Masculinity Construction Across Borders: Literature Review

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Abstract

This scoping literature review provides an analytical overview of existing research on diverse practices and patterns of masculine performances of labour migrants that are sustained, challenged and shifted in transnational contexts. These practices are often constructed in a way that allows migrant men to simultaneously maintain their masculine image in countries of origin and destination. Outlining the main academic arguments concerning the nexus between migration and masculinity demonstrates the diversity of masculine practices of migrant men performed in different contexts. Migrant men constantly navigate and negotiate their masculinity in relation to gender norms of sending and host societies, as well existing political and migration regimes that often structure employment opportunities, as well as racial and class differentiations between local and migrant communities. The multiplicity of masculine practices brought from home or appropriated in a host society, both in the personal and professional milieus, reveal the complexity of migrant men's masculine identity.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

Changes occurring in gender roles and relations in the context of international labour migration have been on social researchers' radar for a long time. However, until recently, most studies have largely focused on certain actors, namely women and children, either seeing them as the most vulnerable categories of migrants or focusing on their experiences of being left behind (Charsley & Wray, 2015, p. 1; Datta et al., 2007; 2008, p. 2; Wojnicka & Pustułka, 2019, p. 91). Until approximately the early 2000s scholars' attention towards migrant men used to be gender-neutral or gender-blind, thus lacking a nuanced approach to migrant men's gender identities and experiences (Hearn & Howson, 2009, p. 54; Huijsmans, 2014, p. 335; Nawyn, 2019, p. 226; Sinatti, 2014, p. 215; Souralová & Fialová, 2017, pp. 159-160; Urdea, 2020, p. 272; Wojnicka, 2020, pp. 283-285; Wojnicka & Nowicka, 2022, p. 234; Wojnicka & Pustułka, 2019, p. 91).. As Hibbins and Peace (2009) assert, "[w]hile traditional immigration research has predominantly focused on men, it has done so by examining men as nongendered humans and it too has ignored the gendered dimensions of men's experiences" (p. 5).

Haggis and Schech (2009) report interesting quantitative, yet revealing data which confirm the inclination toward studying women in migration scholarship. As they state, in May 2008 a google searching tool showed "33 hits for 'men and migration' and 356,000 hits for 'women and migration'" (p. 60). Moreover, as Donaldson and Howson (2009) suggested, although men are often portrayed in literature as those in a more advantageous position in comparison to women in terms of gains from migration, and also because women are considered to be more vulnerable, it is men who most likely encounter discrimination and violence in host countries, and "it is also men who are more likely to need welfare support" (p. 210).

Building upon these arguments, this paper provides an analytical overview of existing research on diverse practices and patterns of masculine performances of migrant men that are sustained, challenged and shifted in transnational contexts. These practices are often constructed in a way that allows men to simultaneously maintain their masculine image in countries of origin and destination. Outlining the main academic arguments concerning the nexus between migration and masculinity allows us to demonstrate the diversity of masculine practices of migrant men performed in different socio-economic and cultural contexts.

Migrant men constantly navigate and negotiate their masculinity in relation to gender norms of sending and host societies, existing political and migration regimes that often structure employment opportunities, as well as racial and class differentiations between local and migrant communities. The multiplicity of masculine practices brought from home or appropriated in a host society, both in the personal and professional milieus, demonstrate the complexity of migrant men's masculine identity.

Most existing studies focus on one aspect of migrant men's lives, whether private or professional, and explore shifting masculine performances that occur on one side of migrants' transnational lives. This paper, however, proposes a transnational approach that looks equally at migrant lifeworlds in both places of origin and destination, and seeks to design a transnational ethnography of migrant masculinity. Accordingly, this paper provides an overview of existing research in a way that demonstrates how different facets of transnational masculine identity and practices of migrant men are interweaved and supplement each other. Therefore, the paper is built in the form of a bricolage, in order to illuminate and encompass challenges and practices of adaptation that migrants' masculine selfhood undergoes in a transnational context.

2. Negotiating Masculinity at Home

Gender is more than just one facet of migration. As Lutz (2010) writes, gender is "a central organising principle in migration flows and in the organisation of migrants' lives" (p. 1651). However, as gender shapes migration in particular ways, migration also creates an environment that triggers migrant men's reassessment and questioning of customary norms and roles, by comparing them with those of a receiving society (Crossley & Pease, 2009, p. 125). When approaching migration from the gender perspective, one can see how migration can be weaved into the process of gender identity construction even before the physical movement takes place. The idea of "being a man" in the first place affects the process of decision-making: whether to migrate or stay in the home country and utilise available, although often limited means, to sustain one's family.

Existing scholarship on gender and labour migration provides nuanced insights into social construction of masculinity based on men's decisions to join migration flows or stay at home. Some men justify their unwillingness to move abroad by emphasizing the importance of their presence in the family and fatherly involvement in child raising. These men, whom Broughton (2008) calls

traditionalists, prefer to remain with their families and local communities because they prioritise their familial responsibilities and necessity of physical presence and paternal care of their children. In this case a small but secure income, stable, although humble livelihood and proximity to one's family and community are seen as features of hegemonic masculinity (pp. 574-577).

