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SYRIAN WOMEN ON THE WAY TO EUROPE: STRATEGIES, CHALLENGES, PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

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The growing securitization of migration in the EU has an impact on the experiences of asylum seekers searching for safety and protection in Europe. In the so-called European refugee "crisis" in 2015 and early 2016, Syrian women were a growing minority group in these asylum flows to the EU. They have been constructed as passive victims in mainstream academic literature and political discourse. This thesis aims to investigate the lived experiences of Syrian women who crossed the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route from Turkey to Greece and completed their onward mobility to Germany through the Western Balkan route between 2014 and 2016. In this scope, the study aims to examine the drivers behind the clandestine journeys to the EU and, in particular, to Germany, the challenges that Syrian women faced in their journeys, the strategies they adopted to cope with violence on the route, and the role of gender and the EU securitization of migration in shaping Syrian women's asylum experiences.

This study adopts a qualitative research design. Drawing on gender theory in International Relations and the securitization of migration literature, the study brings the voices of Syrian women to light through in-depth interviews with Syrian refugee women in Germany who survived these clandestine journeys across the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route between 2014 and 2016.

The findings reveal that despite fleeing violence in Syria, the violence continued at every stage of their asylum journeys to the EU. The growing EU border security industry along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route has gendered implications for Syrian women. It creates gendered vulnerabilities, especially for women with limited social and financial resources. It also exacerbates the existing gendered hierarchies and inequal relationships with various state and non-state actors. However, Syrian women were able to navigate these systems of

oppression and adopt various strategies based on their available resources to maintain their security and wellbeing in the context of highly securitized and militarised borders.

Keywords: Gender, the EU, Securitization of migration, Syrian women, Asylum journeys

ÖZ

SURİYELİ KADINLAR AVRUPA YOLUNDA: STRATEJİLER, ZORLUKLAR, ALGILAR

NOUR ZANJER

AB'de göçün giderek güvenlikleştirilmesi, Avrupa'da güvenlik ve koruma arayan sığınmacıların deneyimleri üzerinde bir etkiye sahiptir. 2015'teki ve 2016'nın başlarındaki sözde Avrupa mülteci "krizinde", Suriyeli kadınlar AB'ye bu sığınma akışlarında büyüyen bir azınlık grubuydu. Ana akım akademik literatürde ve siyasi söylemde pasif kurbanlar olarak inşa edildiler. Bu tez, 2014-2016 yılları arasında Doğu Akdeniz rotasını Türkiye'den Yunanistan'a geçerek Batı Balkan rotası üzerinden Almanya'ya geçişini tamamlayan Suriyeli kadınların yaşadıkları deneyimleri incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. AB'ye ve özellikle Almanya'ya yapılan gizli yolculukların ardında, Suriyeli kadınların yolculuklarında karşılaştıkları zorluklar, rota üzerindeki şiddetle başa çıkmak için benimsedikleri stratejiler ve Suriyelilerin şekillenmesinde toplumsal cinsiyetin ve AB'nin göçü güvenlikleştirmesinin rolü kadın sığınma deneyimleri.

Bu çalışma nitel bir araştırma desenini benimser. Uluslararası ilişkilerde toplumsal cinsiyet teorisinden ve göç literatürünün güvenlikleştirilmesinden yararlanan çalışma, 2014-2016 yılları arasında Doğu Akdeniz rotası ve Batı Balkan rotasındaki bu gizli yolculuklardan sağ kurtulan Almanya'daki Suriyeli mülteci kadınlarla yapılan derinlemesine görüşmeler yoluyla Suriyeli kadınların seslerine ışık tutuyor.

Bulgular, Suriye'deki şiddetten kaçmalarına rağmen, AB'ye sığınma yolculuklarının her aşamasında şiddetin devam ettiğini ortaya koyuyor. Doğu Akdeniz rotası ve Batı Balkan rotası boyunca büyüyen AB sınır güvenliği endüstrisi, Suriyeli kadınlar için toplumsal cinsiyetçi etkilere sahip. Özellikle sınırlı sosyal ve finansal kaynaklara sahip kadınlar için cinsiyete dayalı kırılganlıklar yaratır. Aynı zamanda mevcut cinsiyetçi hiyerarşileri ve çeşitli devlet ve devlet dışı aktörlerle eşitsiz ilişkileri şiddetlendirir. Bununla birlikte, Suriyeli kadınlar bu baskı sistemlerini idare edebildiler ve son derece

güvenlikleştirilmiş ve askerileştirilmiş sınırlar bağlamında güvenliklerini ve refahlarını sürdürmek için mevcut kaynaklarına dayalı olarak çeşitli stratejiler benimseyebildiler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal cinsiyet, AB, göçün güvenlikleştirilmesi, Suriyeli kadınlar, İltica yolculukları

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I extend my thanks to the brave Syrian women who have survived the clandestine journeys to the EU and participated in this study. Your willingness to share your stories, experiences, and memories has added depth to this thesis, reminding us of the human stories behind politics and statistics. Your strength and resilience have inspired and empowered me to complete this thesis.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to the displaced Syrian women whose struggles, stories, and voices should be heard.

