countries. Making free choices is unattainable as Syrian men are over-occupied with making the ends meet, accustoming themselves to the new environment, language, rules, culture, etc.

After examining the existing literature on Middle Eastern men’s lives and perceptions of masculinity, I will delve into other studies that focus on displaced Syrian men in the diaspora particularly. As Syrian men flee from war zones, their masculinity is put into question as the conformed visual expectations of what a “refugee” looks like in the media are disturbed.⁶⁵ The image of displaced Syrian men is shown stereotypically in the media as dangerous or perpetrators according to Rettberg and Gajjala.⁶⁶ The displaced Syrian men's distorted image in the media has deteriorated more as they were not allowed to travel further to Europe from Greece in 2014.⁶⁷ Banned, rejected, and inhibited from moving to another place have worsened the Syrian men’s vulnerability according to Kristín and Ingólfur.⁶⁸ Syrian men’s quest to reach Europe have embodied “an emergent refugee masculinity” so that they could not only live in dignity but also could not play the role of a “provider” to their the families. This research can help examine and compare the current image of Syrian men in the Turkish media of the Syrian men. One study on

⁶⁴Farha Ghannam, *Live and Die like a Man: Gender Dynamics in Urban Egypt* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 57.

⁶⁵ Jill Walker Rettberg and Radhika Gajjala, “Terrorists or Cowards: Negative Portrayals of Male Syrian Refugees in Social Media,” *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 178–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2016.1120493>.

⁶⁶ Rettberg and Gajjala.

⁶⁷Árdís Kristín Ingvars and Ingólfur V. Gíslason, “Moral Mobility: Emergent Refugee Masculinities among Young Syrians in Athens,” *Men and Masculinities* 21, no. 3 (August 2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17748171>.

⁶⁸Ingvars and Gíslason. 1.

how the Syrian refugees are represented in the Turkish media features the Syrian refugee issue in three rhetoric: refugee policy, illegal crossings and refugee as victim.⁶⁹ The main discourse in Turkish media about refugees was through characterizing Syrian refugees as victims struggling to survive.⁷⁰ The prominent nuance to the ideal victim showed by Turkish media outlets is that Syrian women and children are shown as vulnerable, innocent and worthy of sympathy.⁷¹ Young Syrian men, however, are represented as homeless and marginalized and yet to have the victim status.⁷² This article, therefore, can explain about Syrian men's positioned image in the Turkish media, and differentiate whether another understanding of 'refugee' is drawn in the minds of Syrian men.

Moreover, I have examined some studies conducted on Syrian refugees' masculinity in the diaspora. Syrian refugee men in the Netherlands, however, have constructed meanings of masculinity concerning labor market access, paid work, and perceived social status.⁷³ This research can help look at the multiple ways Syrian men in Istanbul differentiate themselves to having social status and accessing the labor market. The prior displacement context of intricate cultural and social norms applied in Syria has complicated the process of becoming a man in the Netherlands.⁷⁴

Displaced Syrian men in Egypt, however, have renegotiated notions of masculinity in contrast to other Syrian refugees in European countries.⁷⁵ They distanced themselves from the "refugee" label through ascribing themselves to be more morally superior,

⁶⁹Ulaş Sunata and Esra Yıldız, "Representation of Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Media," *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 129, https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms.7.1.129_1.

⁷⁰Sunata and Yıldız. Ibid.

⁷¹Sunata and Yıldız.133.

⁷²Sunata and Yıldız. Ibid.

⁷³Rik P. Huizinga and Bettina van Hoven, "Hegemonic Masculinities after Forced Migration: Exploring Relational Performances of Syrian Refugee Men in The Netherlands," *Gender, Place & Culture* 0, no. 0 (July 1, 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2020.1784102>.

⁷⁴Huizinga and Hoven. 5.

⁷⁵Magdalena Suerbaum, "Becoming and 'Unbecoming' Refugees: Making Sense of Masculinity and Refugeness among Syrian Refugee Men in Egypt," *Men and Masculinities* 21, no. 3 (August 2018): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17748170>.

successful, hardworking than other Syrian refugees who receive governmental support from European hosting countries.⁷⁶ Differentiating themselves from being labeled as refugee was conducted through disdaining the masculinity of “real refugees” – Syrian asylum seekers in Europe.⁷⁷ “The real refugees” are personified as men who lost their Middle East culture in exchange for protection in Europe as they receive financial aids from host countries. Syrian men in Egypt have asserted their masculinity through the process of “reverse stigmatization” against the Egyptian host community, as Syrians would look down on Egyptians who are inconsiderate of the displaced Syrians conditions in Egypt.⁷⁸ As for the Syrians in Turkey, being a “guest” does not hold any legal significance to the regular state of being a refugee. Examining this research is important as the peculiarity of the status of Syrians living in Turkey necessitates looking differently at how Syrian men perceive themselves in relation to the host community.

Another research done by SKL International, a subsidiary to the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, and which studies Syrians’ circumstances in Turkey as recognized under the temporary protection scheme, explains the Syrians daily life experiences as well as narratives about anti-Syrian sentiment in Turkey.⁷⁹ The papers study the geopolitical complexities of Turkey and Syria, implications of Turkey’s declining economy on the most vulnerable community, and the EU-Turkey refugee deal.⁸⁰ Understanding the Turkish geo-political arena helps in examining the current and future prospects of the Syrian population in Turkey. Turkish political parties’ pronouncement to deport Syrians as soon as they are in power have agonized Syrians’ perception of stability and sense of home. Research on how Syrians have perceived their host country and how they are perceived by the community, and their views on Turkish politics assist in shaping clearer vision Syrian men lived experience in Istanbul.

⁷⁶Suerbaum. 14.

⁷⁷Suerbaum. 14.

⁷⁸ Suerbaum, 15.

⁷⁹Bitte Hammargren, “Syrians In Turkey: Guests without a Future?” 23.

⁸⁰Bitte Hammargren. 6.

In conclusion, as an emerging body of literature, this scholarship demonstrates different contexts of forced migration and displacement, conceptions of masculinities, and how displaced Syrian men's circumstances make sense of the novel challenges in hosting countries. Most current studies are largely studying displaced Syrian men in Europe and Arab countries. Thus, this research will focus on displaced Syrian men in Istanbul specifically as little attention is paid, and as relatively low number of studies are dedicated to this research area. Moreover, existing academic works are conducted by non-Arabic speakers and non-Syrian researchers. Thus, a qualitative ethnographic approach is adopted. I have possibly benefited from my position as I am a native-Arabic speaker and an insider to overcome and bridge the contextual barriers as discussed earlier.

1.4. On Being a Displaced Syrian Man in Istanbul

According to Miranda Gaanderse, in the article, 'Gender and Forced Displacement: Practical Issues and Challenges at Field Level', defines forced displacement as follows:

Forced displacement is a traumatic experience. Persons fleeing their homes to escape persecution or generalized violence face both direct and indirect threats to their safety and wellbeing at various stages of flight, often exacerbated by separation from family, a breakdown in community support structures, and weakened rule of law.⁸¹

Displaced Syrian men can be equally ascribed to this definition as their lives abruptly have been disrupted. After fleeing Syria, not only did they separate from their family but they also became more vulnerable towards themselves, their families, society, host community and the world being labeled as refugees.⁸² They are confronted by displacement challenges, and have started to probe different ways to start their lives from scratch. Uprooted of their community, culture and stability, the Syrian masculinity

⁸¹ Gaanderse Miranda. "Gender and Forced Displacement: Practical Issues and Challenges at Field Level." *St Antony's International Review* 9, no. 1 (2013): 108. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26229104>.

⁸² Edward Newman and Joanne van Selm, eds., *Refugees and Forced Displacement: International Security, Human Vulnerability, and the State* (Tokyo: United Nations Univ. Press, 2003).

is affected severely by the implication of displacement. Feeling emasculated begins with the act of being displaced. The situation of displaced Syrian men in Istanbul resembled the case of young Kenyan men refugees who “come to terms with being forced to flee by other men”, which leads to a “humiliating experience.”⁸³ Displaced Syrian men in Lebanon experienced feeling guilty at the beginning of the uprising in 2013. They had “Feelings of guilt over choosing to leave ... rather than stay and fulfil their role as protectors and defenders of their land, which has added to their feelings of low self-worth and powerlessness.”⁸⁴ After I have already discussed in detail the legal implications of the displaced Syrians status in Turkey, I will explain the broader theoretical context of the Syrian men’s lived experience. This section will provide a brief explanation on the case of Syrian men concerning forced migration and masculinity.

Men who are displaced due to forced migration are possibly prone to greater intolerance, discrimination, and violence. The mistreatment stems from deeming women and children as the most vulnerable among the refugee community.⁸⁵ However, men who are forced to migrate hold existing masculine mindsets and notions from their homeland which usually tend to be fixed and well-rooted on manhood and gender relations.⁸⁶ According to Kimmel and Bridges,⁸⁷ masculinity is a social construct, concerned about the social role, construction, and meanings of what it means to “be a man”, and it can be defined as “the behaviors, social roles, and relations of men within a given society as well as the meanings attributed to them.”⁸⁸

⁸³R. Jaji, “Masculinity on Unstable Ground: Young Refugee Men in Nairobi, Kenya,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22, no. 2 (June 1, 2009): 177–94, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fep007>.

⁸⁴Roula El-Masri et al., *Shifting Sands: Changing Gender Roles among Refugees in Lebanon*, 2013.

⁸⁵ Mike Donaldson and R. Howson, “Men, Migration and Hegemonic Masculinity,” *Faculty of Arts - Papers (Archive)*, January 1, 2009, 210, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/artspapers/191>.

⁸⁶ Donaldson and Howson.

⁸⁷Michael Kimmel and Tristan Bridges, “Masculinity” (Oxford University Press, July 27, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199756384-0033>.

⁸⁸“Hegemonic Masculinity,” Oxford Reference, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095928286>.

Different imaginations of masculinity have been shaped after settling in Istanbul such as finding a job and asserting oneself through gaining money. Acquiring the legal papers needed for a safe stay in the city which has made them feel less certain of their future as deportation fear looms around because of the anti-refugee rhetoric coming from the Turkish opposition parties. The issues of being breadwinner and women's work have manifested a pressing challenge to the 'Syrian Man' ideal of manhood. Thus, looking from a broader perspective, gender in the Middle East is formed by a patriarchal society, according to Adibi.⁸⁹ He argued that masculinity is divided into two approaches mainly functionalist and constructivist.⁹⁰ Gilmore (1990) takes functionalist approach in defining the main characters of masculinity – men function in a complex system in which all parts of the system work together to promote stability and solidarity.⁹¹ Nevertheless, constructionists emphasize power relations and men's dominance over women.⁹² The leading constructivist theorist Raewyn Connell developed the constructionist theory and focused primarily on gender hierarchy and gender injustice.⁹³ Connell defines gender as "a social practice" as she states that attention should be shifted from focusing on sex roles to concentrating on the embedded structure: "Gender is a social structure or socially organized set of practices forming relationships between people, rather than a matter of kinds of people."⁹⁴

Connell reformulated the concept of masculinity to what is known as "hegemonic masculinity" which categorizes multiple masculinities that change depending on time, culture, and the individual.⁹⁵ Hence, in studying the case of displaced Syrian men context in Istanbul, we should examine the term "hegemonic masculinity" which refers to "men

⁸⁹Hossein Adibi, "Sociology of Masculinity in the Middle East," in *Social Change in the 21st Century 2006 Conference Proceedings*, ed. C. Hall and C. Hopkinson (Social Change in the 21st Century Conference, Australia: Queensland University of Technology, 2006), 2,3, <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/6069/>.

⁹⁰Adibi. 2.

⁹¹Adibi. 2.

⁹²Adibi. 2.

⁹³Adibi. 3.

⁹⁴RW Connell, "Gender as a Social Practice," in *The New Social Theory Reader* (Routledge, 2020), 369.

⁹⁵R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 830, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.

who exemplify, perform, and perpetuate the mythology of dominant masculinity, which are implicated in the subordination of women.”⁹⁶ The aforementioned concepts should be investigated such as social practices, social structures, dominant masculinity, and hegemonic masculinity so that we could better understand the essence of masculine representations of the displaced Syrian men. As we have for the displaced Syrian men in Istanbul, the question of masculinity is partly challenged to be established as a socially constructed phenomenon. As Ayyub mentions:

I have been taking the familial responsibilities right after I finish my high school education until today. I do everything possible to support my family even if that would bring me trouble and do harm to my benefits and health. I do not believe that the reason why I am assisting my family comes from being a man, and consequently, my sister should be submissive to me. I do not think that is the correct attitude at all. I have helped many non-relative people, how would you think if any of my family members needed help. I am not waiting for any compensation. I do not have any right to get from them. I am helping for the sake of doing good deeds. I hope the reward will be great now and in the hereafter.

In this sense, Ayyub’s devotion to the family is derived from adhering to Islamic principles instead of the social norms. The difference in the Syrian case is that displaced Syrian men are lacking the Syrian social circles they used to have back in Syria. Consequently, that deficiency reflects on how they perceive themselves as men and what it means to be a man. The cultural social transformation of conditions and circumstances between Syria and Istanbul could have impacts on the way they behave, adopt social roles, perceive their familial relations to their mothers, sisters, or wives. As such that the concept of masculinity is being criticized by many scholars as it does not explain all the disparities among behaviors, identities, and meanings related to the masculine characters.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ John Scott and Gordon Marshall, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” in *A Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford University Press, 2009), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199533008.001.0001/acref-9780199533008-e-992>.

⁹⁷ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 836, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.

Gender studies scholars such as Peterse, Collier, and MacInnes debate that the concept of masculinity is flawed because “it essentializes the character of men or imposes a false unity on a fluid and contradictory reality.”⁹⁸ Consequently, the term “masculinities” is instead utilized because these performances are produced and reproduced as a mere personal experience in day-to-day interactions.⁹⁹ Observations from the fieldwork indicate that Syrian men's understanding of masculinity has differed to some extent between their two lives in Syria and Istanbul. The pressure imposed by their community has lessened. Since their childhood, certain expectations burden the Syrian men. Living in Istanbul, where they have to work for long work shifts and endure difficult working conditions with low pay, have challenged the notions of masculinity as being the only provider for the family or being the one person decision-maker in the house. This thesis shows whether living in Istanbul and its hasty environment has (re)shaped or affected the configurations of the masculine lived experience of displaced Syrian men and what meanings are attributed to masculinity and being a man, and finally, to what extent the hegemonic masculinity mindset is embodied in the imaginations of displaced Syrian men.

Hence, in order to pave the way for a meaningful discussion, this introductory chapter have provided the contextual framework, including a brief history of Syrian displacement, Syrian men's complex legal status in Turkey, and the implications this displacement has had on daily life experiences. I have explained in detail how this study was conducted, and I have also provided assessment on its methodology, and have presented a discussion on literature review. This study shows that the displacement has led to the questioning of Syrian men’s self-identification and understanding of their masculinity, and that has brought about different configurations of masculinities. The ethnographic findings have shown that Syrian men's lived experiences as displaced persons in Turkey clearly has a significant impact on their perception of their own

⁹⁸ Connell and Messerschmidt. 836.

⁹⁹ Kimmel and Bridges, “Masculinity.”

masculinity. Chapter 2 discusses the Syrian presence conjuncture of the host country in relation to their legal status, and how Turkey's public discourse has developed feelings of impermanence and historical injustice. It will elaborate the discourses about Syrian men within Turkey's social and political context, and its consequential impacts on the way Syrian men perceive and define themselves. I will elaborate on the strategies Syrian men take to be recognized, and camouflage techniques that they utilize. Building on this discussion, chapter 3 explores their daily life experiences, burdens, and difficulties they face in Istanbul in relation to the familial affairs i.e. the fact that Syrian men identify themselves as men when being, living, and fulfilling their familial potential and responsibilities. It will explore and explain how Istanbul's lived experience is being perceived and reshaped by Syrian men after fleeing to Turkey. Chapter 4 continues to show how displaced Syrian men's 'traditional route' is being challenged, contested and negotiated by displacement complexity, and attempts to explain how they perform their imagined masculinities. It will discuss the displaced Syrian men's perception about the 'Ideal Syrian Man' being contested within Istanbul's complex and diverse lived reality. Finally, in chapter 5, I will discuss representations and experiences of masculinity among displaced Syrian men in Istanbul. It explains how within these negotiations and contestations, Syrian men are producing new masculinities while emphasizing the importance of the family and their responsibilities.

CHAPTER II: 'GUEST OR REFUGEE': NEGOTIATIONS OF MASCULINE IDENTITY IN RELATION TO TURKISH POLITICS, SOCIETY AND HISTORY

Syrian men's post displacement life in Istanbul is mainly connected to their reaction to Turkey's domestic and foreign policies, politics and media discourses, and Turkish society's attitudes towards Syrians. Syrian men's daily lived experience is largely about explaining their emotional experience and masculinity. Most Syrians in Turkey are living a liminal phase under the temporary protection scheme, and unable to return to Syria as discussed earlier. The most immediate potential legal ramification of being under that legal system is that displaced Syrians feel fearful of an ambiguous future. The number of Syrians who have become naturalized Turkish citizens equals only five percent of the whole Syrian population residing in Turkey.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, due to Turkish opposition parties' rhetoric about refugee, anti-refugee media discourse, Syrian men have mostly distanced themselves from the 'refugee' label presenting a different narrative on successful stories of Syrian men. Relating to Islam and shared historical ties between the Syrian and Turkish peoples have impacted Syrian men's imagination about brotherhood and belongingness. Accordingly, this chapter will aim to answer the sub-question: To what extent has the Turkish public & political discourse about Syrians influenced on the emotional experience of Syrian men?