Notably, men's understanding of masculinity in the context of mass labour migration is formed not only by migrants' individual perceptions of migration, but also by the local social environment: the two are mutually reinforcing. In this respect, the masculinity of men who remain with their family might be "called into question" (Samers, 2010, p. 99). The dominant social understanding of how to effectively support a family, which prevails in a given locality, is intertwined with the logic that migrants have more opportunities to earn than those who stay behind. This is why in certain regions, such as Latin America and Central Asia, women often prefer to marry migrants, because migrants' social status is considered higher (Levitt, 2001; Massey et al., 1987 cited in Samers, 2010, p. 99; Rahmonova-Schwarz, 2012, pp. 115-116; Roche, 2014, p. 155). Localities with a long history of mass migration may develop a culture of migration. In such contexts, apart from economic gains, migration is perceived as an important social act that marks achievement of manhood and transition to adulthood (Behzadi, 2019; Horvath, 2008; Kandel & Massey, 2002; Reeves, 2013, p. 330).

There are numerous documented cases in different contexts where migration is seen as a rite of passage for young men, in that it confirms their male status, ability to provide and worthiness for family and community (Charsley & Wray, 2015, pp. 3-5; Massey et al., 1994, p. 1500; Monsutti, 2007, p. 169; Osella & Osella, 2000; 2006, p. 118; Reeves, 2013, p. 330). The experience of labour migration is also linked to ideas of adventure and the ability to "make it" somewhere else. As argued by Broughton (2008), adventurers appear in sharp contrast to men who stay behind and those who move for the sake of providing for families. Adventurers are men who are guided by goals of a more individualistic and self-centred nature. In the context of Latin America, for example, the path of migration is viewed by them as a route out of the place of a conventional social system to "independence, a sense of individual achievement and material and social advancement, and a new and exciting life away from the limitations of a neglected and declining rural Mexico" (p. 585).

In a similar vein, Aboim and Vasconcelos (2021, p. 326) highlight that the masculine capital of migrant men can undergo gradual changes. The notion of masculine capital, developed by Anderson (2009), refers to the "'masculine level of a man', as achieved through attitudes and behaviors" (p. 42). This concept corresponds to Ghannam's (2013) idea of masculine trajectory, that is "the process of becoming a man" (p. 6). The process continues throughout the whole life of a man as "a continuous quest for a sense of (illusive) coherence that has to be cultivated and sustained in different spatial and temporal contexts to garner the social recognition central to the verification of one's standing as a real man" (p. 7). Masculine trajectories, as well as acquisition and accumulation of masculine capital are dynamic processes of masculine construction which are filled with successes and failures, as well as ambiguity and fears. Trajectories are formed in accordance with more predictive, socially accepted masculine models and collective expectations but also as a result of unexpected events and individual agency (p. 7).

Both masculine capital and trajectories are affectively shaped by migration, which can have two opposite effects on masculinity. It can strengthen it, as described above, or, on the contrary, weaken it (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2021, p. 326). For example, as Samers (2010) writes, migrant men might experience fear of losing their patriarchal power, in a situation where they face difficulty in maintaining it from abroad. Consequently, this fear might lead to migrant men's return with the aim of retaining and even amplifying their masculinity by presenting themselves as the men who have endured migration and thus proved their status as providers (Samers, 2010, p. 100). Indeed, migrant men's dominance in family hierarchy and their power over decision-making processes might diminish as a result of their absence; for instance, full reliance on and delegation of some of their male responsibilities to other family members, and wives in particular (Sinatti, 2014, p. 222).

Other studies show that men's migration experience can be a contributing factor to shaping their more traditional and religious perspectives on gender norms in sending communities. For instance, Kamal (2024) claims that Bangladeshi migrants build their hegemonic masculinity by adopting more conservative views in regulating their wives' gender and religious practices. Migrant men take pride in their spouses' modest behaviour and religious outfit as well as religious schooling of their children. This observation somewhat echoes findings of scholars of Central Asia. Having experienced gender norms in more liberal gender systems, and most often in Russia, Central Asian migrant men tend to become resistant to introduce liberal novelties to the gender system of their sending communities (Harris, 2004; Reeves, 2013; Samadov, 2025). Notably, migrant men are not the only ones who change their gender performances, as migration necessitates both male and female members of transnational families to negotiate and adapt their gender practices (Sinatti, 2014, p. 215).