Nour Zanjer

ISTANBUL, 2023

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEAS : The Common European Asylum System

EEA : The European Economic Area

EU : The European Union

FRONTEX : The European Border and Coast Guard Agency

GBV : Gender Based Violence

IOM : The International Organization for Migration

IR : International Relations

NATO : The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

S&R : Search and Rescue

UNHCR : The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

INTRODUCTION

Syrian women and children constitute most of the displaced Syrian population. Yet, they constituted a growing minority in the asylum flows heading to the EU in the context of the European refugee “crisis”. This thesis aims to investigate Syrian women’s asylum experiences across the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route between 2014 and 2016. The drivers for clandestine journeys across the EU’s external borders, the challenges they have faced, the strategies they adopted, and the role of gender and the EU securitization of migration in shaping their experiences. This section will offer an introduction to the study by providing background information, the research questions, the significance and limitations, and an overview of the thesis structure.

The ongoing conflict in Syria led millions of Syrians to seek protection outside the country, making the Syrian case one of the largest refugee crises in the world. The greatest proportion of Syrian refugees, 5.5 million, have been placed in countries neighbouring Syria, such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan (UNHCR, n.d.-a), while only one million Syrian refugees have been hosted in the EU (UNHCR, 2021). Women and children constitute more than 70% of this refugee population (UNHCR, n.d.-b).

The EU, along with the global North, has embraced the securitization of migration paradigm in its approach to migration from the global South. This has involved implementing restrictive immigration and asylum policies and promoting the security industry at the EU’s external borders (Huysmans, 2000; Marchand, 2008). Consequently, such measures have limited the opportunities for migrants and asylum seekers from the global South to gain access to the EU (Gerard and Pickering, 2014). However, in 2015 and early 2016, there was a significant surge in the number of asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan attempting to seek protection in the EU. This human mobility has been labelled as the European refugee "crisis". In 2015, the EU member states received 1.2 million asylum applications, with a significant majority being claimed by Syrian nationals (Eurostat, n.d.).

Asylum seekers often become part of mixed flows with irregular migrants in their attempts to cross the EU's external borders. This journey entails navigating dangerous and clandestine routes. In 2015, most Syrian refugees crossed the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route from Turkey to Greece. They then continued their onward journeys through the Western Balkan route, aiming to reach their final destinations in the northern EU member states, notably Germany, which hosts 70% of the refugees in the EU (UNHCR, 2021). However, there is a gender gap in asylum applications in the EU. For instance, Syrian females made up only 26% of the first-time asylum applications in Germany in 2015 (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2016, p. 22). The gendered dimension of refugee flows to the EU between 2014 and 2016 suggests that women constituted an increasing share of asylum flows heading to Europe, making up 29% in 2014, 27% in 2015, and 32% in 2016 (Mixed Migration Platform, 2016, p. 2). Gender as a constructed social identity and as a system of power relations (Lorber, 1994, pp. 5-6), creates unique experiences for females seeking asylum in the EU. Yet, refugee women's experiences in these asylum flows to the EU have often been overlooked (Gerard, 2014, p. 1). Further, the mainstream literature constructs refugee women from the global South as passive victims (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017b, p. 19).

This study aims to investigate Syrian women's journeys from Syria to Germany, in particular, their clandestine experiences across the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route between 2014 and 2016. During the European refugee "crisis" and the atmosphere of panic, a body of literature has been developed by humanitarian organisations that often limits the analysis of women's experiences to their vulnerabilities and types of gender-based violence (Freedman, 2016a; Moran, 2020). Therefore, it inadequately addresses the nuances of gendered power relations and their structural dimension, the complexities of Syrian women's journeys, as well as the way in which Syrian women responded to the insecurities and challenges on the route. Given my positionality as a Syrian woman, I could observe the struggles of my community as well as share the common perception with many Syrian women that "The story is not like that". However, there has been a limited body of literature offering a comprehensive understanding of gendered power relations by addressing

both the gendered impact of securitization of migration and Syrian women's strategies during clandestine border crossings (Freedman, 2019b; Krystalli et al., 2018). This study will contribute to expanding the existing literature and deepening our understanding of the clandestine border crossing experiences of Syrian women between 2014 and early 2016.