Before delving into the details of whether Syrians can assert themselves and express emotions, I will pave the ground for a better understanding of political discourses about the Syrian presence in Turkey, and then will discuss the implications of such narratives on the Syrian populations in Istanbul. Finally, I will discuss the sentiments Syrian men experience in Istanbul and hindrances that stand against asserting themselves.

¹⁰⁰"Turkey Granted Citizenship to over 92,000 Syrians," accessed March 2, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/turkey-granted-citizenship-to-over-92-000-syrians/1548106>.

3.7 million Syrians are living in Turkey as of December 2021.¹⁰¹ After ten years of the conflict, Turkey's policy in Syria is to protect its border and provide shelter for Syrians living in Turkey. The Turkish Presidency regards the Turkish Syrian border as a matter of national security, and seek to establish a safe zone area in Syria so that Syrians can return home as soon as possible.¹⁰² Some nearly 300 thousand Syrian refugees have returned to their homeland in the designated safe zones.¹⁰³ Turkish President Erdogan describes the security and safety of the Syrian population as important as that of Turkish citizens: "It is our duty to protect the rights and honors of our friends, and brothers and sisters beyond our borders as well as of our own citizens... We cannot leave our brothers and sisters at our elbow to oppressors' mercy, bombs and barrel bombs while we live in peace and security here."¹⁰⁴ As of August 2021 around 450,000 Syrians returned willingly to the Syrian areas secured by Turkey¹⁰⁵ Turkish President Erdogan said: "It is our obligation to Turkish citizens to ensure the refugees' safe return to their homes in parallel with the improvement of the situation in their countries."¹⁰⁶ However, he added that Syrians who learn Turkish and contribute to the economy and integrate socially are expected to stay as many are naturalized as Turkish citizens.¹⁰⁷

As the Syrian conflict has been protracted for ten years, the Syrian population issue in Turkey has become the subject of debate of Turkish political parties to achieve political

¹⁰¹"GEÇİCİ KORUMA."

¹⁰²"Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey : NSC Statement: 'The Safe Zone Project Will Be Consolidated with More Advanced Steps,'" accessed November 20, 2021, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/109892/nsc-convenes-at-the-presidential-complex>.

¹⁰³"Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey : 'The Aim of Those Who Want to Keep Turkey Away from Syria Is Not to Liberate the Syrian People but to Deepen the Quagmire,'" accessed November 20, 2021, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/101728/-the-aim-of-those-who-want-to-keep-turkey-away-from-syria-is-not-to-liberate-the-syrian-people-but-to-deepen-the-quagmire->.

¹⁰⁴"Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey : 'The Aim of Those Who Want to Keep Turkey Away from Syria Is Not to Liberate the Syrian People but to Deepen the Quagmire.'"

¹⁰⁵"Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey : 'Leading Our Lives in Peace Depends on All of Us Getting Vaccinated,'" accessed December 2, 2021, <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/130067/-leading-our-lives-in-peace-depends-on-all-of-us-getting-vaccinated->.

¹⁰⁶"Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey: 'Leading Our Lives in Peace Depends on All of Us Getting Vaccinated.'"

¹⁰⁷"Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey: 'Leading Our Lives in Peace Depends on All of Us Getting Vaccinated.'"

gains. Meral Aksener, an opposition leader, promised to send Syrians back if she became a president in the 2018 election¹⁰⁸ Turkey's main opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu also vowed to deport Syrians within two years period if he is voted to power in the coming 2023 elections. A study conducted in 2019 on "Attitudes towards Syrians in Istanbul" shows that 35.49 percent of the Turkish population have approved the Turkish government's previous open door policy for displaced Syrians.¹⁰⁹ Possible reasons for discontent towards Syrians stem from COVID 19's economic implications and inflation. The amount of social and health assistance provided to Syrians in Turkey have become a controversial topic as Turkish public opinions towards Syrians have been altered after their 10-year stay in Turkey. The Turkish president reiterates statements about the generosity of Turkey supporting vulnerable refugees: "According to the calculations of the United Nations, we have spent more than \$37 billion only for Syrian refugees. In this context, our country has ranked first in the world in humanitarian development aid compared to its national income for the last two years."¹¹⁰ However, Kilicdaroglu claims that Syrians are treated better than Turkish citizens are: "(There is) no money for farmers, do you know how much has been spent on Syrians? \$30 million. They have become first-class citizens... The (Turkish government) spent \$30 million on Syrians who don't work."¹¹¹ Ali Babacan, the Turkish minister who used to serve at the onset of Syrians pouring to Turkey, says:

Turkey is a strong and big country. We did not open new schools when the Syrians came. We did only expand classes. We did not open new hospitals for the Syrians. We increased the capacity from 60% to 70%. The state did not open new investments for the sake of the Syrians. The only cost is current expenses. This is known as an implied or

¹⁰⁸"I Will Send 4 Million Syrian Refugees Back to Syria: İYİ Party Leader - Turkey News," *Hürriyet Daily News*, accessed November 27, 2021, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/i-will-send-4-million-syrian-refugees-back-to-syria-iyi-party-leader-133509>.

¹⁰⁹"Attitudes Toward Syrian Refugees In Istanbul: | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Niwêneriya Tirkîyeyê," *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, accessed December 2, 2021, 55, <https://tr.boell.org/en/2021/06/10/attitudes-toward-syrian-refugees-istanbul>.

¹¹⁰"Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Türkiye 4 Milyondan Fazla Sığınmacıya Ev Sahipliği Yapıyor," accessed December 2, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-turkiye-4-milyondan-fazla-siginmaciya-ev-sahipligi-yapiyor/1526721>.

¹¹¹Halktv, *KEMAL KILIÇDAROĞLU GİRESUN'DA 20 09 2017*, 2017, <https://youtu.be/-t70cY9U6m8?t=826>.

shadow cost. The actual cost is not that high. There are also grants from the European Union.¹¹²

An EU official stated that the EU is not paying money to the Turkish government but rather the money spent by the EU is for the purpose of supporting displaced Syrians,¹¹³ and the estimate for the total financial assistance that the EU has provided for refugees in Turkey amounts to €6.8 billion since 2011.¹¹⁴ The Turkish Minister of Family, Labor, and Social Services, Zahra Zumrut Selcuk, said that all aids provided to Syrians is funded by the European Union, and Turkey has not spent any of the financial resources allocated to Turkish citizens for displaced Syrians.¹¹⁵ The contested political environment Turkey endures has directed public opinions against Syrians.

Some other Turkish political figures from opposition parties encourage the public to have anti-refugee sentiment, racism, xenophobic rhetoric, and paranoia within society to sustain homogeneous ethnic identity among Turkish people. The discriminative rhetoric varies from hate speeches to racist remarks and strange claims. Umit Ozdag, a Turkish politician, claims that thirty percent of displaced Syrians are overweight, and twenty percent are obese,¹¹⁶ Syrian's fertility rate is high, displaced Syrians pose a continuous threat to the cultural, ethnic and geopolitical structure of Turkey, and that Syrian displacement to Turkey was already planned by the Pentagon in 1997.¹¹⁷ The main political agenda of Ozdag's party is to deport Syrians who are under temporary

¹¹²Habertürk TV, *Göçmenlerin Ekonomiye Etkisi Ne? Ali Babacan Yanıtladı*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XG8NLkoyNIA>.

¹¹³"EU Not Paying Money to Turkish Gov't, but Supporting Refugees," accessed December 2, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/eu-not-paying-money-to-turkish-govt-but-supporting-refugees/2416454>.

¹¹⁴Factsheet, "European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations," accessed December 2, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/europe/turkey_en.

¹¹⁵"Bakan Selçuk: Mültecilere Yardımı Avrupa Birliği Yapıyor," *Derincemiz*, accessed December 2, 2021, <https://www.derincemiz.com/haber/8311882/bakan-selcuk-multecilere-yardimi-avrupa-birligi-yapiyor>.

¹¹⁶"İYİ Party Deputy Head Draws Ire for Saying '28 Percent of Syrian Refugees Are Obese' - Turkey News," *Hürriyet Daily News*, accessed December 3, 2021, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/iyi-party-deputy-head-draws-ire-for-saying-28-percent-of-syrian-refugees-are-obese-123003>.

¹¹⁷"Right-wing Values Rebranded: A Case Study on İYİ Party," accessed December 3, 2021, <https://www.dokuz8haber.net/right-wing-values-rebranded-a-case-study-on-iyi-party>.

protection and revoke Turkish citizenship for naturalized Syrians.¹¹⁸ Moreover, other peculiar claims circulated on social media platforms and in other websites requesting Syrians to return to Syria for spreading COVID 19 in Turkey.¹¹⁹ We can conclude that opposition parties' discourse on the 'Syrian refugee' issue is based on securitization of the Turkish ethnical, cultural, social fabrics amid economic crisis claiming that the presence of Syrians hinders sustaining the prosperity of Turkey as suggested by the main opposition party spokesperson: "Syrian and Afghan refugees are Turkey's number-one national survival problem."¹²⁰ These political narratives have impacted the Syrian sentiment regarding their stay in Turkey and how they perceive themselves, and how they are perceived by the Turkish people.

2.1. "Not All Syrians Are Refugees"

More than 6.7 million Syrians fled Syria and were ascribed to be called refugees or asylum-seekers.¹²¹ The word 'refugee' connotes vulnerability, showing sympathy and empathy from others. Unlike other Syrians in European countries who receive housing, financial assistance up to €354 per month while taking language lessons for every adult,¹²² Syrians in Turkey have not had any of these benefits because they are guest rather than refugees. Syrians who registered under the temporary protection scheme can receive 120 Turkish Liras, the equivalent of 10 euros, for each member of the household, and this is funded by the EU Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN)

¹¹⁸Haberiniz, *Zafer Partisi Lideri Özdağ "DEVA Türk Milleti İçin Deva Değil, Beladır,"* 2021, <https://youtu.be/6g71DoHw2yM?t=1074>.

¹¹⁹Prof.Dr.Pelin Gündeş, "Ülkemizde artık görünmeyen el ayak, verem, şark çıbanı gibi hastalıkların tekrar çıkmaması için, #Covid_19 un yayılma hızını durdurabilmek için #SuriyelilerSuriyeye," Tweet, @gundesbakir (blog), September 15, 2020, <https://twitter.com/gundesbakir/status/1305960262978211840>.

¹²⁰DAILY SABAH, "Opposition Fuels Anti-Refugee Sentiments in Turkey," Daily Sabah, August 1, 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/opposition-fuels-anti-refugee-sentiments-in-turkey/news>.

¹²¹"Refugee Statistics | USA for UNHCR," accessed December 6, 2021, <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/>.

¹²²"Asylum Seekers in Germany – What Benefits and Rights Do You Have?," accessed December 6, 2021, <https://immigrationlawyers-london.com/blog/benefits-rights-for-asylum-seekers-in-germany.php>.

programme.¹²³ Intriguing is the case of Syrian men settled in Egypt, distancing themselves from the refugee label through looking down to the “real refugees” – Syrian men refugees who are in Europe.¹²⁴ “The real refugees” are personified as men who lost their Middle Eastern culture in exchange for protection in European countries. Syrians in Turkey seemingly have distanced themselves from the vulnerable populations in camps near the Turkish-Syrian borders. Only 1.5% percent of Syrians who live in camps near the Turkish Syrian border, are registered under the temporary protection scheme in Turkey.¹²⁵ Furthermore, their displacement in Istanbul has resulted in feelings of failure as they have not fulfilled the traditional route of displaced Syrian men in Syria. As anti-refugee rhetoric increased in some host countries because of COVID 19 mismanagement and inability to take the necessary measures,¹²⁶ hosting countries’ governments are trying to shift the attention from poor management turmoil to scapegoating the refugee’s and reducing the number of refugees they have been hosting.¹²⁷ Moreover, as discussed, opposition parties in Turkey like other hosting countries regard Syrians as a threat to national security and a possible source of chaos.¹²⁸ The Turkish Interior Ministry announced that the arrival of Syrians in Turkey did not cause a security and stability problem since 2011.¹²⁹ Syrian men have displayed that they are lively, productive, hardworking, diligent, successful business people. Ayyub speaks:

Generally, many Turkish people do not have the full picture of the Syrian people. Most Turkish people think that Syrians are refugees and getting stipends from the government. They (Turkish people) think that they are refugees (living in camps). That is not true. It is only a small

¹²³“3 Ways Refugees in Turkey Use Cash Assistance | World Food Programme,” accessed December 6, 2021, <https://www.wfp.org/stories/3-ways-refugees-turkey-use-cash-assistance>.

¹²⁴ Suerbaum, 378.

¹²⁵“10 Years On, Turkey Continues Its Support for an Ever-Growing Number of Syrian Refugees,” World Bank, accessed December 6, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/06/22/10-years-on-turkey-continues-its-support-for-an-ever-growing-number-of-syrian-refugees>.

¹²⁶Prince Peprah, “Blame Positioning in Covid-19 Response: Refugees and Asylees as Victims,” *Travel Medicine and Infectious Disease* 41 (May 2021): 102010, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmaid.2021.102010>.

¹²⁷Alex Braithwaite, “Replication Data for: Government Targeting of Refugees in the Midst of Epidemics” (Harvard Dataverse, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/9810JX>.

¹²⁸Nimet Özbek, “Refugees as Scapegoat for Terrorism,” *Journal of Human Sciences* 15, no. 4 (October 26, 2018): 1968, <https://doi.org/10.14687/jhs.v15i4.5531>.

¹²⁹“#CanlıYayın | Ankara | Göç Kurulu Toplantısı / Twitter,” Twitter, accessed December 8, 2021, <https://twitter.com/i/broadcasts/1YqGoylZebExv>.

percentage. There are more than 4 millions Syrian living in Istanbul. The ones who are in camps do not make 3 to 4% of the Syrian population in Turkey. The biggest percentage is outside camps, some of them are well-off and are able to succeed in businesses. Some others assert themselves well and get Turkish citizenship. To the extent that Syrian employers recruit Turkish employees. So the picture is not clear to Turkish people. Not all Syrians are refugees.

The number of Syrian-owned company have exceeded 13000 companies and accounts for 29% of the foreign-owned companies in Turkey. Syrian companies have around four billion Turkish Liras capital in Turkey.¹³⁰ Displaced Syrian entrepreneurs have consequently indicated Syrians' efforts contributing to the Turkish economy through paying taxes, producing quality products to the Turkish and Syrian population. Waseem clarified:

Turkish people think that all Syrians are refugees and receive aid from the government. They do not see Syrians who have projects, or the ones who have financial resources. Turkish people look down at us and they are not concerned about who we are. Maybe it is a natural tendency to judge Syrians as entering Turkey at a high number - 4 million. They are not concerned about who the Syrians are, why they left Syria, why did they become refugees. However, the same situation may occur to the Turkish people here such as natural disasters or wars, or anything similar. In Syria, I cannot say the atmosphere was stable, but we were accustomed to living and being brought up there. Our life would have continued there, but all of sudden, circumstances have changed and we were displaced. Similarly, people who are living in a stable condition in their countries think that it is impossible to have experienced the same situation we (Syrians) have.

Similarly, a comparative study about young Palestinian, Sahrawi, and Afghan refugees considered that being a refugee is connoted with "a sense of marginality and exclusion from full legal, social, and civil participation in the communities that host them."¹³¹

¹³⁰Shahan Fazli, "Ekonomide yabancı ivmesi," Text, Yeni Şafak (Yeni Şafak, January 23, 2020), <https://www.yenisafak.com/ekonomi/ekonomide-yabanci-ivmesi-3522808>.

¹³¹D. Chatty, "Researching Refugee Youth in the Middle East: Reflections on the Importance of Comparative Research," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 278, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem005>.

Narrating the successful stories of Syrians in Istanbul would fashion better positive rhetoric than that related to the 'refugee' label. 'Not all Syrians are refugees' discourse is an attempt to escape the 'otherness' imposed on the Syrians in Turkey. Long before the refugee crisis, surrounded by war conflicts in the last hundred years Syrians have already received refugees¹³² from Armenia in 1915,¹³³ 526,000 from Palestine in 1948 and 1967,¹³⁴ 1.2 million from Iraq in 2003,¹³⁵ and 110,000 from Lebanon in 2006.¹³⁶ However, the influx of four million Syrians in Turkey is unprecedented. Waseem thinks that Syrians had never expected to be refugees as they were already receiving refugees from neighboring countries. Life would have continued in Syria and people were content living there he proclaimed. Waseem's perception of being treated unfairly because of the 'refugee' vulnerability label, the fragile refugee's position may have happened to any nation for unforeseen reasons. Waseem's own experience may not be enough to understand the whole picture as he has poor command of Turkish and limited encounters with Turkish people. However, the general perception of interlocutors is that Turkish people are treating Syrians well. Sami also chuckled while he agreed to Turkish people's perception of Syrians is as productive and efficient people. However, Saeed thinks that bad news are propagated more than the good news do, and that affects the Turkish people's treatment of Syrians. Saeed added:

I look positively to the Turkish people's treatment. I would not look at what has been said but rather what has been lived. My experience with my landlord and my neighbors are good. I have not had loads of interactions. However, their cooperation is good. Their treatment is good. This is what I have experienced from my university friends, neighbors and many landlords. There were not many interactions with

¹³²Dawn Chatty, *Syria: The Making and Unmaking of a Refugee State* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017): 8.

¹³³American Committee for Relief in the Near East, *English: Near East Relief, a Common Sight among the Armenian Refugees in Syria, 1915, 1915*, <http://memory.loc.gov/>
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Near_east_relief_the_armenian_refugees_in_syria-1.png.

¹³⁴United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Refworld | World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Syria : Palestinians," Refworld, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/49749c9f39.html>.