Using the concepts of migrant absence and migrant experience effects, Torosyan, Gerber and Goñalons-Pons (2016) explore the transformations that occur in familial gender practices when one's spouse (a wife or a husband) becomes a labour migrant. The migrant absence effect refers to left-behind members of migrant families and their assuming additional duties that are gender-atypical in a given context. As a result, certain changes inevitably occur in gender practices of family members. The migrant experience effect, in turn, is linked to the possibility of changes in migrant's gender practices and perceptions on the basis of new experiences and knowledge that they received in a country of destination and brought back home (Torosyan et al., 2016). During the absence of their migrant husbands, wives might experience a greater freedom of mobility and their power in household decision-making increases (Mobarak et al., 2018, p. 26), although it also results in additional work that left-behind females need to take upon themselves (Torosyan et al., 2016, p. 10). However, in the case of male migration, such a change in gender practices most often has only a temporal effect. The freedom and power women might enjoy during their migrant husbands' absence tends to be reduced to its pre-migratory level upon the return of their husbands (Mobarak et al., 2018, p. 26), and gender inequality might even increase (Torosyan et al., 2016, p. 11).

As studies conducted in various contexts reveal, labour migration provides opportunities to fulfil central roles associated with masculine identity: the role of a family provider and familial roles (Bell & Pustułka, 2017, p. 131; Broughton, 2008; Crossley & Pease, 2009, p. 122; Donaldson & Howson, 2009, p. 212; Hakimi, 2020; Maycock, 2017, p. 819; Pasura & Christou, 2018, p. 530; Pease, 2009, p. 82; Sinatti, 2014, p. 220; Vasquez del Aguila, 2014, pp. 114-117). The ability to provide for their families allows men to maintain their hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal familial order more broadly, and becomes the source not only of men's pride, but also their wives' (Bell & Pustułka, 2017, p. 131). In addition to the breadwinning role, as Donaldson and Howson (2009, pp. 211-212) highlight, we need to account for the importance of paid work for constructing one's sense of masculinity and self-worth (see also Çarpar & Yaylaci, 2021). Crossley & Pease (2009) further assert that: "[P]aid work signifies one's abilities to adapt, to gain respect and honour by providing for one's family. This 'inserts' men into social structures and assists them to develop a sense of belonging and often, to re-orient their own identities as men" (p. 124).

Being engaged in paid work is thus an important constituent of masculinity, because it is connected to the idea of being the main breadwinner for a family. Unavailability of paid work is often what drives migrant men to move to another country, which is a journey that migrant men undertake in order to guarantee the wellbeing of their families despite various hardships and the state of precarity (Donaldson & Howson, 2009, pp. 211-216; Cerchiaro, 2023, pp. 99-100). Research on Afghan migrant men shows that fulfilment of financial responsibilities regarding pre-marriage payments, which requires men to work abroad for years, signifies a man's sense of responsibility and his ability to provide for his future family. Inability to meet these requirements might result in men gaining the reputation of "namard" (unmanly) (Hakimi, 2020, p. 273). In addition, breadwinning becomes an indicator of men's love and care for their families and testifies self-sacrifice, given that migrant men choose the wellbeing of their families over individual desires and ambitions (Hakimi, 2020).

Souralová and Fialová (2017) argue that while transnational motherhood is often the central focus in research on migrant women, migrant men's masculinity is rarely associated with fatherhood. As they state, "[t]he person of a migrant man, homo economicus, stays imprisoned in his role as a provider – he is described as a man (even as macho), a breadwinner, but rarely as a father" (p. 164). Only recently has research on migrant men taken a shift from the invisibility of fatherhood in migrant men's identity, through linking fatherhood with men's breadwinning roles and finally, to feelings of transnational fatherhood and emerging caring masculinity among migrant men (Elliott, 2016; Pustułka et al., 2015; Souralová & Fialová, 2017). However, the image of a migrant father is still closely linked with his providing roles, leaving the aspects of fatherhood and "father's experiences, feelings, and concerns" largely unaddressed (Souralová & Fialová, 2017, p. 170).

3. Masculinity of Migrant Men Abroad

Moving to the other side of labour migrants' transnational lives, migration and gender scholarship has documented numerous accounts of the diverse impacts of living in a foreign country on migrant men's gender identity and practices. Migration experience and exposure to cultural and gender norms which are distinct from migrants' home countries can cause various reactions among men. These reactions range from resistance to adaptation to new gender models, and internalization of new gender practices (Crossley & Pease, 2009, p. 125; Pasura & Christou, 2018, pp. 534-536).

Such transformations occur not only as a consequence of encounters with new social systems and different models of gender relations, but also as a result of a downward social mobility, discrimination, tough labour and living conditions and overall

precarity (Datta et al., 2008; Pasura & Christou, 2018). As a general rule, the transformations are painful processes for migrant men. As Donaldson and Howson write, "while men may move themselves with relative ease across the globe, shifting their own masculinities proves rather more difficult" (2009, p. 216). Apart from maintaining migrants being "here" and "there" at the same time, transnational life requires significant efforts for negotiating power relations in host and home societies, in the attempt to retain the status of "a man" in both contexts.