Through fieldwork-based research and drawing on the securitization of migration and the gender approach in international relations (IR), this study seeks to bring holistic insights addressing both the challenges that Syrian women face and the strategies they adopted to overcome these challenges. This research does not aim at generalising the findings; rather, it aims at offering in-depth insights through gender-sensitive analysis of Syrian women's experiences across the EU's external borders. It will highlight the role of the EU securitization of migration and gender social hierarchies in shaping Syrian women's experiences. This thesis argues that, First, the securitization of migration is a dominant paradigm in the EU response to migration flows and the Syrian refugee crisis. Second, the security industry at the EU's external borders has a gendered impact that affects Syrian women's asylum journeys. Third, Syrian women fleeing the war in Syria are not passive victims, yet they negotiate securitization along the EU's external borders using various strategies based on their available resources. Accordingly, this thesis is developed around one key research question: How have Syrian women experienced the clandestine asylum journeys to Germany along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route during the period 2014–2016? And it seeks to answer these sub-questions:

1- What are the Syrian women's drivers for seeking clandestine asylum journeys to Germany?

2- How do the Syrian women experience the clandestine journey along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route?

3- How do the Syrian women experience the clandestine journey on the Western Balkan route?

4- What challenges, insecurities, and violence do Syrian women face in their journeys?

5-How do Syrian women negotiate the challenges and cope with these insecurities?

In this regard, this study consists of three different chapters. The first chapter will address the theoretecal, conceptual, and methodological framework of this study. It will investigate the concept of securitization of migration and gender theory in IR. It will offer an overview of the literature addressing women's clandestine asylum journeys to the EU. Finally, it will present the research design, the methods, and the limitations and ethical considerations.

The second chapter will offer an overview of the securitization of migration along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea Route and the Balkan Route between 2014 and 2016, and its impact on women's experiences. It will facilitate understanding of the context of the clandestine journeys of Syrian women in the following chapter.

The third chapter will examine the clandestine asylum experiences of the interviewed Syrian women who crossed the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route to seek asylum in Germany between 2014 and 2016. This chapter is organised in three sections, starting with introducing the sample of fourteen Syrian women and their drivers for embarking on clandestine border crossings to Germany. Then, the challenges and insecurities that women face during transit while crossing the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route between 2014 and 2016. Lastly, the strategies that these Syrian women developed to deal with these insecurities and challenges during the clandestine journey will be examined. Finally, the conclusion section will be presented.

CHAPTER I
THEORETICAL, CONCEPTUAL, AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will lay the foundation for the current study by introducing the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological frameworks. This research is informed by several bodies of literature, including critical security studies, the securitization of migration, and gender theory in International Relations (IR). These bodies of literature will offer the necessary background for understanding the unique experiences of women in the context of clandestine asylum journeys to the EU. In this regard, this chapter will examine the securitization of migration concept first, followed by gender IR theories, and then will offer an overview of the existing literature addressing refugee women's clandestine asylum journeys to the EU and the impact of EU securitization of migration on women's clandestine journeys. The last section will present the research design, scope, and methods.

1.1. THE SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION

The "Securitization" concept emerged with the writings of Barry Buzan and Ole Waever from Copenhagen School of International Relations in 1990s. The Copenhagen School is often associated with constructivist approach which emphasize on the role of the ideas, norms, perceptions, identities, and interpretations in shaping international relations (Buzan, 1997).

The securitization concept refers to the process of by which a particular issue (social, economic, natural…etc.) is framed by (politicians, policymakers, media, and other influential individuals or groups) as a matter of security. Therefore, it is added to the political agenda, because it is "presented as an issue of supreme priority," justifying extraordinary measures to address this utmost priority (Buzan & Waever, 1998, p.26).

The process of securitization constructs an imagined threat and portray it as an existential danger to a particular society or community. The securitization process, in other words, relies on "speech act" or using the language to perform actions. Therefore,

the securitization of a particular issue is not reflection of its inherent danger. Rather, it is a political act that serves to legitimize the use of "panic politics" (Buzan, 1997) and exceptional measures such as military action after convincing the audience and constructing a shared understanding of certain issue. Security, in this sense, is not as an objective condition or natural phenomena, but as a social construct produced through practice and discourse. Securitization process has been perceived as a problematic process because it tends to prioritize security over other values such as human rights, democracy, and civil liberties, which can lead to the marginalization and the exclusion of particular social groups.