¹³⁵"Iraqi Refugees in Syria – Draft Outline," accessed December 7, 2021, <https://paperzz.com/doc/8597026/iraqi-refugees-in-syria-%E2%80%93-draft-outline>.

¹³⁶"Syria's Door Is Open to Lebanese Refugees," NBC News, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna13952151>.

them but they were good to me. I have not encountered racism. However, I feel that Turkish society looks at the Syrian people unjustly somehow. Turkish society does not know that young Syrians are very hardworking and diligent. They work all day to make ends meet and they are hardly able to achieve that. They have misinformation that Syrian men are sitting down doing nothing and receiving stipends from the Turkish government. That is not true.

False information is often shared on social media. This includes accusations that Syrians do not pay water, electricity, and natural gas bills,¹³⁷ they do not wait in queues at the hospital,¹³⁸ they can obtain work permits and can work wherever they want,¹³⁹ Syrians students can enroll in any university without any requirements,¹⁴⁰ and are all guaranteed state-sponsored scholarships, and that the state pays wages to Syrians.¹⁴¹ Waseem and Husayn respectively think that these allegations do not reflect the real situation, and discrimination is catalyzed through inaccurate propaganda:

Thanks to the Turkish media and having a weak Syrian media, not showing information, not being efficient in the Turkish language, not having a collective entity representing Syrians, all these reasons have made somehow a negative perception subconsciously about Syrians.

I want to express my emotions but I feel that I would fall into using bad words so I better not speak. On social media, I want to express myself against racist remarks and actions done by Turkish people. Every word is counted and has butterfly effects. So we have to be accountable for every word we speak. Everyone shall be held accountable for the racist remarks they make.

¹³⁷“Mülteciler Derneği’nden Suriyelilerle İlgili Doğru Bilinen Yanlışlar Kitapçığı,” STGM | Sivil Toplum Geliştirme Merkezi, 4, May 12, 2019, <https://www.stgm.org.tr/e-kutuphane/multeciler-derneginden-suriyelilerle-iligili-dogru-bilinen-yanlislar-kitapcigi>.

¹³⁸“Mülteciler Derneği’nden Suriyelilerle İlgili Doğru Bilinen Yanlışlar Kitapçığı,” 4.

¹³⁹“Mülteciler Derneği’nden Suriyelilerle İlgili Doğru Bilinen Yanlışlar Kitapçığı,” 4.

¹⁴⁰“13 False Information about Syrians Living in Turkey on Social Media - Teyit,” accessed December 7, 2021, <https://en.teyit.org/13-false-information-about-syrians-living-in-turkey-on-social-media>.

¹⁴¹“13 False Information about Syrians Living in Turkey on Social Media - Teyit.”

According to a recent study, digital racism in Turkey have exhibited hostility and hate remarks, disparaging the refugee identity making them feel unwelcome.¹⁴² The propensity not to react to racist comments on digital platforms is already driven by observations in daily life interactions and deportation fear. Moreover, a lack of political agency, and the inability to generate an effective political body defending Syrian rights in Turkey have led to discontent among the host community according to the extract.

In conclusion, endeavoring to overcome the generalizations, and stereotypes associated with being a Syrian refugee, Syrian men negate the refugee label and struggle to assert themselves well in Istanbul. They are challenged by their mediocre level of fluency in the Turkish language and the lack of political and institutional entities. Dismantling the notorious narrative of being a ‘refugee’ through relating to the shared history and geography is hindered by the inability to learn and speak Turkish properly, and by widespread misinformation and propaganda.

2.2. Syrians Invaded Turkey Versus Fought for the Turkish Army at Çanakkale

Turkey has the world’s largest refugee population with a number of 3.7 million Syrians under temporary protection and over 330,000 refugees and asylum seekers under international protection.¹⁴³ This unprecedented number of people residing in a nation-state country in a short amount of time showcases that the shared values and shared history of Turkish and Syrian populations are quite similar. Hence, Syrians in Istanbul reside in areas where populations are hospitable or friendly to immigrants and displaced people. Fatih district, known as “little Syria” is filled with many Syrian restaurants, cafes, and markets. “When you walk in Fatih, you feel yourself as if you are walking in Syria,” Mutaz mentioned in informal conversation. Prior to Istanbul municipality’s elections in

¹⁴²Ozge Ozduzen, Umut Korkut, and Cansu Ozduzen, “‘Refugees Are Not Welcome’: Digital Racism, Online Place-Making and the Evolving Categorization of Syrians in Turkey,” *New Media & Society* 23, no. 11 (November 2021): 3349, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820956341>.

¹⁴³“UNHCR Turkey - Fact Sheet September 2021 [EN/TR] - Turkey,” ReliefWeb, accessed December 4, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/unhcr-turkey-fact-sheet-september-2021-entr>.

2018, İlay Aksoy, a political figure who was a mayoral candidate for Fatih's district, vowed through hanging banners around Fatih area saying: "I will not surrender Fatih to Syrians."¹⁴⁴ The campaign failed as Fatih's residents rejected xenophobic remarks and removed anti-refugee banners.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, İlay Aksoy earned the least votes among other candidates in the ballot at only 4.4%.¹⁴⁶ The religious and historical connotations to Fatih district feature a more welcoming stance for Syrians in Istanbul. Ayyub explains about sharing one religion is advantageous: "People here (in Turkey) have more empathy than the westerners have towards us (Syrians) because we have one religion. This is a positive thing. I feel living here would be much more comfortable than living in the west as we have a similar environment." According to a recent study, 'our brothers in Islam' discourse is approved by around 45% of Turkish citizens concerning the Syrians presence in Turkey and 19% is neutral.¹⁴⁷

Moreover, some other media figures claim that Syrians are occupying Turkey. Fatih Altaylı, a Turkish journalist, accused Syrians of taking Turkey as a hostage, broadcasted on 'TekeTek' (One on One) program, he discussed coronavirus vaccinations and the measures taken and said that Turkey was lost to Syria without a war. "They (Syrians) seem to have come with 4 million soldiers and captured the country now. They are the owners of Turkey and we the guests."¹⁴⁸ Ayyub, settled in Istanbul for seven years,

¹⁴⁴"In Istanbul's 'Little Syria' Refugees Find Themselves in Campaign Crossfire," In Istanbul's 'Little Syria' refugees find themselves in campaign crossfire, accessed December 5, 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/in-istanbul-s-little-syria-refugees-find-themselves-in-campaign-crossfire-25345>.

¹⁴⁵daily sabah, "Far-Right İP's Anti-Refugee Election Banner Draws Criticism," Daily Sabah, March 18, 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/elections/2019/03/18/far-right-ips-anti-refugee-election-banner-draws-criticism>.

¹⁴⁶"Turkey Local Election - İstanbul Fatih Results - March 31 Polls," accessed December 5, 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/elections/march-31-2019-turkish-local-elections-results/istanbul/fatih/district-local-election-results>.

¹⁴⁷"Attitudes Toward Syrian Refugees In Istanbul: | Heinrich Böll Stiftung | Niwêneriya Tirkîyeyê," Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, accessed December 2, 2021, 22, <https://tr.boell.org/en/2021/06/10/attitudes-toward-syrian-refugees-istanbul>.

¹⁴⁸TÜRK TV, *Fatih Altaylı'dan Suriyeli Tepkisi: "Türkiye'yi Biz Suriye'ye Savaşsız Kaybettik,"* 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZIS3Gc9xA>.

nevertheless, concludes on the issue of deportation, mistreatment, exploitation, and ethnocentrism reflecting Fatih Altaylı comments:

They are exploited as Syrians who are registered here under the temporary protection law. The Turkish authorities mistreat Syrians sometimes. It may end up in deporting Syrians for whatever reason. We have seen racism from some top political figures. One journalist asks the Governor of Istanbul about the allegation that a strong Syrian army is being prepared to invade Turkey by 4 million Syrians. This army does not have weapons nor do they have to use weapons. This question was from a top famous journalist. The answer from the Istanbul governor was very severe and comes with an insult directed at the journalist as he replies: these people you are talking about (Syrians) were on our side in World War I and they have graves in Çanakkale. Unfortunately, we are witnessing people who are not ashamed of asking this question in a racist way. Their mothers brought them up well and instilled good manners in their characters. It is very devastating to know that they are different from the good manners that they were brought up, the governor said to the journalist.

The shared collective history in Anatolia and the shared Levant geographies held suggests a shared destiny among the two populations. In a televised interview about the Syrians in Turkey, Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu emphasized that “There are 1,102 Syrian martyrs at the Çanakkale’s (Battle of Gallipoli) martyrs memorial cemetery. Since 2011, they (Syrians) have given 71 923 martyrs for their own country. We cannot say what are they are doing here (In Turkey).”¹⁴⁹ Therefore, the political debate of the Syrian populations’ presence in Turkey has reflected Ayyub’s implied narrative of choosing Turkey as a place to live considering the historical, cultural, and religious nexus between Turkish and the Syrian communities. Ayyub exhibits his sentiments as more connected to geography and history, but less asserted from legal rights’ viewpoint. Waseem echoes Ayyub’s sentiment about how religion and geography assist in creating an atmosphere of peace and conformity:

¹⁴⁹Süleyman Soylu, *İçişleri Bakanı Süleyman Soylu’nun Kübra Par İle Röportajı - 7 Ocak 2018, 2019*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNZCpZRdbU>.

(Islam) It is one of the reasons why Turkish people are somehow helpful to Syrians. You hear a lot that Turkish people say: we are from the same country, religion, and geographic areas. If we have moved to a different country that has different religion then things will be much more difficult especially for the family. Here you go the same *Camii* (mosque), fast together, do activities together, this helps a lot integrating into the Turkish community.

Narratives on how Syrians captured Turkey without a war are contested with the narrative of Syrians who lost their lives fighting along with Turkish forces in the past. Having Islamic values contributes to enhancing historical and cultural connections to Syrian and Turkish populations. Adhering to one religion and similar cultural norms have eased receiving a massive Syrian population to be absorbed into Turkish lands. Relating to historical events has influenced Syrian men's sentiments of belonging and asserting oneself.

2.3. Camouflaging "SYRIANESS" - Fearful of Deportation

Syrian men in Istanbul not only find difficulty asserting themselves and expressing emotions but also feel stigmatized as being "Syrians". Being labeled as a 'refugee' features a vulnerable position and that is worsened by otherizing through accusing and blaming Syrians of economic problems and not defending the homeland. As Zygmunt Bauman explained about being identified, "one thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioral styles and patterns..."¹⁵⁰ "Identity" is a name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty."¹⁵⁰ Anas, a qualified English teacher, accepted his Turkish employer's request to be introduced as a Lebanese English teacher instead of Syrian:

I was working as an English teacher for private lessons in a Turkish language center. The center has no problem with me whatsoever. I was

¹⁵⁰Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity* (1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011), 18–36, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221907.n2>.

asked by the center to enter the lesson telling students that I am from Lebanon, not from Syria. The reason is that when the context of refugees or Syrians arise some students speak badly of Syrians. I did not like this approach, but at the same time, I knew how Turkish people really think about the Syrians. How do they perceive me as a Syrian, I wondered, so that I can avoid doing things that have been said about the Syrians. I chose the nationality of Lebanon and it went well. Their problem is with the word S Y R I A.

In an informal conversation which I have later written the extract as field notes, Anas elaborated on how he assimilated himself into becoming a 'Turkish person' in order to avoid checkpoints and policemen requesting his temporary protection ID card.

Now I am walking, dressing, acting, looking as Turkish men do. When walking in the street, I do not look right or left, I just go looking straight. I dress in very similar Turkish-looking pants and shirts and jackets. I did so because I had to, for six months; I did not have a *Kimlik* card (temporary protection ID card). They (Turkish authorities) stopped registration for newcomers. I avoided being with a group of Syrians so that I would not be checked. I used to go to side streets and avoid main streets. If I was caught by the police, most probably I would be deported.

Anas's experience is an intriguing story of having multiple identities escaping the legal, social constraints to survive from being unrecognized, stigmatized, and otherized.

Furthermore, one of the main repetitive discourses is that Syrian men fear deportation. The research interlocutor Ali who is under a temporary protection system, says that he does not have the agency to practice or defend his rights as he is not a Turkish citizen. "We do not have the rights that are given to Turkish citizens. So, for whatever problem occurs, we do not have any rights. So many people were deported, unfortunately. This is a very big problem." Ali's dilemma is echoed by Sami's incident while riding a taxi before the municipality's election time:

I have experienced discrimination from a taxi driver. It was at the time of the municipality election. My wife and I were going to Fatih district when the taxi driver started to get to know where we are from. We

said that my wife is Finnish and that I am a Syrian. When he knew that I am Syrian, he said 'if *İmamoğlu* (the opposition candidate) gets elected, we would rid of all Syrians in Turkey'. We got off in the middle of the road immediately after hearing that.

Sami's lived experience have manifested that leaving the taxi car was a reasonable action for being mistreated. While the situation for Syrians in the big picture is that they are not able to go to Syria, nor are they given refugee's rights. Syrians status is similar to being at the taxi car, feeling estranged and unrecognized, waiting for better conditions, perhaps receiving Turkish citizenship, or having the choice to settle legally in another country. This liminal state puts pressure on Syrians' shoulders as the future is ambiguous, and thus, Syrians have to give up on rights that they used to enjoy in Syria. Syrian men's agency in post displacement daily life is inhibited by legal and social rigid contexts from being able to think and act sufficiently in a self-determined manner.¹⁵¹ The loss of agency loss is a long existing problem for Syrians as being deprived of participating in the political life stirs anger that has already led to the uprising in Syria, and is worsened in Istanbul without the ability to express oneself in Turkish. All these factors together enhance the feeling of estrangement which is accompanied with the fear of deportation. Waleed elaborates on the issue:

Frankly, in any country you live in you make concessions, you do not give up on any person if you are in your country. However, here you have to accept the status quo and relinquish even if you have done nothing wrong. If you have done anything good or bad, the whole Syrian community will be judged by your behavior. Also, there is extreme racism. The problem is not only about racism but rather about having no fair treatment. If I have a problem with my neighbor then he or she may prevail over the case. If the government will act justly on the issue, I would not be saddened. However, your neighbor predominates over you and you would be deported to Idlib. You may also be imprisoned for two or three months. You cannot do anything. I feel sometimes I have to do something to a certain situation but I have fear for the next step to take. I have witnessed a situation of a man

¹⁵¹"Agency," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, by Lisa Given (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), 15, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n9>.

harassing a girl in the street. I would have hit him or at least spoken to him to stop. But as I am strange here I could not do anything. If the situation got worse, I would be scolded off by people as I do not speak Turkish properly. The police would come and bring me into prison and maybe I would be deported to Idlib. Even if I would have defended a Turkish girl, I would be the one to be blamed.

We can realize that the legal status of Syrians and being otherized have affected perceptions of their presence in Istanbul. Hence, Syrian men seemingly become less visible as they cannot assert, act, react or express themselves freely. Syrian men's emotions are hindered by fearing deportation and inability to speak Turkish properly.

Moreover, as the case for thousands of Syrians who are settling in Istanbul for more than eight years, some other Syrian men have excelled in Turkish language and have university degrees or have obtained work permit. This category has been contacted by the Turkish migration directorate to be naturalized as Turkish citizens. Thus, the situation for Husayn who earned Turkish citizenship in 2018 is considerably better than other fellow Syrians. However, he still fears the unknown future:

Comparing my situation with others (Syrians) things are now better. In Izmir, the situation was worse. I am working here (in Istanbul). The situation is not easy as we are living in a pandemic. I have advantages. By the end of June, I will have finished my Master *InshAllah*. I can speak more than one language and have Turkish citizenship. All these factors included, I still have fear of the future. How about people who do not speak Turkish nor have Turkish citizenship and possibly would get deported from Turkey at any time? The Syrian community has social apprehensions and phobia as well as the fear of racism. Even if it has decreased, it exists.

Husayn's fears have emanated from the already discussed anti-Syrians discourses in media and politics. Struggling to be integrated through speaking Turkish and working with a Turkish company and earning Turkish citizenship did not suffice to make him feel safe. He further elaborated:

It took a long time until I was accepted among Turkish people, and to accept Turkish people (myself). I have seen a video on YouTube of some Turkish people saying that Syrians should be deported. Some Turkish political parties are requesting to get Syrians out. I have kept this video in my “to watch list” so I do not forget.

Hate speech, discriminative remarks, xenophobia, and racism have contributed to establishing an atmosphere of uncertainty for all Syrians in Turkey. An ambiguous future through the deportation narrative has made it ostensibly hard for Syrians to establish a stable life in Turkey.

2.4. Men Do Not Cry

Syrian men’s quest to find a haven to live decently is underestimated as being blamed for causing the war. Fleeing a war-torn country, escaping the homeland, leaving families, relatives, houses, and memories behind to a quietly noble reality have affected their psychological wellbeing. Encountering more commitments for the family, and learning a new language have affected the status of the vulnerable Syrian man and the perception of his position in relation to oneself, family, society and the host community. The inability to make ends meet for the household finances contributes to a lesser status and control of familial issues. Difficulty to communicate well in Turkish necessitates having one’s children assist in translating and leads to low self-esteem. However, Jameel has related the ability to express emotions to being able to communicate in Turkish and to achieve tasks when needed.

Learning Turkish made me depend on myself. I did not have the need to depend on someone else in translating anything. I have more options now. For example, if I have a medical condition, I can go to Syrian or Turkish doctors. Learning Turkish gives me more confidence as I can express myself, and understand everything and make myself understood.