Migrant men arrive in the host country with an already established masculine capital, which, as Vasquez del Aguila defines (2014), incorporates cultural and social knowledge and competences needed to behave and be recognised as men. His concepts correspond to masculine capital and masculine trajectories elaborated by Anderson (2009) and Ghannam (2013) respectively. Focusing on experiences of Peruvian migrant men, Vasquez del Aguila (2014) asserts that starting from childhood and through their whole life men "acquire, accumulate and continuously perform" (p. 9) masculine capital. Masculine capital involves knowledge and implementation of different modes of masculine behaviour that construct masculinity through appropriation of moral values associated with masculinity, performances of sexuality and violence, as well as rejection of femininity and homosexuality as a part of masculine identity (Vasquez del Aguila, 2014). Masculine capital is culture-specific, as in some contexts masculinity acquires certain characteristics associated with femininity, like care, as demonstrated by Chua and Fujino (1999) in the case of US-born Asian men.

Bringing with them a clear understanding of manhood and all the sensitivities of gender relations of their respective societies, migrants often build relations "on the basis of a reservoir of cultural and social patterns 'transported' from home" (Shahidian, 1999, p. 191). However, having reached the final destination, migrant men face models of gender ideals and gender relations which are different from their own. Thus, in addition to the need of abiding by gender norms of the sending country, migrant men's masculinity is contrasted with local gender norms and negotiated under the conditions of the system of legal, social and economic inequalities, migration regimes and discourses of a host country.

Despite the difficulty of adapting masculine practices to the gender order of the host society, gender performances of migrant men inevitably undergo changes. As Pease (2009) writes, "if men's subjectivities are socially constructed, they are open to change" (p. 79). In other words, migrants can renegotiate and adjust their masculine subjectivities in accordance with the dominant norms of the society in which they find themselves. Research also shows that experiences related to everyday life in the host society change migrant men and their masculine practices to varying degrees. Some migrant men include elements of the receiving society's gender norms in their practices. Yet, encounters with a different gender order can also have the opposite effect. As a resistance strategy, migrant men might become even stricter in observing their gender norms requiring the same from their family and society members (Reeves, 2013; Samadov, 2025).

Examining domestic relations of immigrant families from South America, Africa and Asia in Australia, Pease (2009) points to significant shifts in migrant spouses' household responsibilities. Men migrating from patriarchal societies to more egalitarian ones often become more involved in household work and share similar responsibilities with their female partners. However, he also shows that in the process of adapting what men previously saw as women's responsibilities, they also express reluctance to do so, and only in rare cases do men view the change in a positive sense. This reluctance is less visible among men whose fathers used to share some household duties at home, but often the scope of housework that they find themselves involved in, turns out to be broader than they had expected (Crossley & Pease, 2009, p. 125). These migrant men are able to revise their vision on gender roles in new circumstances by adopting a strategy of accommodation, through which men "consciously negotiate and embrace transformative masculine identities" (Pasura & Christou, 2018, p. 534; see also Fathi, 2022).

Similar accommodation of local norms occurs in the case of intergenerational relations, where the parent-child hegemony unravels in a more egalitarian environment in the host country, especially between the first and second-generation migrants. In this situation, in spite of the older generation's attempts to impose traditional norms, parents are often ready to accept a certain loss of parental authority and close their eyes on, for example, premarital romantic or sexual relations – which would not be the case in the country of origin (Mungai & Pease, 2009, p. 108; Shahidian, 1999, pp. 211-213). It should be noted that women tend to be more receptive to new gender norms of a receiving society than their husbands, especially when it comes to marrying off their children (Shahidian, 1999, p. 213).

Scholarship on migration and masculinity also shows that one of the pivotal factors which leads to more egalitarian relations in immigrants' families is related to available economic opportunities in the country of destination. Migrant women appear to have better chances to improve their economic positions in comparison with the ones they had, or could have, in the country of origin, and also in relation to potential economic possibilities of men (Pease, 2009). The improved economic situation impacts on gender relations within migrant families, making them more equal, given that the status of migrant men as a dominant side in the relationship often decreases, whereas women's positions are strengthened. Changes in men's behaviour occur not only because of men's acceptance of different circumstances and new gender norms, but also due to reconstruction of the migrant woman's position within the relationship and her ability to articulate it (Pease, 2009).

Financial independence, and at times even better income than men's, gives women an opportunity to speak about changes, become more involved in decision-making and make men reconsider their attitudes. In migrant families where both partners are employed, men tend to become more involved in household work and start sharing household duties, especially in the case of full-time employment of women (Crossley & Pease, 2009; Mungai & Pease, 2009, pp. 107-109; Pease, 2009; Smith, 2006). In addition to a diminished sense of the men's selfhood, these transformations are rarely approved by migrant communities, which lead to a decrease in a man's masculine status among his compatriots (Donaldson & Howson, 2009, p. 214).