Securitization concept has been utilized by many scholars to understand the international, south – north migration, by asking the questions of "how" and "why" migration as a social phenomenon has been framed as a threat to national security, thereby require security measures like military intervention, border controls, punishment, surveillance and control and legitimate other forms of coercive actions and policies (Huysmans, 2000; Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002; Marchand, 2008; Williams 2003). According to Ceyhan and Tsoukala, (2002), after the Cold War and the change of international system, the western societies experienced an "identity crisis", in which that the threats perceptions have been transferred from the military sphere to the social sphere. Therefore, the western societies created binary opposition between the host society and the migrants or refugee "other" as an existential security threat to the cultural and national identity. This process of securitization of migration has increased after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, which exacerbated the public concerns about the threat of migrants coming from particular cultural backgrounds, particularly from "Muslim" countries; this perception contributed to intensify border security industry to ensure the protection form the threat of potential terrorists coming from "other" cultures (Karamanidou, 2015, p,40).

Regarding the framing of migration as a security threat in the European Union, Huysmans (2000) argues that the EU securitization of migration has evolved in the context of the European integration process to protect the Schengen zone, the national cultural "European" identity, and the welfare state. The need to initiate a sense of security and stability after the eliminating the internal borders and allowing the free

movement of people and common European market led to developing rigid and restrictive migration control at the EU external borders to protect the Schengen zone from the outsiders.

The securitization of migration necessitates and reinforces border security- or the securitization of borders- as places need to be protected from unauthorized crossing (d'Appollonia, 2015, p. 15). As an illustration, the European Union border security industry is associated with migration flows. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) identifies in its annual risk analysis "illegal" migration as a "threat" to the EU borders (Sachseder et al., 2022) along with various cross-border crimes like money laundering, weapon trafficking, trafficking in persons, and terrorism. Moreover, the EU border security industry has been over years growing with an annual budget of Frontex from 6 million euros in 2005 to 754 million Euros in 2022 to fight irregular migration (Frontex, 2005; 2022). The securitized approach to migration has become apparent in the response to the 2015 European refugee crisis. The mobility of asylum seekers and migrants to the EU has been labelled as a "crisis" to motivate and regulate "panic politics" and extraordinary measures to control mobility, and these measured ended up with stemming the flows of migration through the EU-Turkey deal in 2016 (Freedman, 2019, p.706). However, the securitization approach to migration will be further elaborated in the second chapter that reveals the securitization nature of migration management at the EU external borders particularly at the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route.

In this study, the critical view of Copenhagen School to security as a socially constructed concept is used in understanding the debate on irregular migration to the EU. It provides a framework for recognizing and understanding the growing security industry and how human mobility across borders have been framed as "illegal" mobility and a "threat" to national security by this paradigm. Therefore, the concept of securitization of migration is relevant in offering a critical understanding of the EU's and other nation states' restrictive measures in addressing irregular migration flows. Accordingly, it is useful in offering a contextual understanding of Syrian women's irregular journeys to the EU.

However, one of the primary limitations of this critical security approach of the Copenhagen School is that its scope is confined to answering the question of "how" nation states are restricting border and migration policies and practices and "why" they are doing so. Therefore, the securitization concept is limited to state-level analysis and has little to do with understanding and analysing the influence of securitization of migration on people on the move, particularly on women. Accordingly, there is a need for drawing on the gender IR literature that questions the state-centric security concept, provides a bottom-up approach, and facilitates the understanding of the "impact" of securitization of migration on the experiences of Syrian women seeking asylum across the EU external borders.

1.2. BRINGING WOMEN AND THE EU'S SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION TOGETHER

1.2.1. Gender International Relations (IR) and Women's Voices

Cynthia Enloe's question, "Where Are the Women?" in 1989, revealed the gap in the study of women in international politics and the role of gender in excluding women's voices, as women were placed in subordinated positions in international politics research (Smith, 2018). Gender theory in IR is a diverse field that refers to incorporating gender in the study of international relations. It is a result of the efforts of many researchers and feminists in the field of gender studies and international relations in the 1980s and 1990s. Among the academics and thinkers who have significantly contributed to the development of gender analysis are Judith Butler, J. Ann Tickner, Cynthia Enloe, Catherine MacKinnon, and others. They engender the current knowledge and reconsider the gender-blind understanding of various concepts such as national security, power, and sovereignty (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017b, p.82). This approach seeks to understand how male-dominated relations and hierarchies of power influence various aspects of international relations, such as political decisions and government processes, international law, international development, conflict, and security contexts.