Not being able to communicate and convey one’s messages may lead to otherizing. Thus, Syrian men agonize over fearful sentiments of unforeseen reactions by the host

community. Agonized to show and express emotions among peers lest to feel emasculated, Syrian men still follow the 'men do not cry' quote in Istanbul. All these factors considered together resulted in the suppression of Syrian men's emotions as Syrians in Turkey are positioned as the weakest link according to Saeed and Waleed:

The man has more commitments and is expected to do more things, he does not have the outlet to speak and express. It is not similar to the woman or children. Their desires are spoken clearly and ought to be accomplished accordingly. The Syrian young, let's say the Syrian single young man is suffering from keeping their emotions inside more than other people. –Saeed

I do not think I am capable of expressing my emotions 100%. It is because of the community power, and Turkish people's power. Would you be able to speak against Turkish people in their presence? In my opinion, I do not think so. I am studying at a Turkish university. Will I be able to say that Turkish people are unfair to Syrians? I would think of my word, my letter. I do not think that I have the free atmosphere to express myself. Many things are kept inside, but also we came from a war, I do not think Turkish people have time to listen. –Waleed

Waleed added that "Because I am an Arab, I would not dare to speak in public transportations. Their (Turkish people) gazes are essentially enough to deter you from speaking." Saeed voiced that Waleed's concerns are not only related to displacement life but also relevant to the mentality and perspective the Syrian man has. Overwhelmed by hefty responsibilities and tremendous losses, fleeing to Istanbul has changed the minds of Syrian men to more expressive ways as Saeed clarified:

Let me say, Syrians as a people are among the least nations to express their feelings. Syrians have a pattern of seriousness that sometimes is exaggerated. One category of Syrian (men) people think that expressing a man's emotions is kind of vulgar. In Turkey, I think this has changed, as experiencing loads of pain, a Syrian man concedes more and more to be comfortable expressing himself.

However, enduring traumatizing psychological events back in Syria, showing emotions is still negotiated and contested through comparing sentiments of the Syrian man with his

Turkish counterparts who are not ashamed of showing vulnerabilities in public according to Ayyub:

The Turkish man would not feel embarrassed or shy if he falls emotionally while the Eastern man does. For me, I have weak points but I do not want to look weak in front of people. I look to overcome these weak points on my own. I tend to always look like the 'strong man'. This is related to the pride aspect.

On the other hand, Ali's experience was intriguing as being too nice was not a good sign for some Syrian men:

Some Syrian men think of me as a gay person, Ali laughed, but I do not think this about myself. I was very disappointed frankly speaking. I figured out the reason that they said that I am very kind, that I do not disturb anyone. I said to myself that this is good. Therefore, what is expected from the man is not being gentle or kind and not showing or expressing emotions. I was surprised by that thing.

According to a case study on men's crying in competitive sports, the findings have suggested that beliefs about emotion are tied to beliefs about gender.¹⁵² The study has also concluded that "male athletes who are perceived to embody cultural ideals of masculinity may be given more room to cry than those who are perceived as less stereotypically masculine." Similarly, the social dynamics and cultural norms of the Syrian community support and promote good mannerism. However, as for the case of Ali, some Syrian men link courtesy with being vulnerable and weak. Thus, as discussed earlier in the theoretical framework, Raewyn Connell suggested that one representation of the 'hegemonic masculinity' is promoted and encouraged by societies by displaying a certain set of masculine characteristics. Hence, Ali's propensity to express and show his emotion is probably inhibited by the hegemonic ideal of Syrian masculinity. Waseem echoes Ali's perspective and thinks that personality types, and social and culture norms boys learn since childhood affect whether men show emotions.

¹⁵²Heather J. MacArthur, "Beliefs About Emotion Are Tied to Beliefs About Gender: The Case of Men's Crying in Competitive Sports," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (December 13, 2019): 2765, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02765>.

In conclusion, it appears that the Turkish discourse of Syrian men has resulted in feelings of impermanence and emasculation by the threat of deportation. Despite efforts by Syrians to position their contribution to Turkey's history, Syrian men remain without a national identity. Many are forced to lie about their country of origin and heritage despite the numerous cultural, religious, and historical ties between the two peoples. This has resulted in Syrian men hiding or camouflaging their masculinity. Moreover, a lack of political agency, being treated by the hosting community as the weakest link, the Syrian men's tendency to be shown invulnerable is weakened by displacement complexity, the inability to articulate oneself well in Turkish, and a rigid imagination about how a man ought to be among others have contributed to the repression of emotions among Syrian men.

CHAPTER III: 'MY HOMETLAND IS WHERE MY FAMILY LIVES!': NOSTALGIA, CONVENTIONAL MASCULINITY AND DISPLACEMENT

The subtle interplay between the lived experience and the Turkish discourse of Syrian men has been impacting Syrian men's perception of masculinity as we have examined in the previous chapter. Therefore, as I have investigated the lived experience of Syrian men in Istanbul, masculine configuration is not directly discussed or deciphered within the conversations when they speak and define themselves. However, Syrian men have identified themselves as being, living, and providing for the family as an individual and especially as a man. As such, this chapter will attempt to answer the following sub-question: To what extent does nostalgia to family and loss of hometown and community have on male Syrian refugees and their perception of masculinity?

In this chapter, I will discuss the circumstances that Syrian men experience with settlement in Istanbul concerning their families, separation from their families, providing compensation and support for their family, difficulty in establishing a new family and obstacles in seeking opportunities while living in Istanbul, liminality and the implications of COVID 19 on their psychological well-being.

3.1. My Homeland is Where My Family Lives

After two hours and half of interviews on the experiences of Syrian men, Hasan has reiterated in an informal conversation that Istanbul is a magnificent city to be at. He stated, "I live with my wife and children here in Istanbul. We go on weekends to the seashores and green places to give children some time to enjoy Istanbul." Nevertheless, he cannot enjoy it fully with his children and wife as his parents are not living with them he added, "Living in Istanbul is a dream for many people. However, I always feel that something is missing and that thing deters us from realizing the beauty of the city." His attempt to assist his parents to move in Turkey by applying through the Turkish embassy

in Beirut. The visa application has failed because of bureaucratic reasons related to the validity of his father's Syrian passport. The visa was issued only to his mother who decided not to go without her husband. Syrians cannot apply to the Turkish embassy in Syria as it stopped working for ten years. Hasan reckoned that having his parents living with him revitalizes his life as he said "I think my homeland is my parents, and my parents are my homeland." Hasan's expression is well established within the whole family ideal as his mother did not travel without accompanying the family (her husband). Furthermore, exploring how Syrian refugees maintain family ties during displacement in Jordan, the article "Blood Doesn't Become Water" concludes that Syrian refugees "finding strength and solace in family structures, as well as negative or mixed experiences of family ties".¹⁵³

Ali, from Damascus, echoes Hasan's idea as he is not able to see his family anywhere and cannot return to Syria. He said "I firstly came and chose Turkey because I had hope for a change in Syria. However, now I have lost hope for Syria, so I do not have a problem living in any country as I do not see my family anyhow." Turkey's proximity to Syria and his family, and his wishes for a political change in Syria were the reasons why Ali fled to neighboring Turkey initially. Now, hopeless of any change contributing to seeing his family or returning to Syria because of the temporary protection scheme, Ali does not mind leaving Turkey to any other country. As seen in the previous extract, Syrian men attach importance to living with the family. In the Syrian familial sense, the family gives meaning to life, a purpose to live, a homeland to be attached to and an anchor to have support, recognition, comfort, and happiness. Syrian men's masculinity performance has been underperformed by the inability to fulfill their family's duties and responsibilities that used to be practiced in Syria.

3.2. Remittances & Symbolic Gestures - Alternative Means of Care for The Family

¹⁵³Michelle Lokot, "'Blood Doesn't Become Water'? Syrian Social Relations during Displacement," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33, no. 3 (September 1, 2020): 561, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fey059>.

Displacement affects the way Syrian men view their relationship with their families. Previously, in Syria, in most families, men used to do all the groceries, water, gas, or anything related to issues of household logistic materials as well as to shoulder the responsibility of being the problem-solver and a reference to any decision-making issues of their families. After coming to Istanbul, the Syrian man has lost the ability to take these two responsibilities. Alternatively, he is compensating now through sending money, recalling old memories through conversations over social networks applications, and gifting presents on Eid occasions to reassure and assert his presence and his fulfillment to the responsibilities.

Additionally, Ali prioritizes his mother's well-being in Syria over his own benefits in Istanbul. Ali shares his apartment with another two Syrian men so that he can survive financially and send money to his family back in Syria. He said: "The young Syrian men workforce is obliged to live in apartments that have many people because their income is simply insufficient." Illustrating his commitment as an indispensable responsibility to his family back in Syria, and here in Istanbul as he added:

My father passed away, I have my sisters and mother. What is expected from me for them is to work and bring money to the household. Anything else apart from working is not expected from me as a man. (Back in Syria) I have to bring along the groceries needed for the apartment and hold hefty stuff similar to the apartment. My mother lives in Syria and she does not work. I send money to Syria. It is my responsibility to do so. I do not think that it is already a given thing. I do not have a second thought about whether I should do so or not. Helping my mother comes as a priority before I buy food for myself.

As the steep depreciation of the Syrian currency influenced the Syrian citizens adversely, leaving 11.7 million people in Syria in need of humanitarian assistance,¹⁵⁴ and leaving 40% of Syrians to live on less than \$1.90 a day,¹⁵⁵ remittances sent to Syria are

¹⁵⁴Waleed Abu Ismail et al., *Syria at War: Eight Years On* (UN - ESCWA, 2020).

¹⁵⁵Abu Ismail et al.

indispensably pivotal to sustain the survival of many families living in Syria.¹⁵⁶ Money sent from Syrians living in Turkey accounts for 14% of total remittances to Syria.¹⁵⁷ The situation of the displaced Syrians in Turkey is not better when taking into consideration the severity of inflation induced by the immediate results COVID 19 left to displaced Syrians as among those who primarily lost their jobs among other refugee households,¹⁵⁸ and 88% of Syrians have suffered a loss of income.¹⁵⁹

Nevertheless, Syrian men are not only responsible for their family's income and household issues but also are delicate and thoughtful of the feelings of the other members of their families and their psychological well-being through providing symbolic gifts to assure families that they have not forgotten the old days they spent together. Nor they will forget their connection to their familial roots even if they are thousands of kilometers away. Jameel, 33 years old, married to a Syrian woman with two children, lived in Istanbul for seven years, has obtained Turkish citizenship, and has worked as a legal consultant with NGOs for refugees clients. He shares the following in his attempts to stay close to his family in Aleppo:

My whole family is in Aleppo. My mother does converse with me about the past through the WhatsApp application. She tells me all the (past) details. I listen carefully and attentively. This helps her reminisce old memories and preserve her emotions and I am considerate of her. When Eid or similar occasions occur I send kilograms of Syrian desserts as a gift to make them (my family) feel that I am still nearby even if I am not physically with them. sigh! It is still my responsibility to be around them.

¹⁵⁶Daniel Aron, "The Challenges of Transferring Money in Syria | Developing Markets Associates Limited (DMA)," accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.developingmarkets.com/perspectives/challenges-transferring-money-syria>.

¹⁵⁷Daniel Aron.

¹⁵⁸Dilara Hamit, "Syrian Refugees First to Lose Income in Pandemic: UN," accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/latest-on-coronavirus-outbreak/syrian-refugees-first-to-lose-income-in-pandemic-un/1985248>.

¹⁵⁹Şenay Akyıldız, "TEPAV | How Has COVID-19 Affected Turkey's Labor Market?," TEPAV, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.tepav.org.tr/en/haberler/s/10170>.

A service company called “A Kind Touch”¹⁶⁰ utilizes a Facebook page to deliver Syrian expats’ gifts from Syrians residing in Europe and Turkey to their relatives in Syria. Traditional Syrian desserts or dishes are brought to the families’ doors surprising family members at the apartment. This symbolic gesture boosts the family psyche as the return of the other members is unseen nor expected soon. This situation has kept displaced Syrians having mixed feelings as they established a new life in Turkey but cannot return to their homeland. Most of the interlocutors live away from their parents. After coming to Istanbul, the sentiment of being responsible for the family has been activated differently through probing means of support and care. The family dynamics have become more crucial in understanding themselves as men in Istanbul.

3.3. Away from the Family - Cultivating Different Mindsets

On the other side of the coin, displaced Syrians miss their immediate and extended family, and the role of the family in displaced Syrians’ lives should not be undervalued in the social dynamics among Syrian family members.¹⁶¹ However, some other interlocutors’ accounts suggest, many social norms and expectations are left behind in Syria after settling in Istanbul. Anas, 27 years old, single, an English teacher for private courses as well as for an international school, describes his experience after three years of living in Istanbul while being away from family and relatives: “I feel more dependent on myself and I feel stronger in comparison to my status when I was in Syria. In Syria, I felt that I had social restraints. Society puts pressure on the young man.” Jameel feels satisfied on his capability of starting and succeeding in building a new life from scratch in Istanbul, “Even though I am away from my family, I feel glad about being able to establish a new life, develop myself here. I have accomplished things in Istanbul that I would not have been able to achieve in Syria.” Being in Istanbul, the melting pot of cultures, communities, nationalities, ethnicities, religions, and thoughts, has given a free

¹⁶⁰“لَمْسَة حَنِيَّة” | Facebook,” accessed December 22, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/lamst.hiniya>.

¹⁶¹Hilal Altunay Yılmaz, “Adjustment Experiences of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Findings from a Community-Based Participatory Research,” 2018, <https://open.metu.edu.tr/handle/11511/27606>.

atmosphere conducive to flourish in the professional, cultural and social fields. Istanbul has transformed Syrian men's mindset from a passive state into active in Istanbul. The passivity is caused by authoritative political sphere, and relatively conservative cultural and societal norms. In Syria, the average Syrian man's thinking is short-term, that is, based on daily plans only.

Husayn echoes Jameel's description about the transformation journey from Syria to Istanbul, "I moved in from a place to another. This contributes to a cultural difference or identity loss. This change has developed certain aspects in my personality in the way I become a man in Istanbul." Displaced Syrian men's attempts to make sense of the lived reality has shaped and reshaped the trajectory of manhood. Husayn's lived experience has exposed him to some different social norms that contribute to the urgent negotiations of what beliefs displaced Syrians adopt. Jameel, for example, stated that he altered his character after coming to Istanbul: "I was not that ambitious when I was in Syria. When I got out from there, I started thinking of the future. I have cultivated a motivational culture which was not there before." Jameel, an English literature graduate from Aleppo University, keeps his mind alert to make a change, and support and advocate for the persecuted people by studying another bachelor's degree in Istanbul university:

This is the difference that happened between Turkey and Syria; a willingness to help more, to help the weak and oppressed ones to the extent that I enrolled in an online bachelor's degree in political science and international relations at Istanbul University. I have an ambition that if I graduate from this field then I would probably work in the diplomatic corps. As you see, it turned from a standard ambition living day to day to my situation now that I want to do something, I want to leave an imprint.

Jameel was pushed by his motivation to help and speak for the other vulnerable Syrians, along other many fellow Syrian students who started to get degrees in the social sciences department so that they could understand the political, social, cultural, religious, and historical factors influencing the world of activism through which Syrians would be able

to create change in their homeland country. Istanbul gathers a wide variety of people from different Arab nationalities who could not make a change or better living conditions in their countries. As such, Istanbul becomes the nexus of the displaced and of expatriates that ultimately may form the hub of the oppressed and disadvantaged populations from all over the world.

Nevertheless, not every displaced Syrian can enjoy fully the luxury of planning for the future as Istanbul consumes its citizens and leaves no time to socialize or conduct any other activities. Displacement circumstances do not allow a convenient flow to accomplish life pathways according an article by Lubkemann, “the transformation of lifescapes in ways that render essential life projects harder to achieve.”¹⁶² Anas, is single, has emphasized the age of marriage issue in the mindset of Syrian community as a hindrance to work on personal plans: “You would not be able to focus on anything but your work as you are expected to get married at a certain age. Here (In Istanbul) you could think of doing and achieving other things as no pressure exerted from the community.” Anas has felt independent and strong in Istanbul, and has become free from social pressure exerted in Syria. He elaborated:

I feel that Istanbul is the city of opportunities. However, if you are working from nine9 am to 6pm, then your time is killed. You need two hours to commute and one hour for breakfast. You come home very tired and not capable of doing anything. Istanbul has severe traffic that consumes its residents. As the nature of the big city, you feel yourself consumed by the city. You feel yourself like a wheel, Do you know how does a wheel move?!

While Istanbul allows an outlet to develop skills and expertise in different fields, Syrian men are possibly unable to utilize these opportunities as they are often working long shifts. Saturday is a half-working day for many Turkish and Syrian companies. Sundays become the only day to socialize, cook, clean, speak to the family, and ultimately rest

¹⁶²Stephen C Lubkemann, *Culture in Chaos: An Anthropology of the Social Condition in War*, 193, 2010, <https://www.degruyter.com/isbn/9780226496436>.

and relax after working throughout the week. Therefore, the established social and family norms are still being negotiated to be accepted, normalized, actively made sense of, or partially rejected. Istanbul have contributed to the paradigm shift to the Syrian men's understanding of social norms.