Having somewhat lost their hegemonic position within family hierarchy, migrant men might opt for other strategies to cope with their decreased sense of masculinity. One of such strategies can be what Pasura and Christou (2018) describe as withdrawal. Withdrawal, or return to their home country, might occur in the case of migrant men's failure to secure the status as the sole breadwinner. (pp. 533-534). Loss of hegemony and power shifts in migrant families may trigger migrant men's resistant attitude toward any change in gender roles. Subsequently, migrant men can resort to hypermasculinity to retain their position, respect and power. Hypermasculinity can manifest itself in domestic violence, aggression and consumption of alcohol as signifiers of masculine dominance (Pasura & Christou, 2018, pp. 536-537).

Migrant men's resistance to gender norms of a host country can also involve children. As Shahidian (1999) observed among Iranian immigrants in Canada, parents usually put pressure on their offspring to make them abide by traditional norms of the homeland, especially when it comes to intimate relations and sexuality (p. 213). Migrant families might even decide to return to their home country for the sake of ensuring the "proper" traditional upbringing of their children or to find suitable marriage partners (Shahidian, 1999, p. 214). As in the case of Shahidian's study of Iranian immigrants, Tajik migrant men are also afraid that their children might internalise norms of intimate and sexual relations practiced in Russia. This fear results in reluctance on the part of many migrants to bring their children and families to Russia (Samadov, 2025, pp. 139-142).

However, migrant men's strategies of retaining masculinity are not limited to either acceptance or resistance to the new gender order of the receiving society. Pasura and Christou (2018) show that migrants can employ what they call the "endorsement and subversion strategy" (pp. 537-539). This strategy implies a complex combination of simultaneous endorsement and resistance to gender changes. Accordingly, the endorsement of a change of traditional gender relations happens within the domestic space, while in social and religious spaces migrant males tend to subvert the change and demonstrate traditional masculinity. This approach and development of hybrid masculine practices is grounded in migrant men's awareness of diminished or lost hegemony in the context of the new social, economic and political environment (Pasura & Christou, 2018, pp. 537-539).
Such hybridity of masculinity manifested in situational switching between different masculine practices are explored in various studies which propose various theoretical lenses to explain this phenomenon. Migration creates conditions where migrant men obtain and have to reconcile multiple masculinities (Bell & Pustułka, 2017; Vasquez del Aguila, 2014, p. 225). As Shahidian (1999) notes, migration does not necessarily need to be burdensome in terms of a migrant man's navigation of masculine practices between the norms of sending and receiving societies. Rather, it can result in "having double (or multiple) identities and being able to constructively manoeuvre among them" (p. 192). Referring to heterogeneity of gender practices among transnational migrants, Kivisto (2001) describes it as a bricolage, claiming that:

> [t]ransnational migrants forge their sense of identity and their community, not out of a loss or mere replication, but as something that is at once new and familiar - a bricolage constructed of cultural elements both from the homeland and the receiving nation (p. 568, italic in original).

Such a bricolage might be a result of marital dependency, when a husband who is a transnational labour migrant has to accept his subordinate position in familial hierarchy because of legal and economic precarity, limited social capital and the fear of returning back home should his marriage fail (Charsley, 2005; Charsley & Ersanilli, 2019; Charsley & Liversage, 2015; Liversage, 2012).

Appropriating hybrid masculinity, migrant men strive for at least a minimal manifestation of hegemonic masculinity and thereby preserve a sense of self-esteem and respectability (Pasura & Christou, 2018; Sabur, 2024). Likewise, Choi and Peng (2016, p. 152) sustain that migrant men tend to come to what the authors call a masculine compromise, which implies renegotiation of gender power between spouses (see also Choi, 2019). Thus, men divide their authority on decision-making, appropriating the right to decide on "big" issues, and delegating "small" decisions, often related to management of the household, to their wives. Choi and Peng, however, note that men's compromises on "big" decisions can be driven by economic necessity, for example the "big" decision of allowing their wives to work. Such an approach allows men to "preserve the gender boundary and their symbolic dominance within the family by making concessions on marital power and domestic division of labour, and by redefining filial piety and fatherhood" (Choi & Peng, 2016, p. 152; see also Choi, 2019).

Similar fluidity of masculine practices was documented by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), who argue that men can perform different masculinities: internalise hegemonic masculinity when needed, but also "the same men can distance themselves strategically from hegemonic masculinity at other moments" (p. 841). Referring to such fluidity of migrants' masculinity, Batnitzky, McDowell and Dyer (2009) propose the concept of flexible and strategic masculinity, as the main reference point for conceptualizing migrant men's interchanging non/hegemonic practices. By doing this, they go beyond the intersectional approach when shifts of masculine performances occur due to legal, economic and racial constraints, and show how migrant men deliberately accept non-hegemonic masculine practices as a result of their personal choice (see also Sabur, 2024). This conceptual lens was applied in the transnational context to explain the shifts of masculine practices of migrant men between the somewhat contradicting Russian and Tajik models of gender relations and highlight migrant men's strategic approach and agency both in familial and employment spheres (Samadov, 2025).