To begin with, "gender" refers to the socially constructed system of norms, expectations, and roles of individuals in society. It is a system that regulates

relationships, societies, and power, and it is embodied in our lives (Lorber, 1994, pp.5-6). Femininity is attributed to females, who are responsible for children, care work, and the private sphere, and a passive role is often attributed to them while masculinity is attributed to males, who are the main breadwinners and the holders of decision-making authority, as well as the main players in the public sphere. Gender is a "human invention" that is dynamic and varies across time and cultures (Lorber, 1994, p.6). Unlike sex, which refers to the biological differences between males and females given by birth, gender inequalities appeared in terms of relations of domination and subordination and inequal access to rights, resources, and knowledge. This power imbalance produces various types of gender-based violence and discrimination, in which feminist movements aim to end these inequal power relations and promote gender equality. The European Commission defines gender-based violence as "violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately." (n,d.). According to Article 2 of The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, violence against women has a broad understanding, including the "physical, sexual, and psychological" violence that is perpetrated by family, community, and state. (United Nations, n.d,).

Feminist security studies, as a subfield of gender IR literature, focus on the relationship between gender and security. Feminists' contributions to security studies suggest a shift in understanding "security" beyond the state-centric perspective of the realist theory in IR that excludes gendered security concerns from the security analysis. According to Özgür Baklacıoğlu (2017b), state-centric perspective represents the traditional masculine approach that prioritises state security and border security over the security of women crossing these borders (p.26). In this regard, the securitization of migration and the militarization of the borders are masculine constructs that align with masculine norms such as strength, control, and dominance. This construct marginalizes women's perspectives and has gendered implications for women's experiences.

J. Ann Tickner (1992) explored the intersection of gender and security and suggested a comprehensive definition of security. As it should be understood in "multidimensional and multilevel terms" (Tickner, 1992, p. 128). This

multidimensional understanding of the security concept includes not only physical security but also social, economic, and environmental security. A multilevel understanding of security means eliminating the dichotomies between the public and the private; and the boundaries between the personal and the international through connecting various levels of violence and power relations for the sake of a wholistic understanding of (in)security (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017b, p. 82). This bottom-up, gender-sensitive analysis of security places the security and well-being of individuals, whom are women, at the centre of concern by exposing social hierarchies and relationships between various state and non-state actors in a comprehensive manner.

Peterson and Runyan (2014) also suggest that gender inequality is a root cause of insecurity, yet mainstream security analysis fails to recognise the structural elements of violence and insecurity (pp. 145-146). Structural violence is a concept that has been developed by Johan Galtung and refers to the hidden and implicit violence that is built into structures, such as social structures, where there is no single and specific offender that can be detected (Galtung, 1969, p.171). In this regard, Tickner (1997) suggested that access to security requires the emancipation and elimination of unequal power relations and "all forms of violence, including physical, structural, and ecological" (p. 625). Therefore, addressing gendered violence and inequal power relations can contribute to the analysis and understanding of security.

One of the primary limitations of the dominant gender-sensitive literature is its universalizing tendency towards women's experiences. Drawing on postmodern, postcolonial, and third-wave feminism, Hudson (2005) argues that western feminism addresses women as a homogenous group who share the same social positionalities, and this portrayal does not fully capture the different experiences of insecurity among women groups worldwide (pp. 157-169). In her critique of the westernized elements of IR theories, she argues that "the security needs of western women and women in the developing world are different" (Hudson, 2005, p.157). Considering the various political, legal, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts, she calls for intersectional and "indigenous approaches to human security" to understand women's experiences of insecurity (p.157). She asserts the need for a deeper and more nuanced examination of gender and the diversity of women's experiences and security needs (Hudson, 2005,

p.157). This study acknowledges both the cultural sensitivity of addressing Syrian women's experiences and the importance of an intersectional analysis of their experiences. Yet, in-depth intersectional analysis of Syrian women's experiences is outside the scope of this study; however, the diversity of Syrian women's experiences will be highlighted as much as possible to enhance the understanding of their diverse experiences in the third chapter.

Another limitation of the mainstream gender-sensitive literature is the narrow focus on women as victims of conflicts and insecurity, which overlooks their agency (Hudson, 2005, p.170). Furthermore, according to Özgür Baklacıoğlu (2017b), women have been constructed in the mainstream IR literature as "either the Iron Lady of international politics or, on the contrary, the victim" (p. 88). In this regard, Hoogensen and Stuvoy (2006) suggest an inclusive framework for understanding security in two dimensions: first, identifying the (in)securities of the individuals, and second, identifying the actions of resistance to these insecurities. Their framework emphasised the conceptualization of oppressed individuals as actors of security, which challenges the dominant narrative that the state is the only actor of security. They highlighted in their inclusive approach the need to include agency, the capacity to act within structural limitations (Charrad, 2010), and the capabilities of marginalised populations to maintain their own security and challenge oppressive structures. Their emphasis on agency aligns with the core normative principles of gender theory and its subset, feminist theory, which seeks to examine and transform the lives of women within societal and international structures. As Hoogensen and Stuvoy explained, "Security is not only about the recognition of threats but also about building capacities to create secure spaces" (Hoogensen and Stuvoy, 2006, p. 222).