3.4. We Left Syria But Syria Did Not Leave Us– Liminality

According to a recent survey, one in two Syrians in Turkey will not return to Syria even if a political agreement is reached.¹⁶³ As the current situation has reached an impasse, a political solution is not visible in the near future and the question of Syrians returning to Syria is undiscussed. Permanent residence permits are not issued to Syrians who registered for the temporary protection scheme. Thus, the state of liminality is largely experienced by many Syrian men living in Istanbul as settling permanently in Turkey is not guaranteed. Liminality as a term denotes the phase between separation (leaving Syria behind) and reincorporation (resettlement in a third country and/or acceptance in Turkey).¹⁶⁴

Living for many years under the temporary protection legal framework does not grant Turkish citizenship to Syrians, nor do they enjoy the rights of refugees. Displaced Syrians who are enrolled in Turkish universities, who have earned undergraduate university degrees, or who have work permits are randomly chosen to apply for Turkish citizenship by the Department of Immigration and Directorates of Population and Citizenship Affairs. As displaced Syrians cannot apply by themselves and have to wait for a call or SMS message to be requested for an interview, they live in a liminal state having little to expect about the future. Applying to earn Turkish citizenship takes one to three years, and many applications are rejected without given official explanations. This situation has increased the ambiguity of the future for Syrians in Turkey. As of 14 February 2020, only

¹⁶³Bülent Sarıoğlu, "One in Two Syrians in Turkey Will Not Return to Homeland, Says Report - Turkey News," *Hürriyet Daily News*, November 27, 2020, <https://www.hurriyetcailynews.com/one-in-two-syrians-in-turkey-will-not-return-to-homeland-says-report-160365>.

¹⁶⁴Koser Akcapar and Simsek, "The Politics of Syrian Refugees in Turkey." 179.

110,000 out of 3.5 million have earned Turkish citizenship.¹⁶⁵ Waiting to be called for the application interview, and the prolonged application process, and the possibility of rejection have contributed to looming ambiguous future.

Furthermore, being exposed to biased media reports as well as the Turkish public's concerns towards Syrians have caused Syrian men to hide from expressing and asserting themselves freely, and have kept the idea of being 'in transient' activated for any opportunity to happen to go to Europe illegally or legally through UN resettlement programs. As many displaced Syrians endure and attempt to maintain a survival mode in Istanbul, the advent of COVID 19 has deteriorated displaced men's psychological well-being. Many of the research participants expressed their willingness to integrate into the Turkish society through learning Turkish if they knew that they were to settle in Turkey. Ayyub, has not been able to learn Turkish even though he has been in Istanbul for 7 years. Last year, he started his application to resettle in Canada and enrolled in French courses in the French cultural center in Taksim in Istanbul. Fluent in English, he reported that he would have learned Turkish if he knew that he would settle here or receive Turkish citizenship. He explained:

Learning Turkish is a very important thing. However, feeling unstable and unsafe for the future means that you are not settled in the country and have no aspirations. I do not have the aspiration to learn Turkish. I forced myself sometimes to learn Turkish but I could not learn. If I knew that I would settle down, have a stable life, and acquire Turkish citizenship, then certainly I would learn Turkish with passion. But now frankly, I do not have passion.

Lacking motivation and suffering from COVID 19 circumstances have affected Sami who said, "I want to learn Turkish but I do not feel I have psychological readiness to learn it. Living during the time of COVID 19 has made me unwilling to learn anything." Displaced Syrians have lived in double uncertainty – the liminal legal state and living in the COVID

¹⁶⁵"Naturalisation," *Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles* (blog), accessed July 16, 2021, <http://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/content-temporary-protection/status-and-residence/naturalisation/>.

19 period. Feeling regretful, delusional, fearful of the future, and hopeful at once, Ayyub regards the return to Syria as impossible. Moreover, COVID 19 has impacted and worsened the situation adversely as his job as a tourist guide stopped since the advent of COVID 19, and consequently, delayed the resettlement for many months. He explains his liminal situation and the better-imagined opportunities available in a different country:

The country and environment we used to live in made us think that life in Syria is like a long unrealistic dream. As if we had not lived there, life was a dream. If I knew that would happen to me, that I would be in this current situation, I would not wait for a moment, I would have traveled and started working in Europe at the age of 18. The reality we lived in, made us think as such. For now, it is impossible to go back into these circumstances. Most of my family live here, but my mother and two of my sisters live there (in Syria). So if one of the family's members, Allah forbid, passes away, I would not have a connection or reason to go back there.

Ali echoed Ayyub sentiments: "Corona has made me feel bored, anxious. It feels like I am living in a prison." Legally unrecognized, not belonging to the city, uncertain of the future because of COVID 19 have generated a terrifying, pessimistic prediction of the coming days. Ali voiced his concern:

There are many homeless people in the city. This makes me feel terrified. This makes me terrified when I see so many people left out in the streets. At the end of the day, this city is not my home, and I am a stranger here. As I have lost hope from Syria, and as I am nothing in this country, I have a fear that possibly I will get the same destiny – I may find myself in the street. There is a possibility for this if I get sick or paralyzed – Allah forbids, I would get the same destiny.

According to Ali, being under the temporary protection scheme is equally ascribed to feeling like nothing of value as he lacks the legal recognition by the state. It can be realized that the ambiguity concerning the liminal legal status of displaced Syrian men has nurtured feelings of uncertainty, despondence in light of a gloomy future, fear of deportation, disinterest in learning Turkish, hopelessness, and less ascertained of being

a man. This situation features many intricate issues that accompanied the Syrian men's lived experience in Istanbul. Anas expresses the struggle to live and his difficulty in feeling as a man in Istanbul under the status of temporary protection:

Paperwork is the greatest obstacle in living in Istanbul. Bureaucracy and Turkish employees' mindset and mood (in governmental institutions) is what stands against Syrians feeling properly as a man. Turkey is not a law state. You go to one employee and he requests something from you, you go to a different employee; he requests something totally different than what the other employee asks. Not having Turkish citizenship is another obstacle. If you have Turkish citizenship, then you will be treated equally to all other citizens. The problem is that the employee does not know how to interpret the law related to foreigners. For this reason, the employees' interaction and exposure to refugees are recent; so interpretation of what is the proper procedure is different from one employee to another.

Paperwork issue may seem trivial for an outsider. However, the situation is different for displaced Syrian people all over the world. Not being able to study, work or live legally in any hosting country is a nightmare for Syrians even before 2011. The Syrian passport ranked third-worst passport following Iraq and Afghanistan passports.¹⁶⁶ Applying to the Syrian passport is not only expensive costing around \$800. To have the passport printed also requires long periods and enduring cumbersome bribery and bureaucracy. After ten years of displacement, Syrian passport holders can enter 29 countries in the world without needing visas.¹⁶⁷ Having the freedom to travel Turkish cities is not attainable for displaced Syrians as they need to apply for a "travel document permission", issued a few days before travels, defined for destinations, and restricted by time. The Turkish administrative authorities can reject applications without giving explanations. Hence, Syrian men have perhaps reshaped the notion of Syria to be a homeland instead of a nation-state. The reason is catalyzed by instability and unrecognition of being a Syrian which, in turn, causes the sentiment to emasculation.

¹⁶⁶Alex Ledsom, "How Powerful Is Your Passport? These Are The Best, Post-Pandemic, In 2021," Forbes, accessed July 26, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexledsom/2021/01/10/how-powerful-is-your-passport-these-are-the-best-post-pandemic-in-2021/>.

¹⁶⁷Ledsom.

It can therefore be concluded that Syrian men's identities are challenged in a variety of ways. Firstly, displacement has resulted in separation within formerly nuclear families, distancing men from their traditional roles within the family unit and disturbing their sense of what a man should be able to contribute to their family. This has been exacerbated by the COVID 19 situation and the limitations of the temporary protection regime. Syrian men clearly feel trapped between the impossibility of returning to Syria and the failure of the temporary protection regime to offer them permanent refuge in Turkey. This has resulted in Syrian men feeling emasculated by this distance from family, and through the lack of certainty and legal status within Turkey's temporary protection regime.



CHAPTER IV: 'THE CAPTAIN OF THE SHIP': DISPLACEMENT AND CONTESTED SOCIO-FAMILIAL ATTITUDES TO MASCULINITY

We have examined earlier in chapter 2 that Turkish discourse of Syrian men has resulted in sentiments of impermanence and emasculation. In chapter 3, we explored that Syrian men's lived experience is defined by the interaction with their formerly nuclear families, and that this family separation has been worsened by the COVID 19 situation and the limitations of the temporary protection regulations. Moreover, displaced Syrian men's 'conventional route' is being challenged, contested and negotiated by displacement complexity. As such, this chapter will investigate to answer the sub-question: To what extent has displacement changed notions of masculinity and self-identification?

In this chapter, I will explain the imagined scenarios of the Syrian man life traditional pathways in Syria; and how these imaginations have been contested in relation to the Turkish masculinity standards. Regarding Syrian men's inability to fulfill Syrian marriage criteria I will discuss how Syrian men navigate different ways of social norms and marriage practices, and how Syrian children have shifted roles with fathers.

4.1. The Traditional Path of Being a Man in Syria

Completing the military service, finding a job, receiving a stable salary, saving money to marry, ultimately marrying, and having children are the main milestones Syrian men have to go through for the expected traditional path of being a man in Syria. The immediate family plays a crucial role in making, facilitating, and supporting these things to happen. Albeit remote, the close-knit families and community draw milestones in the journey Syrian men embark on from childhood. The man's interaction with his family and community leaves tremendous expectations and duties with age. Waseem elaborated on the journey Syrian men endure:

At the time we were in Syria, the man is defined as the one who controls his home's issues. He has the higher authority to run the house. Since the childhood of the boy, he has been thought that he is the man. The idea of being a man is reinforced for a boy that he has to do specific things for his sister as he is a man. The boy gets older having this preconception. When he goes to university and other life events, more pressure or commitments are posed on him. He has to work, study if possible, and then he has to get married. A plan has been put for the man to accomplish all these things because he is a man not because he has a special feature that distinguishes him among others. The moment he is born, he has certain milestones to overcome. This develops the sense of being responsible as the man. It simultaneously boosts the feeling of control as everyone should listen and mind what he says. Consequently, as we have in Syria single-sex and mixed schools, this feeling is enhanced that the man is different from the woman. Not to mention the financial aspect, as the man gets into the job market and makes money, he becomes much more independent than the woman. All these things together promote the feeling of control in the man. So when he gets married, then his perception of the woman is that he is protecting and providing financially and even sexually. Also, the religious aspect is important. He thinks himself supported by religious ideas that he has authority more than the woman has. He makes use of this point to increase his masculinity and be more in control.

These imaginations and expectations construct the roles the man has to do in the family and for the family. Anas stated that in Syria, a man's parents buy him an apartment to get him married, and a Syria man is expected to get married by the age 25 years. If unmarried past this age, a Syrian man will be questioned directly and indirectly by his immediate relatives and workplace's friends about why he is not married yet. However, according to Anas, the Syrian standard for a man after living in Istanbul has transformed from securing a job and getting married to making ends meet and covering rental payments and apartment expenses. Similarly, the case of gender dynamics in urban Egypt, young men centralized the economic productivity and financial success to the masculine trajectory when young men at their mid-twenties.¹⁶⁸ Anas spoke about his nuanced experience as he came to Istanbul at the age of 25. "A rope was cut" is the

¹⁶⁸Ghannam, *Live and Die like a Man*, 49.

expression experienced and expressed of the journey to Istanbul, and to the possibility to go back one day. That rope connects the family to tradition and culture, and old memories to a familiar life route. The severance of the 'rope' establishes a totally different obligatory route to the new reality in Istanbul. Encountered by the difficulty to learn a new language, find a job, apply to university, certify one's undergraduate degree, Anas stated that "I had to start from scratch." Moreover, In Jameel's situation, Syrians lost the ability to change because many countries and militias were involved militarily on the Syrian grounds. Alternative options for helping displaced Syrians in the diaspora emerged. In Fatih district, Jameel who is an English literature graduate, has volunteered to help displaced Syrian children learn English in an NGO at Fatih district. Jameel's attempts to achieve meaningful deeds for the Syrian population in Istanbul as he has not been able to impact change back in Syria.

Another feature Syrian men hold about the imagination of the man's traditional path is to be financially established. Failing the standards subjects displaced Syrian men to the unpleasant feelings of loss and vulnerability. The decent lifestyle they lead in Syria has economically and psychologically shifted after fleeing to Istanbul. Losing one's property, belongings, and more importantly, homeland have accumulated to the generational losses. Waleed reported on his life and socio-economic hardships after fleeing to Istanbul "In my town, we had our apartments, cars, and relatives. Now all these have gone, our generation is lost."

Finding a job and making money is one of the traditional route of Syrian men back in Syria. In Istanbul seizing work opportunity largely depends on the type of networks one socializes with. With no access to institutionalized entities where Syrians meet results in the feeling of being a stranger to the city as is the experience by Waseem. The city makes one feel very consumed to the extent that they do not have to maintain in contact with fellow Syrians or Turkish acquaintances. As a result, finding a "life partner," according to Anas, is unattainable or even impossible in Istanbul. This is because Syrians have only

two ways to get married; one is through their families, and second is through their social circles:

I think that Istanbul allows no opportunity to have a social life because of long working hours. Syrians tend to look for partners in two ways: through the family; then it is possible to find a wife, but I would not say it is 100% guaranteed as you need someone to accept you within your condition and fit your mindset. It is impossible for me to buy an apartment in Istanbul as the Syrian's expectation of the prospect husband should do. For this reason, it is difficult to find a 'life partner' on my own in Istanbul as I do not have time to be outside of work.

Finding a life partner can fulfill the "void" as Anas explained: it fulfills the Syrian family's expectation of getting married, compensate for not living with one's family, provides social and psychological support through in-law family, makes Istanbul's lived experience less severe, and satisfies the need of establishing one's own family.

After two hours of interviews and conversations about many topics at the Süleymaniye Salis Medrese, gazing over the Istanbul's scenery places from up the Süleymaniye Mosque, we decided to go out for a walk towards Fatih area. I asked Anas about how does he feel when we were watching the sunset looking over the Golden Horn and Galata Tower and other historical mosques. The answer was that he is not able to feel and perceive the beauty unless he finds a partner; these places should be walked through, discovered, seen with a partner (wife). Anas could not entirely appreciate the beauty of Istanbul as he missed his family and was unable to establish his own family. This consolidates the argument reached in chapter two that the Syrian man is defined by the family, wife and children.

Moreover, COVID 19 worsened the already deteriorating lived experience of displaced Syrian men because they did not only missed psychological support from their families but also missed meeting up with others. Waseem voiced this idea as the following:

Being a doctor and single man and doing a medical specialty that requires long hours shift and less time to spend outside the hospital.

Curfews, lockdowns, closing restaurants, and cafes affect me. Usually, I do a lot of activities. This affects me psychologically. People usually get support from family or friends or neighbors. But there is no one. Everyone is alone or is with their small family. This is not only for Syrians but also for Turkish people.

Marrying is one of the main pillar of the Syrian man traditional route. The failure or inability to marry impacts the ideal of the Syrian man. Therefore, the question of being 'single' and not being able to meet up with people irritated many participants as loneliness. Waseem described his social life nowadays as "a recession state" as COVID 19 affected everyone adversely. However, the implications on Syrians were much more severe. Ziyad, Waseem's brother, left Istanbul to Antep as he feared endangering him with the possibility of transmitting infection to him while working with COVID-19 patients. This, in turn, contributes to feel emasculated as we have discussed earlier that Syrian men are defined by being with the family.

4.2. Failing Syrian Society Standards of Marriage

Before settling in Turkey, a Syrian man marrying a Syrian woman in Syria used to be culturally connected to factors pertinent to the bride's family background – ascribed to the reputable authentic family for families living in cities, and acknowledging the bride's family lineages in the countryside areas. The man and his family look for certain specifications related to the bride's family lineage and other different standards related to beauty, hygiene, morality, religiosity, education, and etiquettes. The woman and her family examine the prospective groom's salary, occupation, social status, whether he owns an apartment and a car, his morality, and religiosity. The more qualities the prospective groom or bride has the easier he or she possibly marries. According to the research's interlocutors, Syrians in Istanbul are applying the same marital standards considered in Syria; "one's value is equal to the amount of money one has." Large and lavish dowries worsen the situation as the bride's family expects a wealthy groom so as to protect the woman in case of divorce. In Syria, married couples resolve disagreements through spouses' paternal interference and consultations. After being displaced, many

Syrian families live alone in Istanbul and are disconnected from their extended families who might be scattered in three to four hosting countries or continues living in Syria. For this reason, some families request large dowries as families are no longer connected as they were in the past. Divided families and the lack of family atmosphere and family visits to grandparents, maternal and paternal aunts, and uncles deteriorate the already fragile social circles that assist in keeping marriages together. In Syria as also known in Turkey, a proverb explains the significance families play in their children's marriages, "couples are not the ones who marry rather the spouse's families do." Ali states that an average Syrian man needs fifteen more years than the five years needed to save money so that he can fulfill promises in a Syrian marriage in Istanbul, as he adds:

Money, if he does not have money, all the time he has to compromise for others. If he has money, then he can fulfill his promises which he was able to accomplish. Syrian men who are in Syria used to have high promises of dowries, gold, a fancy wedding which invites 1000 persons. He was able to do so and also he was supported (by his family) to make all these happen. Now, he is not able to do any of these promises and no one would help him with it. He would need twenty years or his whole life to fulfill these promises while these promises were completed in five years (of making money) in Syria.

Dedicating one's life to making a family unit through marriage is regarded as a trait of the Syrian man known as a "family man". On the other hand, Syrian women consider husband's demands known as "the lady of the house" symbolizing the apartment's management, bringing up children, and doing the household chores. As described by Saeed, "In a wedding party, in the countryside of Damascus, I have known a groom who had to pay debt for ten years for the wedding expenses." Saeed elaborates: "The reason for big weddings is that people show off over how many people attend the wedding, and how other families had a wedding attended by fewer number of people." The unrealistic expectations and customs have presented a heavy burden on the Syrian man's shoulders in Syria. Moreover, settled in a metropolitan city, encountered by much more financial and familial responsibilities, making less money, and being unable to provide, the Syrian man in Istanbul is not able to make sense of the new reality. A generational gap has been

created between the young people and the elderly who use to adopt a traditional lifestyle. Saeed explains:

I would speak about the people of my generation. People do not examine the struggles that they are experiencing. (Syrian) People so far do not look to the struggles men face financially. (Syrian) People are still attached to old traditions. They expect Syrian men to have certain requirements that they are not capable of achieving. The same goes when he asks for marriage. He is being asked many things he cannot acquire. Young Syrians are not understood well by their community.