4. Migrant Men's Masculinity Vis-à-Vis Local Gender Models Abroad

Apart from changes of gender practices and hierarchies that migrant men experience in the familial relations with their wives in the country of destination, migrant men's masculinity is also renegotiated when confronted with dominant gender norms of local femininity and local masculinity. In this regard, existing research, that mostly focused on male migrants in Western societies, illustrates that migrants from more traditional societies find local women to be more independent, individualistic, modern and thus dominant in familial hierarchy, while women from their country are seen as more conservative, family-oriented and subordinate (Crossley & Pease, 2009, pp. 125-126; Shahidian, 1999, pp. 204-205).

However, it is not only cultural differences that migrant men see as the reason why women in Western countries hold such a dominant position. Crossley and Pease (2009) show, that in the context of a more egalitarian gender regime in comparison to their home countries, migrant men might also blame the governments for prioritizing women's rights over men's. Migrant men tend to take for granted their dominance in patriarchal relationships in their home countries, and therefore often believe that receiving governments not only support but also deliberately favour women. It is remarkable that such a perception often makes men believe that when it comes to intimate relationships, local women have a dominant status in familial relations. Stereotypes about local women and state gender politics make migrant men think that "the macho in the family is the female" (Crossley & Pease, 2009, p. 125), with the government's priority given to "women at the top followed by children and then animals and men last" (Pease, 2009, p. 90). The new gender reality coupled with men's inability to adopt to the model of gender relations may cause a resistant attitude toward local gender norms and encourage men to develop feelings of being "marginalized by 'the system'" (Crossley & Pease, 2009, p. 125). Because migrant men assume that their relations with local women cannot be successful, they are inclined to opt for relations with women of the same origin, who favour more traditional conjugal roles and responsibilities (Crossley & Pease, 2009, pp. 125-126).

Indeed, mixed marriages are more vulnerable and unstable, since both partners need to constantly confront pressures of different, sometimes contradicting cultural and gender norms, in addition to pressures coming from their families and friends (Cerchiaro, 2021; 2023; Parisi, 2016). Applying the concept of dissonant masculinity in the case of Moroccan migrant men in Italy, Cerchiaro (2021) demonstrates how challenging the negotiation of a migrant man's masculinity can be during his and his Italian wife's visits to Morocco. During the trips men need to navigate between traditional gender norms of their family and co-nationals and simultaneously enact masculine practices that correspond to expectations of their wives who have more egalitarian perspectives on familial gender norms.

Such negotiations among mixed couples can occur not only in the transnational, as in Cerchiaro's (2021; 2023) research, but also in the translocal context in the host country, where migrant men change their gender performances depending on whether they spend time with their wives or relatives and friends. In such cases, the dissonance, just as Cerchiaro reports, is often being amplified by wives' resistance or reluctance to accept, at least temporarily, certain aspects of their migrant husbands' hegemonic masculinity. However, wives frequently understand the reasons behind their husband's reluctance to demonstrate acceptance of the host country's gender norms in front of their compatriots (Samadov, 2025). Contrary to Cerchiaro's (2021) findings, Samadov's (2025) research on Tajik migrant men demonstrates that migrants' wives situationally adjust their feminine practices in accordance with their husband's gender perspectives, especially during visits of their husbands' relatives. These temporary adjustments facilitate the enactment of flexible and strategic masculine practices by their husbands and simultaneously manifest the flexible and strategic femininity of the women who also cross gender boundaries (Samadov, 2025).

The process of making sense of each other is not a one-way process. If migrant men develop certain visions of local women in the destination country, the same processes occur among the local population. Crossley and Pease (2009) note that "[i]n this process, stereotypes play a huge role" (p. 126). Certainly, migrant men from various countries are received differently by local people. Giving the example of Latin American men in Australia, Crossley and Pease (2009) explore migrant men's views on the differences between how local women perceive relations with migrants and local men. Latino migrant men, for example, claim to have an image of being more romantic and passionate than local men, which significantly contributes to migrant men's masculine self-perception. Nevertheless, when it comes to more serious relations and marriage, local women give preference to local men. This selective approach has a negative effect on migrant men's masculinity. Migrant men think that they are not seen as partners worthy of marrying and are resentful of women's selective, instrumental approach to marriage, where local women prioritise the economic side and thus pragmatically opt for local men, rather than feelings and love (Crossley & Pease, 2009, p. 126-128).