Moreover, Hudson (2005) suggests a relational understanding of women's agency, as it is not only about making independent choices that resist the existing structures; rather, it is relational, interdependent, contextual, and embedded in the surrounding hierarchies and power relations (p.169). Considering this understanding, women's decisions are influenced by their relationships with family members and larger societal structures. Moreover, their opportunities and constraints are shaped by political, legal, and cultural contexts. For instance, women in western societies may enjoy wider

freedom, political protection, and access to education and work, in contrast to women in developing countries. Furthermore, Kanal and Rottmann (2021) argue that the dominant understanding of women's agency is an individualistic understanding that overlooks the cultural context and the potential for collective agency**.** This critical, gender-sensitive body of literature provides a room for listening to women's voices and subjectivities and recognising their agency in the context of structural violence and insecurity. Drawing on the previously mentioned literature, this study addresses both the security challenges and the strategies that Syrian women employ to respond to these challenges during their asylum journeys.

To conclude, gender IR theory offers a gender-sensitive understanding of current international politics and challenges masculinized notions of state-centric security. Feminist security studies, as a subfield of gender IR literature, broaden the security concept. It provides a space for understanding (in)security through a gendered analysis of the power dynamics, thereby providing the theoretical foundation for addressing the experiences of Syrian women across the EU's borders. This normative, bottom-up understanding of security issues justifies bringing Syrian women's voices and experiences into the centre of research in the discipline of international relations. However, there are some limitations to this body of literature, such as its westernised elements that overlook the agency of refugee women coming from the Global South. In this regard, Hoogensen and Stuvoy's framework is useful in approaching asylum-seeking women as active actors by addressing their insecurities as well as their capacities. Therefore, it is suitable for addressing the research question, allowing a comprehensive analysis of Syrian women's experiences, challenges, and strategies.

1.2.2. Women's Clandestine Asylum Journeys to Europe as Presented in the Literature

Seeking protection is a human right that is regulated under international law and the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, fleeing wars and seeking asylum and protection is a process that requires crossing international borders. In the context of the securitization of migration, lots of asylum seekers from the global south are forced to join irregular migration flows to the EU on clandestine journeys. Clandestine border

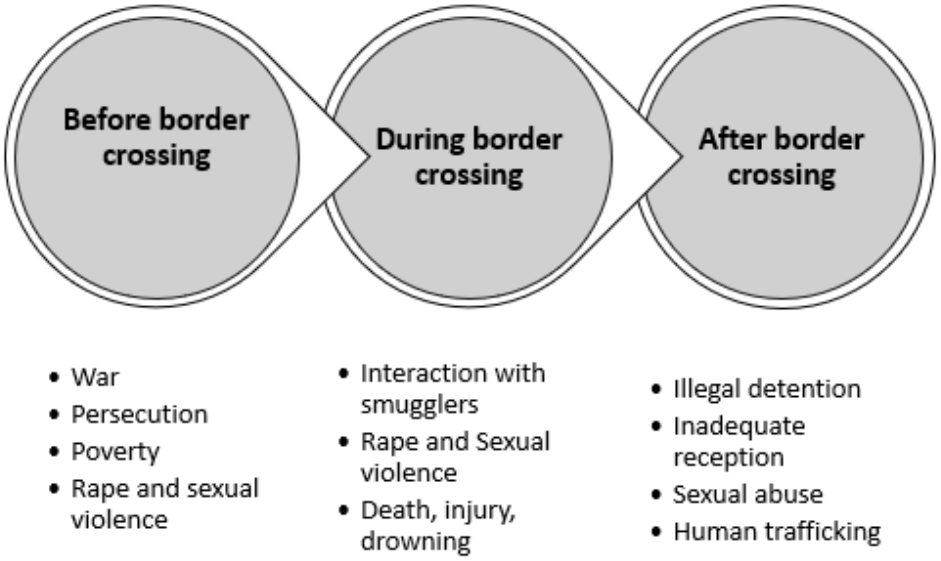
crossing refers to the process of entering nation-states and crossing national borders without permission, valid passports, or visas. Gerard and Pickering (2014) argue that the EU securitization process is "protecting the EU from its refugee convention obligations" and limiting the chances of asylum seekers to access international protection by criminalising human mobility at its external borders. However, asylum seekers often seek dangerous routes depending on the services of the smuggling markets that facilitate their transport and entry to the EU. In these clandestine flows, women compose a significant proportion. The female component of these flows differs over time, culture, and geography. Yet, there is a gender gap in the asylum applicants in the EU, and only one third of these applications are filed by females; for instance, females made up 29% in 2014, 27% in 2015, and 32% in 2016 (Mixed Migration Platform, 2016, p.2).