As mentioned by Saeed, some Syrian families are still living by the old traditional Syrian mentality requesting a long list of unattainable demands for marriage. However, according to Hasan, a freelance social media manager: “yes there are loads of families who are still living in the past. Nevertheless, many other families seek their daughters’ welfare; when I married, my parents in law did not ask for anything nor did they expect anything. Moreover, they assisted furnishing the apartment, and were very cooperative.” Hasan added that inflated life expenses in Istanbul have made it impossible to survive if one does not work for two jobs as he does.

Muaz, Damascene, a freelance entrepreneur selling gifts online, in an informal conversation, spoke about how bride’s families inquire about his profile. His mother’s multiple attempts to ask for potential brides to some families have not succeeded. Muaz said that the very first question is whether the future husband gains Turkish citizenship, then whether he owns an apartment and/or car and receives a stable salary. These requirements kept him waiting for someone who can be considerate to his conditions; otherwise, Muaz thinks that marrying a woman in Syria and applying for her reunion visa solve the insuperable expectations of Syrian families in Istanbul. Many Syrian men are unlike Muaz live alone without parents in Istanbul. Therefore, seeking help from the family and friend network to ask for women willing to marriage is seemingly more practical than pursuing marriage from opinionated traditional Syrian family in Istanbul according to Muaz. Despite the apparent complexity for the couples to know each other

utilizing social networking sites via video calls, and excessive bureaucracy in applying to the Turkish embassy in Lebanon, Syrian men still find refuge to establish family through bringing Syrian women living in Syria to Istanbul. Ali, single, thirty-one years old feels the psychological burden of not being married. At his age, he feels that a young man is not yet well-established financially and consequently not married:

...as I have become 31 years old. The Syrians' expectation of my being at this age is that I should have been married now, have children, or be about to have children. (Long sigh). I should be working, take responsibility, and be a balanced committed person.

Sami married to a Finnish woman, resonates with Ali's idea that Syrian men bear the pressure of establishing the family and being responsible for family issues, while the Turkish women partake in family concerns and decisions. As Sami contrasts the Turkish marital lifestyle with the Syrian one. His marriage with a European woman who does share all the responsibilities and duties articulates clearly that marrying a woman who can work and has her own is relief in terms of making ends meet as living in such an expensive city as Istanbul. Sami told me in an informal conversation that he does not live in an area where many Syrians live because he prefers to stay away from possible troubles. Away from Syrian populated neighborhoods, Sami did not confirm the Syrian norms of the man being the only breadwinner in the family:

I am frank with you, I am comfortable living with someone who could share the living expenses. Why are we living here? To work, to live to eat. When you do not have to do this you will not feel psychologically well. If one of your family members as your mother, sister, or wife could work, why would you not let them do so?

Sami's position is somehow intriguing as living in Istanbul merges the Eastern and Western lifestyles. On the one hand, marriage is encouraged, supported, preferred, and demanded by Turkish families. On the other hand, women's work is negotiated between the spouses and not by default assigned to men. On the other hand, the Syrian norms suggest that making money is expected from the man. Thus, Abulawahid does not feel

comfortable expressing views about what a man should be. This masculine contestation is presented as described by his words:

As I am in Istanbul, Syrian people do not describe me as a man as I do not hold the same opinions they have. For example, when it comes to women, I believe in gender equality between men and women. In Syria, to some extent, we do not have this. If I spoke my mind about these notions, Syrians would call me *Tartur* - {stupid or foolish not dominating over the family issues} and would call me *Muquren* {a person who holds an animal mind with horns} – not jealous for his family members' honor. You are not a man by the Syrian standards if you cook or clean instead of your wife. These are the standards for most Syrian men. I would not speak of such issues if I lived among the Syrian community because it would cause inconvenience as whatever reasons I provide would not be accepted.

Sami's perception of marriage is ingrained in the experienced reality of the past living alone and not being able to survive on his own. Waseem, however, concurs with the Syrian criteria of being the main breadwinner in the family, marrying the person who has similar origins, upbringing, and language. A known Syrian proverb manifests Waseem's idea and implies that bad luck and consequences for the one who does not marry someone similar to his background, religion, nationality, and sect. Waseem's perspective about marriage is also affected by the language barrier, social and cultural differences experienced after seven years studying in a medical Turkish university. Waseem elaborates the following:

By Syrian standards, I have to be the main provider financially for the family. I do not look at it as a wrong thing, but it is not a necessity to have it. This is among others what I am trying to achieve. I am trying to be financially independent. Second thing is to get along with the Syrian norms as to get married to someone from the same city, same social, cultural, religious backgrounds. I feel comfortable with these norms. These norms are compatible with the Syrian standards for men. For me, I am not interested in getting married to someone from a different religion, nation, or country.

Confronted with long hour shifts as being a resident doctor, unable to be financially self-sufficient, Waseem still regards Istanbul as a promising city to find the significant other, and clarifies that people of Istanbul are drained and being challenged when considering options on employment and bringing up children options:

In Istanbul, there is a big opportunity to meet up with people who suit your aspirations or qualities of people who you want to be with as the city is very big and has a variety of people from all walks of life. Bringing up children may be difficult as Istanbul is a very big city. You may get into a machine for capitalism always working, making money, and staying home. As the city is very big, there is no outlet to relax.

On the other hand, Waleed, single, who comes from the countryside of Damascus, negotiates the social and cultural differences between the Turkish and Syrian community and imagines extreme lifestyle for married Syrian men in Istanbul.

If a Syrian man gets married to a Syrian woman in Istanbul. The same standards in Syria are applied here in Istanbul. However, life gets tougher in Istanbul. The concept of masculinity equals the status of men to how much money they have. In Syria, you would work for 8 hours shift. In Istanbul, you have to work 12 hours shifts as well as commute for 2 hours. This is what has changed now. Also, I have two paternal uncles who are polygamous. Each uncle is married to two wives. There is polygamy in Syria. This is more common in conservative towns than it is in cities. Polygamy in our town is a very normal thing. Here, no polygamy, they will register one wife and the second wife will not be acknowledged by law. We have found this strange, they also perceive our practice strange. Every society is accustomed to certain customs.

Living in Istanbul is preferable as there are many available jobs and education opportunities. However, Istanbul's hustle and bustle and displacement life conditions, cultural and social nuances, and unrealistic expectations of some Syrian families have caused many Syrian men to postpone their decision to get married as for the case of Waleed who is currently 39 years old, or to marry a non-Syrian woman as the case of Saeed and Sami, or to seek an alternative way through marrying from Syria and bringing the wife to Turkey.

4.3. When the Child Becomes Father – Parentification

As discussed in the previous chapter, living in a liminal state, not recognized by the state, challenged by COVID 19 conditions, not able to find a job, fearing the future among many factors has contributed to feeling vulnerable for displaced Syrian men. As the end of 2020, the number of the Syrians who registered under temporary protection is 3.7 million,¹⁶⁹ of whom over 1.6 million are children.¹⁷⁰ Displaced Syrian fathers are not able to do the expected duties of fatherhood in Turkey. Lack of good command of Turkish, working for long shifts, not able find proper jobs are reasons of feeling incompetent as fathers.

Many participants share stories on fathers feeling inadequate when they go to buy some groceries, or when they want to go to faraway locations in a big city such as Istanbul. They have difficulty speaking Turkish, and accordingly, feel the need to ask assistance from their children to translate or to communicate with Turkish people. Syrian children adapts quickly in learning Turkish as they study in Turkish schools. This problem continues to be seen in some conflicts in schools and with neighbors where children may have problems but their fathers cannot resolve or intervene as they are unable to communicate with teachers or neighbors. Children can translate for their fathers when buying things from the malls, for instance. This situation is called instrumental parentification when children adopt adult family roles.¹⁷¹ Saeed reported that his father felt lost when he could not communicate well with the supermarket cashier worker. Husayn elaborates on the issue:

For the financial aspect, I know some families that a girl is contributing through her work to the family finances and the father does not work.

¹⁶⁹“Naturalisation.”

¹⁷⁰“UNICEF Turkey Humanitarian Situation Report #40, (Syrian Refugees Response): January -December 2020 - Turkey,” ReliefWeb, accessed July 16, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/unicef-turkey-humanitarian-situation-report-40-syrian-refugees-response-january>.

¹⁷¹Peter F. Titzmann, “Growing Up Too Soon? Parentification Among Immigrant and Native Adolescents in Germany,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 41, no. 7 (July 2012): 880, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9711-1>.

In many Syrian families, the father becomes nothing. You would imagine children's perception of the man who is responsible for the family. This perception will change how children develop in the future. We should not forget that we do not have Syrian fathers in Turkey. It is a very serious issue. They are fathers biologically, but few are the fathers who work. Any person came of the age of 40s or 50s to Turkey, it is difficult to remain a father here. The expectation of fatherly trait is missing, the father would not go with children to schools if anything occurs as he does not speak the language. The fatherly responsibility is not fulfilled here. So the child becomes a father. Now, back to COVID 19, imagine the man was working, now he is dismissed!

According to Peter F. Titzmann, “parentification is based on parents’ inability to fulfill their parental role.”¹⁷² In immigrant families, parents lack the socio-cultural skills that their children have acquired; children are more in contact with the host society than their parents are.¹⁷³ Different from the norm of women being only households, the Syrian mother and daughter have become providers to the family finances in Istanbul. This also affects the father’s sentiment of being responsible for the households which were provided totally by the man back in Syria. Another example comes from a young Filipino who was among the internally displaced persons from Marawi City, Lanao Del Sur, in the Philippines. They assist their families to achieve the family’s goals and have become “the family resources during difficult times” at the time of the conflict.¹⁷⁴

4.4. Negotiation and Contestation Between Syrian and Turkish Masculinity

As described earlier by some interlocutors that “Syrians are reluctant to change”, other migrant men changing behavior comes as a response mechanism to “their own and their partners’ altered positions in the family, community and labor market.”¹⁷⁵ For instance, Vietnamese migrant men did not regard Australian men as exemplary model to reshape

¹⁷²Titzmann. 881.

¹⁷³Titzmann.

¹⁷⁴Zaldy C. Collado, “Displacement, Miseries, and Responsibilities: What Does It Mean to Rebuild the Home among Young People Affected by Conflict in the Southern Philippines?,” *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, June 14, 2021, 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450128.2021.1936735>.

¹⁷⁵Mike Donaldson, ed., *Migrant Men: Critical Studies of Masculinities and the Migration Experience*, 214, 1. publ, Routledge Research in Gender and Society 20 (New York: Routledge, 2009).

their sense of self.¹⁷⁶ Attached to the held beliefs from their homelands about manhood and gender relations, migrant men generally bring with them their sets of understanding about what it is to be a man.¹⁷⁷ Some participants were not impressed by the other fellow men in their host community. They attributed Turkish men as being less strict, less controlling, dominating, ruling, providing, responsible over the family than the Syrian man is as Husayn explained:

The difference is that Turkish men do not have the same strictness *Al rajul al sharqi* has. Women are the rulers of the family. Certainly, Turkish people are different from one city to another. They have different varieties of traits. Some Turkish people are Sharqin men and some are not. The same situation is in Syria, some women are more dominating in the family. Having a craft or profession is not a necessary thing to have for Turkish men. However, he is the main financial provider to the family but not the sole breadwinner and that is because of the nature of the Turkish market. In addition to that, Turkish men like making money more than Syrians do.

For Syrians, Turkish men are of less status (command) in their familial relationships and I got used to this practice. However, the Syrian community does agree with this notion positively. I think that this is the basic standard that I cannot achieve for the Syrian standards of masculinity.

Al rajul al sharqi is a repetitive theme among participants which means the eastern man in Arabic. It connotes the difference between Western countries and Arab countries. The Western men which, in this case, can be inferred as the Turkish men are less controlling than those of the Middle Eastern men. It is a noteworthy point that many participants repeated utilizing *Al rajul al sharqi* rather than the Arab man mentality. In the context of bringing migrant in Australia, Vietnamese men did not want to be ascribed as “a bloke” which means “man” in the Australian dialect.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, Indonesian Muslim migrant men view Australian men as antisocial and animalistic.¹⁷⁹ Similarly to Australia’s

¹⁷⁶Donaldson.

¹⁷⁷Donaldson. 210.

¹⁷⁸Donaldson. 214.

¹⁷⁹Donaldson.

case for the migrant men who consider themselves having superior “variant of masculinity” than that one practiced by Australians,¹⁸⁰ some displaced Syrian men think that being in control of the family issues, being the main provider for the family, having a profession or craft is the proper understanding of being a man. Saeed articulated more nuances between Syrians and Turkish men:

If I will do a comparison between Syrians and Turkish people, maybe the concept of having “courage and audacity” is more present with Turkish people more than it is shown among Syrians. On the other hand, maybe concepts such as “independence in the family and the masculine centrality in Turkish are less common in Turkish people. By and large, Turkish people are more prone to get themselves into “courageous situations”, however, they will be less independent from the family even less independent from their wife. While the Syrians are more independent as figures in the family. A Syrian man will be playing a more centric role in making decisions for his wife. He is the center of the family.

Intriguingly, Saeed’s idea mentioned a distinguished difference between Syrians and Turkish men. Turkish men show more courage than Syrians. Following Saeed, the reason might be that Syrian people have not experienced any political engagement in their social life as they have lived under dictatorship, persecution, and oppression for fifty years. Having no agency to protest or speak against the government contributed to constructing fearful men. Being under an authoritative regime resulted in redirecting men’s agency to exercise and exert power on the family’s members. Turkish civil law, constructed social norms, culture, and traditions allow women to have a more obvious role in the decision-making mechanism in the Turkish family. As explained by many participants, Turkish women’s work brings money to the household, accordingly, making her less cornered, allowing her to play an active role in solving family issues. Abuallah agreed with Saeed to the different reality and change of martial roles between the Syrian community in Syria, and the Syrian community in Istanbul: “Turkish people as for marriage and women's rights are governed by civil rights laws.” These nuances account

¹⁸⁰Donaldson.

for more daunting duties on the men's shoulders, and negotiation to men's contribution to the household finances and decision-making.

Some instilled gendered practices in Syria have in effect become lesser after coming to Istanbul. Ideas such as exerting power over the female family members' choices declined because of living in Istanbul away from the Syrian community pressure and relatives' expectations. This transformation is articulated by Waseem in detail:

Some issues have changed. My perspective on women is from the religious aspect. I had the control aspect especially because for whatever thing you do, they would say to you: do you accept this behavior to happen to your sister? This notion has faded. I understood this concept incorrectly. For example, the man has to oblige the woman to wear Hijab or oblige her to get married to a specific person or study in a certain field. I was adopting all these ideas but I had a notion that if I had a sister, I would act similar to the way Syrians do. These things have changed me. If I stayed in Syria, I would have obliged my sister to wear a Hijab at a certain age. I am not discussing whether wearing Hijab is the correct or incorrect thing but rather I am speaking about being in control over women. Some people oblige women to wear certain clothing, getting in and out of the apartment at certain hours. This point may be diminished in Turkey.

Waseem's stance for the common understanding of what men should command and react to women was initially affected by misconceptions about the role of man in the family confused with tradition, custom, and culture.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored how the Syrian man struggles to achieve life's pre-determined conventional roles in the family and in society. After being displaced to Istanbul, the Syrian man's traditional life trajectory has been contested by livelihood issues, struggling to make ends meet. This, in turn, affects his familial duties and ultimately has forced him to renegotiate his traditional role as the only breadwinner and dominant person in the family. The Syrian man's quest to establish a family and marry is impeded by unrealistic demands from Syrian families, by language, and social and cultural barriers to marriage with Turkish women. Syrian men have probed different

ways to find a significant other through marrying non-Syrian women or marrying Syrian women from Syria and bringing the bride to Istanbul through a family reunion visa at the Turkish consulate in Lebanon. Moreover, as Syrian children learn Turkish much easier than their parents do, the traditional fatherhood role in Syria has been contested by the simple fact their children's ability to communicate with Turkish people is better than their own. Hence, enduring the struggles and difficulties of displacement in Istanbul has resulted in contestation and a renegotiation of the Syrian man's identity, role of a young person, brother, husband, father and ultimately as a man.



CHAPTER V: CONFIGURATIONS OF MASCULINITY: 'MASCULINITY IS MY RELATIONSHIP WITH ALLAH'

As have been discussed in chapters two, three, and four about the Syrian men's sentiments of impermanence and emasculation which are resulted by Turkish discourse about the Syrian presence; the lived experiences have defined Syrian men daily life's discourses on the family concept; displaced Syrian men's conventional lifescapes is contested and negotiated by the legal displacement complexity. In this way, this chapter elaborates on how the mentioned experiences and emotions of displacement as a Syrian men reflect upon the self-identification and masculinity understanding. Considering all the previous chapters together, displaced Syrian men have constructed meanings of masculinity in multifaceted ways: his position of a family-man is challenged, women's work idea is contested, his role as 'the captain of the ship' in command over family issues is negotiated, and adhering to Islamic and ethical principles is maintained. Consequently, this chapter will attempt to answer the following sub-question: how do Syrian men navigate a new discourse on masculinity within their lives in Istanbul?