Local standards of masculinity – local men's sexuality, self-expression, intimate relations and familial hierarchy – also become a reference point for migrant men's gender identity negotiation. Thus, migrant men from societies with strong patriarchal norms, as showcased by African, Middle Eastern and Asian migrants in Portugal and Australia, tend to emphasise their hegemonic masculinity against local gender norms. Due to more egalitarian familial roles in Portuguese and Australian societies, migrant men view local men as emasculated, positioned "under the thumb of women" (Pease, 2009, p. 90, italics in original; see also Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2021, p. 337) and unable to provide for their families (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2021, p. 337). Likewise, the sexuality of local men becomes a frequent target of migrant men's ironic jokes, given that they attribute feminine features to local masculinity and see local men as "weak, soft and sissy" or sexually unfit and less romantic (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2021, p. 337).

In addition to differences in familial hierarchies, migrant men build a masculine image of local men by referring to various practices of dominant masculinity. Accordingly, Indonesian migrant men in Australia tend to consider local men as too aggressive, self-centred and focused on their body rather than their behaviour. By doing that, migrants underline masculine features dominant in their own culture, such as calmness, self-control, communal and homosocial closeness, which local men lack (Nilan et al., 2009). Crosley and Pease (2009) point out that Latin American migrant men apply the notion of "machismo" while evaluating Australian masculinity. Although migrant men agree that local men can demonstrate the same level of machismo, they also admit that their machismo is perceived differently by the receiving society. Therefore, migrants complain that "while Latin American men are perceived as incorrigible, chauvinistic machos", Australian practices of machismo "are not seen as such and are tolerated and even encouraged" (p. 130).

5. Migrant Masculinity in the Context of Inequality

Arriving in a new country, migrant men not only need to adjust to the new conditions of their personal life and relations with their family left behind, but they also need to deal with discrimination, unjust working relations and prejudiced attitudes from locals and local governments on the grounds of migrants' religious and cultural affiliations. Such an attitude is often demonstrated in public anti-migrant rhetoric, in particular toward Muslim migrants who are perceived as dangerous and culturally different and thus constitute "a threat to national well-being and identity" (Gallo & Scrinzi, 2016, p. 5). These perceptions create and justify politics of othering and discriminatory migration and border regimes (Gallo & Scrinzi, 2016, p. 4; Kirtsoglou & Tsimouris, 2018; Kukreja, 2019, 2021; 2023a; 2023b; Scheibelhofer, 2017). Anti-migrant discourses influence general perceptions among the local population, shaping negative opinions about arriving migrants, especially men. The negative views of migrants, along with tough living and working conditions, impact on migrant men's relations with locals. Moreover, they influence the feelings of migrants' masculine selfhood, forcing migrant men to search and refer to other sources of manhood in attempts to retain it (Cerchiaro, 2023; Kukreja, 2021).

Anti-migrant discourses in host countries contribute to the construction of social and racialised hierarchies and visions on migrants, dividing them into "good and bad" migrants. "Good" migrants are those who are docile and easily integrate into national cultural and legal frames, while "bad" migrants are those who are uneducated, effeminate or dangerous, not only in terms of criminality, illegality and sexual violence, but also in relation to migrants' denial to integrate (Gallo & Scrinzi 2016, pp. 85-119). The division between "us" and "others", and "desirable" and "undesirable" migrants supported by state politics, security concerns and racialised perceptions, as argued by Gallo and Scrinzi (2016), "legitimise the insertion of migrant workers into 3D (dirty, dangerous, demanding) job[s]" (p. 88). When facial and physical differences make migrants more distinguishable among the local population, the process of othering amplifies, while the whiteness of some migrant groups in Western contexts, coming, for example, from Eastern Europe, is perceived as more welcoming. Racial discrimination extends to migrant families and even children. For example, Farahani (2013) demonstrates how migrant children of Iranian origin are teased by their peers in Sweden on the basis of racial belonging (p. 148).

Importantly, discrimination and racialization occur not only because of visible physical differences between migrants and locals, but differences are also incorporated on the basis of religion and class. Gallo and Scrinzi (2016) report that in the European context, migrants from European countries are seen as "good" migrants due to their affiliation with Christian religion, whereas migrants from Muslim countries are viewed as culturally distant, which makes them "impossible to incorporate into democracy" (p. 88).

Institutional discrimination affects migrants' status and their "value" on labour markets. Stereotyping and segmentation based on ethnicity become a part of employer-migrant workers relations. Therefore, when choosing among migrant workers to fill the lowest positions, employers aim to select workers from migrant groups of particular ethnicities, considering them as docile (Datta et al., 2007; Datta et al., 2008; McKay, 2007). The burden of migrant men's image as holders of "feminized" identity, stemming from the low-paid work that they often do, can also be amplified by migrant men's employment in sectors that are considered as "feminine" both in sending and host societies (Datta et al., 2008, p. 21). The same challenges are not rare among Central Asian migrant men in Russia, who also received the label of docile, low-skilled and low-paid workers among employers on the Russian labour market (Roche, 2018, pp. 96-97).