The existing research on gender and migration has shown that gender, as a constructed social identity, has an impact on the migration process, starting from the decision to leave, during the various stages of transit, and after arrival in destination countries. Yet, refugee women's voices and experiences have often been overlooked in irregular migration flows (Gerard, 2014, p. 1) and across international borders (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017b, p. 7). Therefore, a growing body of gender-sensitive literature has been developed addressing various aspects of women's asylum journeys in the context of the securitization of migration.

The existing literature addresses the challenges and insecurities that women face during their clandestine journeys to the EU and the factors that lead to these insecurities. For instance, Alison Gerard examines in her study, "The Securitization of Migration and Refugee Women" (2014), the lived experiences of clandestine asylum journeys of Somali women from Somalia to Malta. She builds on critical security studies, such as Huysman's argument that the securitization of migration has dominated the EU's border control, and then she suggests that this has a gendered impact (Gerard, 2014, p. 1). She demonstrates the ways in which the EU securitization of migration is maintaining gender-based violence against Somali women seeking asylum in the EU through the different stages of asylum journeys: exit from Somalia, transit through, arrival to Malta, and onward mobility (Gerard, 2014, p.1). In her

analysis of the exit phase, she examines the role of gender discrimination in shaping women's decisions for asylum (Gerard, 2014, pp. 92–96). Drawing upon Galtung's concept of "direct and structural violence", she demonstrates various gendered insecurities during transit in the Sahara Desert, detention in Libya, and crossing the Central Mediterranean route (Gerard, 2014, pp. 111–123). In line with Gerad's study, Özgür Baklacıoğlu (2017b) draws on IR literature and border studies and argues that the growing masculine border controls are reproducing gender-based violence (pp.20-26). She suggests that women's asylum journeys across international borders are characterised by structural violence, as insecurity and violence extend beyond the conflict in the country of origin and continue during the process of asylum; before, during, and after border crossing (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017b, p. 169) (See figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Özgür Baklacıoğlu's Analysis of Refugee Women's Border Crossing Experiences



Source: (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017, p.196).

Drawing on databases from the European Union, Australia, and the United States, Pickering and Cochrane (2013) illustrate that women are disproportionately impacted by the conditions of the smuggling markets, which exacerbate women's deaths at borders. In the context of sea journeys across the Mediterranean Sea heading to

Europe, Gerard and Pickering (2014) suggest that Somali women are exposed to physical risks during their boat journeys across the Mediterranean from Libya to Malta because being placed in dangerous locations inside the boat, health risks, and dehydration, make them more likely to be exposed to death. Sexual abuse by smuggling hubs has been documented on the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey to Greece, as Syrian and Iraqi women are exposed to rape, harassment, and transactional sex for the exchange of a discount or free seat in a boat from Turkey to Greece (Amnesty International, 2016). Sexual exploitation often intertwines with other forms of violence, like women's financial precarity and their limited access to resources because of their gendered roles (Tastsoglou, 2021).

Moreover, gender-based violence continues upon arrival on European soil and after surviving the Mediterranean Sea journeys. In the context of the European refugee "crisis" in 2015, Freedman's (2016a) study on Syrian and Afghan women in the Greek island of Kos, Serbia, and France demonstrated the inadequate response to women's needs and the various sources of gendered insecurities, like overcrowded reception facilities and gender-based violence, including rape, in various locations in transit and the EU's member states (Freedman, 2016a). Amnesty International report in 2016 documented various cases of sexual harassment where women were threatened to sleep in insecure facilities with other men in Greece, Hungary, and Slovenia (Amnesty International, 2016).

Along the Balkan route, human rights reports highlighted that women are exposed to human trafficking, including sexual, labour, and organ exploitation, especially in Macedonia and Serbia (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2019; La Strada / Open Gate, 2016). Moreover, detention centres create an insecure space for women. For instance, in the Gazi Baba migration detention centre in Macedonia, women's exposure to sexual harassment by police guards has been documented (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Moreover, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights reported that "women and girls, especially those travelling alone, face particularly high risks of certain forms of violence, including sexual violence by smugglers, criminal groups, and individuals in countries along the route" (Commission for Human Rights, 2016). This systematic discrimination against women continued at every step and with

various actors during the clandestine journeys, including the domestic sphere. Women maintain abusive relationships out of fear of being alone on the road, and cases of intimate partner violence and domestic violence have been reported (Freedman, 2016a).