This chapter focuses on what imagination Syrian men held about ideal manhood and masculinity representations of how a man ought to be. Examining the held Syrian masculine persona draws an interesting picture of how masculinity is perceived in Syria and to what extent changes related to this notion of masculinity occurred in Istanbul. Ultimately, we study the general understanding of the word 'masculinity'. Finally, we investigate how masculinity is demonstrated through personal traits and masculine characteristics within the family.

When asked about how Syrian men would be thought of in the Syrian sense: two respondents' comments to the question what a Syrian man would like in Syria was that "a Syrian man meant being (Abu) *Antar*." Similar to the condition of the *Awdet Ghawar* series broadcasted on the Syrian television channel in the 1970s. Abu Antar's character

in the drama series signified a male dominant parody featuring a tough guy with a walrus mustache, full-toned exaggerated Damascene accent, *Kufiya* covering to the shoulders but showing his muscles and a dagger holding to the waist.¹⁸¹ Abu Antar's collective shared memory does not represent real masculinity but rather explained the quest to retrieve suppressed masculinity through exaggerating external symbols of stereotypical manhood. Waleed recalls Abu Antar's imagined persona:

Masculinity in Syrian standards means walking with sandals that make squeaky noise, a folding pocket knife as well as lock keys hanging on the pants at the waist, swaggering around the neighborhood screaming. This is a general perception not what a man ought to be.

Abu Anter's persona attempted to substitute the resentment to economic problems, corruption, and dictatorship that led to frustrated masculinity according to Rebecca Joubin.¹⁸² Similarly, Syrian men in Istanbul, deprived of any political rights or outlet to express themselves, suppressed by the same Syrian political regime for more than fifty years, Syria's political sphere and displacement's legal complexity have conditioned Syrian men's masculinity to be oppressed, misrepresented and unasserted. Moreover, according to Sami, exaggerated display of control and power over the others, and being dominant over family members were utilized to manifest masculinity:

In the past, being a man meant that your wife should mind your words, being always angry, if you are walking in the street, and someone stares at you and you should stare at him back. If you have quarrels with friends then you should bring other 10 friends to fight. A Syrian man meant being *Antar*. For me, masculinity is having masculine physical traits. Masculinity has other meanings different than physical meaning. It (masculinity) changed and did not have those meanings now. Whenever you say: he is a man then you characterize him and you put pressure on him. On interactions within the community and with other friends, being a man is not through being furious at other people but through committing to one's word and doing what is

¹⁸¹"Syrian Actor Who Played Abu Antar Dies," March 31, 2009, <https://www.arabamericannews.com/2009/03/31/syrian-actor-who-played-abu-antar-dies/>.

¹⁸²Rebecca Joubin, *Mediating the Uprising Narratives of Gender and Marriage in Syrian Television Drama*, 125, 2020.

expected from you in all life situations. It is how you position yourself well in all situations.

Sami's disposition to expectations of being a man and the cultural pressure of the society and community in Syria has diminished masculinity to the physical features. In Istanbul, a novel masculine perception released from the Syrian social norms is introduced in order to succeed and prosper in pressing conditions. Being responsible for oneself and family issues have become the norm instead of flaunting manhood characters to the community. Situated in a complicated immigration legal system, conditioned to learn Turkish language, required to work to make ends meet, Syrian men's struggle to survive the challenging predicaments have shaped and developed a new masculine trajectory. Accordingly, Ghannam has coined the term "masculine trajectories" for men in urban Egypt: "the process of becoming a man and how during this process, which lasts over a life span, men identify with various ideals, norms, and values."¹⁸³ Dismissing Abu Antar's old mentality and degrading external manhood character manifest an emergent sense of masculinity succinctly salient as Ali puts in his words: "Helping the wife in the household chores is not a shameful thing. Instead, those who say as such have long mustaches but in reality, they are trash. They act as Abu Antar." Istanbul has given Syrian men an opportunity to reshape mindsets and conclude different understanding in interacting with multilayered complexity of social, cultural, and religious issues related to oneself and family. Moreover, most participants emphasized that outward appearance does not reflect the true authentic actualization of manhood. Ayyub stated that:

We cannot discover certainty. The outside appearance does not tell everything about a person. You have to look for the inner side. You may look to a person, you would think that he has the full characters of masculinity but in practice, he is not. I like my physical character. But I do not see that masculinity is having muscles.

Ayyub's situation and devotion to his family members are remarkable. He applied to be resettled to Canada along with his sister and niece and nephews. His sister lost her

¹⁸³Ghannam, *Live and Die like a Man*. 7.

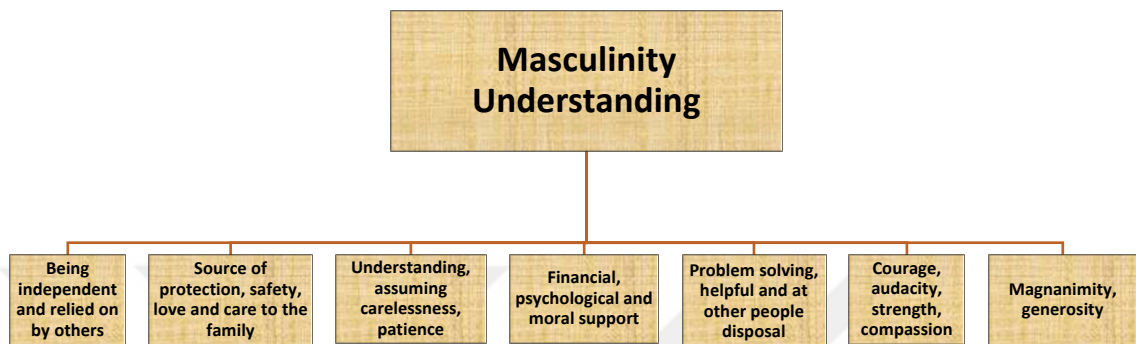
husband during the clashes in Aleppo. He stated that the only reason for the resettlement is to save his niece and nephew's future through better education. I noticed while visiting his apartment that a separate room has stackable storage drawers for sportive clothing that contains more than ten jerseys and many pairs of trainers. He encouraged me to go to the gym to keep my body fit, and cook healthy food with less carbohydrates. While having lunch, Ayyub told me that mining workers are the highest-paid among other sectors in Canada, and he has already planned to work there the moment he arrives. Ayyub says: "Man, for me, means strength in all what the word connotes. Let it be taking responsibility, the physical strength. Generally being "strong" in its all sublime meanings." Ayyub's expression of a strong man connotes the Islamic tradition of suggesting a higher status of a strong believer than a weak believer. After lunch, Ayyub continued the discussion while drinking tea that his emotional state is under constant pressure but he cannot show or express his vulnerability. His impulsive sense of responsibility pushes him to keep fit and prepares his body to be ready for the physically demanding job in Canada. Ayyub's facial expressions and sentiments during the interview exhibited a frustrated determined person. Ayyub endeavors to sustain strength physically, emotionally, socially, and psychologically necessitate being responsible and vigorous, and that manifesting strength is through actions not through noticeable outward appearances. Waseem agrees to Ayyub's thought and relates to cultural differences examining who is a man:

Physical traits are the least important when I look at a man. It relates to different cultures. In some cultures, the man is defined by his mustache. Other cultures are defined by their length or muscles. I mean the physical features. Just because I am born as a man, I should not have more status or authority over other people.

Waseem and Ayyub's ideas proclaim that being a man means being responsible and not exercising the privilege of being a man. Istanbul and displacement life have driven Syrian men to develop and to reshape a nuanced understanding of being a man. Freed from political and social pressure implemented in Syria, constrained with liminal legal status

in Turkey, Syrian men in Istanbul regard being responsible and succeeding in establishing a decent life in Istanbul as the baseline of what a man ought to be.

Before delving into masculinity representations of Syrian men in Istanbul, participants most repeated answers about what is the meaning of masculinity are as follows:



We can realize that most of the characters mentioned were focused on relationships within the family. Thus, the family unit is regarded as one of the most substantial factors of Syrian people's lives in Syria. However, as Syrians fled and spread all over the world in the last ten years, Syrians' perception of the family has been affected severely as family members live separately. Due to displacement, fragmented family members live in two to three different countries. We have discussed already in this chapter as well as in chapter four that Syrian men compensate for the inability to live with their beloved ones through remittances and symbolic gestures. Moreover, we covered earlier that Syrian men deemed the ability to lead a decent life and establish themselves and have their own families in Istanbul as substantially necessitated. Thus, the masculinity quest, to be independent and be depended on, prove useful to understand the complexity and contestation Syrian men encounter in Istanbul. Missing their families and lacking the atmosphere of having support from their relatives questioned and conditioned Syrian men's capability to provide, support, protect, and help inadequately. Thereby, they define themselves and their masculinity through their family, wife etc.

5.1. The Syrian Man is a Family-Man

The Syrian man is conditioned to be responsible and to sustain achieving multiple duties and commitments since he was in Syria. Much more pressured in Istanbul, the Syrian man keeps the notion of family and raising children prioritized. His journey to establish a family is troublesome and dire. The bride's family examines the future husband's work status and whether he makes enough money. Being a well-off groom minimizes the probability of needing the bride to work in the future even if the woman is educated. Syrian marriages generally contain an unwritten agreement that the man has to cover his family expenses fully and the woman should sustain children's upbringing.

The Syrian man's responsibilities are not to be taken for granted. Being in a position to lead the family is merited through exerting all efforts to work and to be responsible, and to generate money for the family according to the research participants Abdoullah and Louay:

There should not be two leaders in the family. It is like a company where the man can be presented as the director, and the woman, wife, can be defined as the general manager. She can override the man in taking some decisions, but the leadership should be from one person who can be depended on, these two features are the most important traits for being a man. Also, I want to add that a man should have agency in taking decisions. I have witnessed some events that I could not bear or accept that "the man of the house" or "the owner of the house", married and have children, is not able to be strong and capable of having agency to make crucial decisions. It implies a certain deficiency of the trait of being a man. I do not know how to judge as I am not in their position. Also, I cannot say that whoever has done as such is not a man. –Abdoullah

The Syrian man is a family man in every sense of the word whether being a single person in relation to uncles, aunts, and grandparents or being married in relation to his wife and children. He is committed to all household familial issues. Whether for me or to any man in a family: the man is like a captain in the ship. Many responsibilities are held on him such as providing sustenance and a source of income. Also, a man should be wise in taking decisions at the time of problems. He should deserve the position of leading the family. –Louay

According to these two extracts, the Syrian man should feature three characters to succeed in being the chief in the family: assuming responsibility, being relied on by other family members, and being wise in decision making. Moreover, the Syrian man is not only providing emotional and physical protection to the family but also expected to sustain financial duties to the family fully. The Syrian man has to show and give respect to the elderly in the family including the father, mother, grandparents, paternal and maternal uncles, and aunts. Honoring the elderly in the family through minding their words, paying regular visits, and checking and fulfilling any needs or requests are the means men ought to accomplish for the family. For married men, all the above-mentioned duties are expected to achieve for the nuclear and extended family along with other responsibilities related to bringing groceries and taking care of home maintenances. Full devotion to the family is commonly rewarded by having the extended family support in difficult situations financially and emotionally. Financially speaking, parents generally assist their children paying for their education expenses, and at the time of marriage, providing money to buy furniture for their new house, and sometimes contributing to the dowry. Emotionally speaking, children should return the favor by helping resolve disputes among family members by adhering to the words and wisdom of their elders. Being a man necessitates minding and adhering to the elderly opinions whether they are women or men.

Intriguingly, being a man is ostensibly restricted to the status of providing and caring to women according to Waseem who is a resident doctor in Istanbul university. As Waseem misses his family, defines masculinity as being a family man who lives, provides, cares and commits to promote the overall wellbeing of women. Waseem elaborates:

I cannot answer this question. How would I know myself as a man if I did not compare myself to a woman? When someone can describe someone as a man, then it should be related to the marital relationship, if you have two couples then you can compare the man to the woman. As I am single, and not connected to a marital relationship, then I cannot describe that I have masculine characters.

When you say the word “man” you have to pair it with the word “woman”. If you are not living in an atmosphere that includes mother, sister, or wife, then you cannot say that you have or actualize your masculine traits. You are not doing things and responsibilities that a man does for a woman. As I am living alone, then I would not say I am actualizing the masculinity character. As I am not providing for my family, and as I am only studying now, I cannot describe myself as I actualize the masculine character. However, if I were married or lived with my mother taking care of her, then you could say I am a man because he is doing things that he is supposed to do from a man to a woman. The man should sustain a decent life for the woman. You are bringing a woman from a specific environment and you settle together. You have to sustain a decent life such as psychologically, financially, and socially. The man has to be committed.

Waseem’s perception of the lost manhood is driven by his inability to be financially independent. Difficult work conditions left no outlet to rest and pushed him to contemplate the decision of marriage as multiple layers of commitments should be considered in all aspects of life.

We can conclude that the ‘family man’ notion is partly diminished. Displacement consequences have contributed to the masculine sentiments being less present and represented. Being a ‘family man’ connotes assuming responsibilities and fulfilling all family member’s needs. Adopting the family-man ideal necessitates undertaking more responsibilities in Istanbul. Nizar, who is married and has three children, described that the concept of masculinity is not clear as Syrians have not struggled in Syria as much as they have in Istanbul as everything was relatively in order. After coming to Istanbul, Syrian people have suffered from displacement tremendously. Consequently, Syrian men’s understanding of masculinity’s becomes clearer as many difficulties inflicted Syrian men in the journey of establishing themselves in the city, Nizar added. In Syria, young men were supported by their fathers and families. The father does the job thoroughly. “If you needed money, your father, paternal or maternal uncle would help. Being lonely here increases the manifestation of masculinity as living in Istanbul is already difficult, and you have to do everything on your own,” Nizar concluded.

Family roles and household issues are ostensibly the pressing arguments that contested the Syrian's family man perception. Many participants shared the idea that a man should help in household chores. Dividing chores were mentioned by four married participants out of seven interlocutors. Two participants, Ali and Ayyub, both are single, and are sending money to relatives in their hometowns, have degraded men who do not assist their families in doing household chores: "it is a shameful false masculinity" not being of help to other family members. Husayn stated that household issues should be managed similarly to two managers in an organization. Husayn added that family roles should be also divided and should not be done only by one person. The man should bring money to the family and the woman should be responsible for bringing up children, cleaning, and organizing tasks. However, he thinks that both spouses can help in financing and maintaining household issues. Waseem explained further that Syrians in the past adopted "wrong customs" inherited for years having female family members doing all the chores while the male members are sitting doing nothing. Waseem elaborated that even though he works in a hospital for long hours, he cooks and cleans by himself at home: "Would it make any difference if I got married. Would I stop doing things that I was doing by myself for a long time?" Sami who is married to a Finnish woman feels proud of himself for respecting gender equality between man and woman. He feels comfortable dividing household labor equitably as doing so makes his wife feel comfortable and not treated as a maid. Muaz emphasized that the family institution encompasses a shared life between family members. Family members should work and benefit from each other reciprocally. Receiving and giving should be balanced. If the man is working outside the house then the woman should work inside the house. Both sides should be in consensus. His main argument is that family members should work for the sake of the family whether they are male or female members. For his situation, being single, living with his mother, Muaz was contributing to the household finances by working outside the house, while his sister, before she married, was working inside the

house doing the household chores. Nonetheless, Waleed, single, 39 years old, if he marries, thinks that family roles should be divided completely:

I cannot make this concession. I will be responsible for providing money to the household. I will provide everything and more than she provides for the household. However, as the initial agreement is concerned, I would not do anything related to the household. This may be part of my masculinity. Nevertheless, I know that religiously speaking that men should help in the household chores in the family. When I have a wholeheartedly devoted person, I will be embarrassed not to assist and I will provide more than what is being provided.

As we have seen, there are a variety of opinions related to family roles and dividing household chores. However, Waleed's contention not to do domestic household is premised on being the main breadwinner to the family. Waleed thinks of his providing role as a default distinguishing feature of masculinity. Knowing that Islamic traditions promote men's participation in the household chores, Waleed's initial consensus to family roles is contested by Islamic teachings which encourage males' involvement of the housework duties, however.

5.2. Women's Work: A Reckoning between Ideality and Reality

As discussed earlier, the Syrian man's devotion to the family encompasses all household financial aspects. Convenient lifestyle and adequate pay received by male family members have helped Syrian families to survive in Syria. A consensus, however, is realized among participants that women's work is needed as far as living in Istanbul is concerned. Jameel works with refugee rights associations while his wife works as a home-based freelance architect and designer. Jameel recalled that in the past Syrians were not used to having women work as men were the only financial source of the family. Jameel also recollected the fact that his father-in-law married on the basis of having his mother-in-law as a housewife. However, currently, in Istanbul, living expenses in relation to wages are inadequate. This situation has made women's work and wife's work preferable as two sources of income to contribute to a better family welfare.

Living in Istanbul has exhausted married Syrian men as basic living expenses are high, and that has caused the uncomfortable feeling of insecurity. "Living in Istanbul is hard for one person. It is much more difficult if you have a family. The man becomes incapable. He cannot secure the basic needs for himself at first. This will make him feel weak and inadequate", Jameel, who is married and has two children, says. Feeling vulnerable and unable to provide for oneself and other family members put Syrian men under tremendous pressure as the necessity of women's work comes into play. Syrian men are encountering a new reality in which other family members have to work and bring money into the household so that they can make the ends meet. Furthermore, Saeed, twenty-seven years-old, married, said that Syrian men would not bear the situation if they were in Syria as it is not acceptable. Nonetheless, they started to normalize this novel condition as it inflicts many other Syrians:

Working women to make the ends meet affects the Syrian man, however, he is accustomed to the situation as no other option is available. If the same happens in Syria, he would feel greatly humiliated, but the situation here makes him incapable of providing. The wife is experiencing and acknowledging that the situation is hard as it is happening to everyone. We call this situation the "widespread affliction", people are starting to accept this societal change as the "affliction" is experienced by everyone.