In the conditions of discrimination, racialised attitude and precarity, migrant men navigate their masculinity not only with regard to the employers, local population and their own families, but also in relation to each other. Such relations are often characterised by hierarchal relations in a homosocial context. A homosocial environment is an important space where men who often know each other from childhood interact with each other and learn, construct, perform and maintain the hegemonic masculine selfhood of a particular context (Hopkins, 2006; Vasquez del Aguila, 2014, p. 123). During their migration trips, migrant men sustain ties with male friends from their pre-migratory life, as well as develop new acquaintances and friendships in a host country (Bell & Pustułka, 2017, pp. 137-139; Vasquez del Aguila, 2014, pp. 123-140). As Vasquez del Aguila demonstrates (2014), migrant men's homosocial relations may develop out of mutual support and can be grounded on ideas of competition, mistrust and power relations between men (pp. 123-140). In discriminative contexts, the unifying significance of homosocial networks for migrant men extends beyond mere provision of protective support and solidarity on the basis of common ethnical roots. It may include the solidarity of migrant men's marginalised masculinity constructed against local masculinity (Bozok & Bozok, 2018,

p. 5). In addition, the homosocial environment provides space and compels migrant men to adhere somewhat to pre-migratory, "correct" masculinity (Vasquez del Aguila, 2014, pp. 123-140). Relations with other male compatriots plays a central role in regulating religious aspects of a Muslim migrant man (Cerchiaro, 2023). Research on Muslim migrant men in Europe shows that Muslim men's ability to extend their religious affiliation to their wives and children is seen as a marker of "right" masculinity in their homosocial environment (Cerchiaro, 2023, pp. 100-102).

Legality is another aspect that plays a crucial role in the construction of migrant men's identity. Exploring the masculine practices of Indian and Pakistani migrant men in Greece, Kukreja shows that legality becomes an important signifier of a hegemonic status among migrant men in a precarious and often discriminatory environment, where illegal migrants fear being deported. As a result, in the context where migrant men are easily distinguished from locals, undocumented migrant men constrain themselves to working and living spaces, and are often afraid of going out on unnecessary occasions (Kukreja, 2021, pp. 313-314; see also Kukreja, 2019). Legal status provides migrants with more mobility. In fact, migrant men with a legal status enjoy better employment and accommodation options, which in the established masculine hierarchy allows them to maintain a dominant position among other migrant men, especially those newly arrived and of junior age. The age hierarchy can, however, be disrupted by the state of illegality, given that at times illegal migrants of senior age may be dependent on migrant men of junior age, but who have legal status. Such dependence resulting from illegality diminishes migrant men's feelings of masculine self-worth due to their inability to fully fend for themselves (Kukreja, 2021, p. 313).

Despite experiences of discrimination, low-paid and "nonmasculine" employment as well as the state of illegality, migrant men can manage to find a source of self-valorisation of their masculine identity. This is often connected with fulfilling or at least attempts to fulfil familial responsibilities or reference to migrant men's working ethics, when compared with those of local men. The fact of having a job and being a breadwinner is already a strong indicator of a migrant's masculinity, the demonstration of which allows the man to attain local acknowledgement of his masculine identity (Crossley & Pease, 2009, p. 124). In an environment with limited access to the whole range of masculine practices available in their home countries, "feminine" work might be presented by migrant men as a signifier of their self-sacrifice for the sake of their families and thereby be the sign of their manhood. Endurance of harsh work for long hours without complaint is also associated with masculine identity among migrant men (Donaldson & Howson, 2009, p. 212; Haile & Siegmann, 2014, p. 112; Kukreja, 2021, p. 317-320). Thus, in the context of significant distinctions between local and migrant men in terms of available masculine capital, migrant men's manifestation of dominant masculinity is often grounded in their claims for better working performance, less time spent on personal leisure and abstinence from alcohol (Bell & Pustułka, 2017, pp. 131-132; Datta et al., 2008, pp. 26-27; Samadov, 2025).

6. Conclusion

By highlighting different masculine practices that migrant men employ, the aim of this paper was to show the heterogeneity and multiplicity of masculine practices and gender roles that labour migrants often need to adopt and navigate in the state of transnational in-betweenness, in order to adapt to gender normativities of both sending and receiving societies. This happens because of an increasing number of actors and factors, vis-à-vis which the masculine identity of transnational migrant men is constructed and negotiated. Moving to another country, migrant men shape their own masculinity by referring to their legal, economic and social achievements or lack of them, as well as taking as a point of reference other masculine and feminine practices of both their compatriots and locals.

Masculinity and gender practices of transnational migrant men are also actively reshaped and challenged by migrant communities and the local population, in addition to multiple legal and economic constraints and discrimination that migrant men face in host countries. However, negative experiences of marginalised masculinity and difficult life abroad are often successfully transformed into hegemonic masculinity in migrants' sending communities. Migrant men's creative and flexible approach to the construction and interpretation of their masculine practices allows them to maintain their masculinity and make sense of their masculine self in the contexts of inequality and discrimination. Thus, the complex environment creates a ground for diverse masculine practices to emerge.

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