Living in the metropolitan city of Istanbul, challenging the existing social norms and household roles, has reshaped a new norm to somehow create a cultural shock when it comes to women's work. Waseem elaborates on the issue and differences between Syrian and Turkish women:

If you compare Turkish men to Syrian men (understanding) in the work environment, there is no difference between the man and the woman. All are equals, they work the same amount of hours. The concept of the woman working or not is not discussed in Turkey as everyone works. However, in Syria, we still have people who have arguments about whether or not women should work, and what types of jobs they could work. Here, I have not experienced such a thing. In my department, you see a man and a woman working together or alone,

they achieve tasks equally and efficiently. This is the difference I notice here. In Syria, the usual situation is that women do not work, so if they are working then it is a good thing. It is good in the sense that she gets something more than what she is supposed to. Supposedly, she does not have to do anything but sit down. The Turkish woman is more independent financially than the Syrian woman is.

There is a demand for women to work because of the current inflation in Istanbul, Sami clarified. Anas stated that when the family's financial status is good, then women have two options, to work or not. Ali concluded that men are expected to work not women and that his full responsibility is to make ends meet regardless of whether or not his female family members work, and that the last generations' gender dynamics were based on family values of mutual understanding and mutual respect among men and women:

For me, I will never request my wife to work but if she wants to work then I let her do so. As a family, if my wife is successful, willing, and capable of working then this will strengthen me. I do not think of a family where I am the leader and I have subordinates. Ultimately she is my partner. I will feel strong when she is working. Yes, you are required to be strong at home but it is better when you have a shoulder to lean on. It is not necessary that if you are a man in the family then you have the full authority. How do our families live? They consult their women and take their opinions into consideration. Regardless of the financial situation, it is not necessary for the woman to work but it is for the man.

Moreover, Waleed highlighted that his two sisters are working to assist their father financially. He does not regard women's work as important if no financial distress is experienced. His two sisters' wages assist their retired father's hardship strained from soaring prices as they live in the United Arab Emirates. Waleed argued that his sisters' wages should be kept to themselves and freedom should be prioritized whether considering to contribute to family finances: "As I am not obliged to help in the chores, she is not obliged to provide money to the family. Whatever she chooses, it is her choice."

Ayyub, on the other hand, views women's work as important regardless of whether financial necessity dictates. Ayyub added that women's work enables women to assert themselves and boost their morale. However, he thinks that the workplaces' environment should protect women's dignity and chastity. Saeed agreed with Ayyub's idea stating that "Women should work only in positions that make their life comfortable, and enable them to spend more time on commitments related to children and children's upbringing."

Waseem maintained the opinion that not working and staying at home have conditioned the Syrian woman to draw a narrow perspective of life. The Syrian woman had possibly to stick to a toxic husband as he is the only resort to financial means. Furthermore, Sami asserted that when women do work and socialize with others, they feel a sense of accomplishment and happiness.

Women's work in Syria was not largely discussed or encouraged as social dynamic, social norms and economic circumstances suggest men provide and be the main breadwinner for the family. In Syria, the Syrian female employment rate in 2010 was 22 percent,¹⁸⁴ while the figure dropped to only 15 percent in Turkey in 2018.¹⁸⁵ According to the field observations, the question of women's work is still contested with the language barrier and lacking job-related skills. Alternatively, young male family members' employment diminishes the need for women's work. Syrians at young age are sent to work to help in financing family household expenses. As observed from the participants' extracts, Syrian men have negotiated the 'family man' role related to being the main breadwinner and provider to the family through exerting efforts to fully sustain family finances. Inability

¹⁸⁴Beatrix Buecher, James Rwampigi Aniyamuzaala, "WOMEN, WORK & WAR: Syrian Women and the Struggle to Survive Five Years of Conflict" 12, (CARE, March 2016).

¹⁸⁵"Needs Assessment of Syrian Women and Girls Under Temporary Protection Status in Turkey," UN Women | Europe and Central Asia, accessed December 20, 2021, <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/08/needs-assessment-of-syrian-women-and-girls-under-temporary-protection-status-in-turkey>.

to be well established financially minimizes the proper feeling of masculinity. According to the participants, women's work can boost women physiological well-being. However, Syrian men have voiced reservations about workplaces which should maintain a female friendly work environment.

5.3. Being a Reference in the Family

'The captain of the ship', 'the leader', 'the director', 'the man of the house', 'the owner of the house' and 'family man' are the phrases the participants utilized to explain men's position in the family. Being in command to direct family issues, being in control over household matters, and having powerful status in the family among others are the distinctive features Syrian men enjoyed in Syria. Due to displacement, Syrian men have become overwhelmed by difficult circumstances related to living in a different society and country. Labeled as the 'other' by the host community, unrecognized by the Turkish state, just possessing temporary status for a prolonged time, deprived of the familial, social, communal status enjoyed in Syria, struggled to maintain the main breadwinner position, and negotiated the necessity of women's work have impacted the Syrian men's status of being a person of authority over other family members. Syrian families have become segmented in which one family can have family members in two to four different countries. In Syria, the family social structure promotes family's kinship through being well connected to nuclear and extended family members. In Istanbul, Syrian men are disconnected from the nuclear family and to a larger extent away from the extended family. Separating from one's community and uprooting of his family have affected the Syrian man's manhood sentiments. Saeed elaborated on this issue:

In Istanbul, the man has lost "his word" authority in two dimensions: authority in its essence, the influence of his opinion on family issues becomes a sort of equal as any family members. He does not have a say or authoritative word among his brothers and even to his sisters. The big brother word (opinion) is no longer always considered. The second dimension is authority of being a reference in the family. The Syrian man used to have a word in the family regardless of his

education or financial status. His opinions “word” among his sisters, wife, children or brothers would be minded.

Not only did the Syrian men lose their means to express and assert themselves socially in Syria and Istanbul but they also lost the agency related to family dynamics. The Syrian men’s legal vulnerability was worsened by his social and financial incapability to sustain an expected role of being a man. Saeed further explained that the strong position Syrian men held among his community and family in Syria shifted to a weak status by sacrificing power and authority to survive Istanbul’s strenuous living standards. Saeed mentioned that he lacks agency as his wife, for example, always translates for him whenever they go to Turkish public institutions for paperwork issues or when dealing with neighbors as her Turkish speaking level is excellent. He also recalled that one of his eldest relatives was not confident to buy from a Turkish market dealing with the cashier as he is not able to speak Turkish properly. Inability to make decisions and to act independently has conditioned Syrian men to be dependent and vulnerable. Syrian men’s lost agency and deficient authority contributed to having less of the feeling of manhood.

5.4. Being Critical of Oneself and Adhering to the Islamic and Ethical Principles

Struggling to be a proper family man because of financial and social constraints, losing agency and authority in the family and community, and failing to achieve expectations of being a man resulted in undervaluing and harming Syrian men’s sense of masculinity. Born biologically as a man does not entitle the man to have privileged treatment or special authority over other people according to the research’s interlocutor Waseem. Keeping one’s word, realizing one’s potential to accomplish aims, setting priorities, and achieving goals is the summary of what manhood is according to Waleed. For Anas, the way Syrian men can assert masculinity is through finding a job and developing a better standard of living in Istanbul. He added that developing work skills or working extra hours will ultimately ascend the man to be in a better position in terms of receiving more money in the coming years. However, not all men are successful in climbing the ladder.

Consequently, the genuine evaluation of who is a man or not is driven by oneself assessment and judgment not by other people's according to Ali who states the following on accomplishing aims:

I am standing against myself to achieve what I have to accomplish. I do not have time to do many things. I have only one day off, not two days. On the off-day, I end up sometimes doing things that I should not do. I want to learn Farsi but at the same time I do not want to lose my fluency in Turkish so I practice Turkish, but at the same time I do not want to forget English so I keep reading some English texts, but at the same time, I have to read Arabic to feel myself as an Arab. I am doing all these things but I should have developed my freelance business. However, to develop my business, I need some spare time. The spare time is spent on other things. I do not blame myself but I think that I am the one who stands against achieving my plans.

Istanbul's hectic lifestyle leaves no place to spare time to undertake activities or develop skills. Aspiring to be a better version of himself is the way to embody the appropriate form of masculinity. Saeed asserted that novel circumstances of displacement have reshaped and changed existing conceptions and perspectives of Syrians who are in the ongoing mindset transformation stage. This process endures dealing with contradictions and crises related to conflicting religious beliefs, or physiological problems.

"Everything is available in Istanbul. If you want to go to mosques there are plenty, if you want to go for unethical behaviors and practices there are many." Muaz elaborating on practicing manhood in Istanbul, voiced that the path to be a true, refined man is to be closer to Allah, however, taking street drugs is the way to become a complete man among a gang of thugs. This explains that Istanbul's lifestyle has relieved Syrians from the social pressure to perform, manifest, and exhibit a dominant form of masculinity. The Islamic teachings and the moral compass are the factors essential to embody holistic masculinity according to Waleed:

Masculinity is my relationship with Allah. The better I am with Allah, the more masculine I am. When I became committed to Islamic principles, masculinity is defined as how much good and evil you have in your heart. For example, if you have 60% goodness and 40% evilness

then you are a man only for 60%. As such, if you have 90% then you will become a man because being 100% is a prophet trait. We cannot reach that level. So, masculinity is a comparison between good and evil, between white and black, right and left.

Waleed's perception of masculinity cannot be manifested without adhering to moral commitments, moral conventions, and religious convictions. Helping the disadvantaged and needy people, the simple acts of kindness are masculinity traits according to Anas. Jameel concluded that generosity is paired to one's self-worth and respect. People currently evaluate one's manhood through the lens of one's fortune, not through courageous and honest characters which are the most distinctive features of masculinity, Anas concluded.

As we have explored in the theoretical framework 'on being a Syrian in Istanbul', we can realize that masculinity understanding of Syrian men has multiple layers, nuances and features. Therefore, the term 'masculinity' may not be applicable to the Syrian men's case as the displacement complexity is concerned. Instead, 'masculinities' is better explain the intricate dimensions of Syrian men's social class, age, and family situation.¹⁸⁶ These factors lead to a plethora of positionalities and performances Syrian men adopt as they have been produced and reproduced as a mere personal experience in daily interactions.¹⁸⁷ Thus, 'masculinity' as a term cannot be treated as a homogenous group.¹⁸⁸

In conclusion, this religious understanding of manhood in Islam and its centrality to Syrian notions of what it means to be a man have been significantly contested by displacement in Istanbul. Syrian men have attempt to maintain their position as a family man. Nevertheless, they are no longer the breadwinner for their families, and cannot ensure the conditions of their female family members in the Turkish workplace in the

¹⁸⁶Katarzyna Wojnicka and Paula Pustułka, "Research on Men, Masculinities and Migration: Past, Present and Future," *NORMA* 14, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2019.1622058>.

¹⁸⁷Kimmel and Bridges, "Masculinity."

¹⁸⁸Wojnicka and Pustułka, "Research on Men, Masculinities and Migration." Ibid.

same way that they can in Syria. This is indicative of the question of agency, and can no longer approach their fathers, uncles, or other significant males in their lives. In the reverse, Syrian men no longer feel that they themselves are who their families can turn to in times of need, reflecting a significant shift in conceptualizations of what it means to be a Syrian man.



CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

In conclusion then, displacement has had a significant impact on the conceptualization of Syrian masculinity for a wide variety of reasons. As outlined in chapter 2 that it seems that Turkish public discourse regarding Syrian men has developed feelings of impermanence and emasculation by the threat of deportation due to the complex legal and bureaucratic systems that govern Turkish immigration and naturalization. Despite efforts by Syrian's to propagate their significant contributions to Turkey's history, Syrian men remain without a national identity. The title of refugee is also contested due to Syria's legal status as guests. Many are forced to lie about their country of origin and background despite the numerous cultural, religious, and historical ties between the two peoples. This has resulted in Syrian men hiding or camouflaging their masculine contributions to Turkey's past (warfighting and central positions in Ottoman history), while erstwhile believing these ties to be true. This has resulted in complicated feelings of belonging rooted in the disparity between Syria's historical contributions to Turkey's past and a feeling of comradery between the two peoples, and Turkey's refusal to treat them as such.

Moreover, as discussed in chapter 3, Syrian men's identity is challenged in a variety of ways. Firstly, displacement has resulted the dispersion of formerly nuclear families, distancing Syrian men from their traditional family roles, disturbing their idea of what a man contributes to their family. These dynamics have been further exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic and the inherent limitations of the temporary protection regime in Turkey. Syrian men feel trapped between the rock of the impossibility of returning to Syria and the hard place of the failure of the temporary protection regime to allow them pathways to permeant refuge in Turkey. This has caused Syrian men to feel emasculated by distance from family, and through the lack of certainty and legal status within Turkey's temporary protection regime.

Secondly, as analyzed in chapter 4, Syrian men have struggled to achieve their conventional role in the family and in wider society. After being displaced to Istanbul, the Syrian man's conventional life trajectory has been characterized by livelihood struggles, struggling to make ends meet. This has significantly affected his familial responsibilities and has forced him to renegotiate his traditional role as the sole breadwinner and key figure in the family. The Syrian man's traditional desire to build a family is impeded by unrealistic demands from Syrian families, by language, and social and cultural barriers to marriage with Turkish families. Syrian men have explored many different ways to find a significant other, marrying foreign women or marrying Syrian women in Syria through a family reunion visa at the Turkish consulate in Lebanon. In addition, as their children learn Turkish easier than their parents, the traditional role of the father in Syria has been contested by the simple fact their children's ability to communicate with Turkish people is better than their own. Therefore, it is clear that through enduring displacement in Istanbul has resulted in the contestation and renegotiation of the Syrian man's identity, within his own family and society more broadly.

There is also a significant religious element central to this shift in identity and gender roles as explored in Chapter 5. The religious understanding of traditional gender roles and their centrality to Syrian notions of what it means to be a man have been considerably contested by displacement in Istanbul. Displacement, and the disruptions in the traditional familial and social position of women have led to an expansion of females roles and responsibilities, including in education and employment. While Syrian men have attempted to sustain their position as a family man, they no longer serve as the sole breadwinner for their families. This has presented a challenge to what many Syrian men perceive as the masculine responsibilities in society and within the family. This disruption of Syrian traditional social structures and hierarchies has also removed the ways in which men present their masculinity in the social space. Syrian men can no longer resort to their fathers, uncles for support, community and security. Reversely however, they feel that they themselves are not who their families and communities can

turn to in times of need, reflecting a significant shift in conceptualizations of what it means to be a Syrian man.

Therefore, having summarized the answers for the sub-questions, I have thereby attempted to answer the core research question. Syrian men's lived experiences as displaced persons in Turkey, clearly has a significant impact on their perception of their own masculinity. A number of factors significantly contribute to this changed perception. Firstly, Turkey's public discourse has developed feelings of impermanence and historical injustice, resulting in men camouflaging elements of their identity to ease integration. Secondly, the dispersion of nuclear families has significantly disrupted the tradition roles young men assume. No longer can they care for their families in the same way, resulting in feelings of inadequacy related to their own understandings of what it means to be a 'man'. Integration has also meant that their children are becoming 'Turkified', speaking Turkish often better than their parents leading them to take more responsibility when representing their families in public. Disruption to conventional social and familial roles, especially increasing freedom, roles and responsibilities of women has challenged Syrian masculinity. Men also lack the traditional systems of male familial support, instead resorting to new groups of close friends often around non-governmental organizations and social gatherings. All of these factors have contributed to a significant change in what Syrian men feel it means to be a Syrian man.

Moreover, the term 'masculinity' is perhaps not suitable to the Syrian men's case as the displacement complexity is concerned. Instead, 'masculinities' is better explain the intricate dimensions of Syrian men's social, cultural, religious, and political conditions. It is noteworthy to mention that COVID 19 implications, being the interlocutors' friend, and limiting myself to only interviewing Syrian men are among the limitations of this study.

Further research however should be conducted into the impact that this shift will have on themselves and future generations and their opportunities to build futures for themselves and their families.

APPENDIX

Date of Interview	Nickname	Place of Origin	Age	Marital status	Interviews' Avenues
22.12.2020	Saeed	From the country side of Damascus	27	Married with Moroccan	The interlocutor's apartment
24.12.2020	Ayyub	From the country side of Aleppo	37	Single	The interlocutor's apartment
02.01.2021	Waleed	From the country side of Damascus	39	Single	The interlocutor's apartment
03.01.2021	Husayn	Homs	30	Single	The interlocutor's apartment
07.01.2021	Waseem	Aleppo	27	Single	MEDIT – Ibn Haldun Campus
18.01.2021	Ali	Damascus	31	Single	The interlocutor's apartment
19.01.2021	Sami	Homs	30	Married with Finnish	The interlocutor's apartment
19.01.2021	Hasan	Aleppo	38	Married with Syrian	The interlocutor's workplace
21.01.2021	Omar	Aleppo	33	Single	The interlocutor's workplace
21.01.2021	Louay	Aleppo	26	Married with Syrian	The interlocutor's workplace
21.01.2021	Jameel	Aleppo	33	Married with Syrian	The interlocutor's apartment
22.01.2021	Ahmad	From the country side of Damascus	31	Married with Turkish	MEDIT – Ibn Haldun Campus

24.01.2021	Ali	Latakia	25	Single	The interlocutor's friend's apartment
25.01.2021	Anas	Aleppo	30	Single	MEDIT – Ibn Haldun Campus
20.03.2021	Ziyad	Aleppo	21	Single	Istanbul Medipol University Campus
12.04.2021	Muaz	Damascus	26	Single	Café



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