In brief, the previous literature illustrates that women on the move are experiencing vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence during interactions with different state and non-state actors. Such as border guards and authorities, migrant smugglers and human traffickers, locals, other migrants, and family members. Accordingly, the securitization of migration has created and exacerbated gendered inequalities in both direct and indirect ways.

However, the previous literature that was limited to the impact of securitization of migration has been questioned. Özgür Baklacıoğlu (2017b) argues that mainstream literature constructs women "on the basis of victimization" through reproducing gendered stereotypes and generalizations of women's experiences (p.19). Moreover, this victimization and depoliticization of refugees reinforces gendered stereotypes, limits their complex experiences to the aspect of passivity and vulnerability, and thereby has a disempowering impact on refugee women that reinforces their underrepresentation and marginalization (Malkki, 1995). Being identified and labelled as inherently "vulnerable" can be an obstacle to the total recognition of women's voices, power, agency, and capacities (Freedman, 2019; Butler, 2016). In this regard, Gerard and Pickering (2014) argue that there is a growing need to highlight women's resistance, especially those from the global South, in the context of EU's securitization and victimization.

Recently, there has been a growing body of literature shifting the focus and addressing both the impact of borders and women's strategies during clandestine border crossings through a nuanced analysis of gender power relations (Freedman, 2019b; Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017b; Krystalli et al., 2018). This body of research suggests that women have employed strategies to negotiate their asylum journeys while interacting with different actors. For instance, Krystalli et al.'s (2018) research in Jordan, Turkey, Greece, and Denmark suggests that women on the move played an active role in

building social capital and relationships across the journey to enhance their security. Freedman's (2019b) research in Greece and France highlighted the practices of solidarity among women on the move to defend their rights and maintain their security; she also suggests that some women used the label of "vulnerability" to facilitate their journeys and negotiate with border guards, as they are in a more privileged situation compared to men. Moreover, Gerard's (2014) research on Somali women in Malta highlighted that some women were relying on pregnancy in order to be released from detention in Malta (Gerard, 2014, p. 141). Yet, there is a need to expand this body of research and further deepen the understanding of Syrian women's asylum journeys and voices in their own cultural context.

To conclude, this literature review highlights the complex relationship between gender and the securitization of migration. The lived experiences of refugee women suggest that the EU securitization of migration and borders has a negative impact on women on the move and maintains their gendered discrimination. However, there are some limitations that underscore the need for further in-depth investigation of women's clandestine asylum experiences, especially in the Syrian case (Özgür Baklacioğlu, 2017a). The current study will contribute to the previous literature by addressing Syrian women as actors in security rather than passive victims. In line with gender IR approaches to security that emphasise the importance of including marginalised voices, this empirical study will address the experiences of Syrian women in a holistic way, recognising the vulnerabilities and strategies they employed on their route. The coming section will present the research design and methods.

1.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research adopts a qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive approach to investigate the case of Syrian women's clandestine asylum journeys from Syria to Germany. This thesis is developed around one key research question: "How have Syrian women experienced the clandestine asylum journeys to Germany along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route during the period 2014–2016?" And the sub-questions are as follows:

1- What are the Syrian women's drivers for seeking clandestine asylum journeys to Germany?
2- How do the Syrian women experience the clandestine journey along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route?

3- How do the Syrian women experience the clandestine journey on the Western Balkan route?

4- What challenges, insecurities, and violence do Syrian women face in their journeys?

5-How do Syrian women negotiate the challenges and cope with these insecurities?

The aim of this research is to bring the voices of Syrian women to light and offer empirical evidence regarding the challenges and struggles they face across the EU's external borders. The specific research aims are:

1-Identifying the main drivers for Syrian women's seeking clandestine asylum journeys to Germany. In particular, the push factors for fleeing Syria, the push factors behind leaving the region neighbouring Syria, the pull factors to Germany, and the factors behind choosing the clandestine border crossing will be identified.

2-Examining the ways in which the Syrian women experienced the clandestine journey along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route between 2014-2016.

3-Examining the ways in which Syrian women experienced the clandestine journey on the Western Balkan route between 2014-2016.

4-Identifying the challenges that Syrian women face as a result of their gendered identity and the securitization of migration.

5-Exploring the ways in which Syrian women responded to and coped with these challenges.

Accordingly, qualitative research methods are particularly suitable for the aim of this research. Qualitative methods of data collection help to get a deeper understanding of the lived realities of women and the case under study rather than generate shallow data and generalizable outcomes. According to Harding (2008), it is sufficient to use

qualitative research methods to reflect the standpoint of a certain social group. Moreover, it is sufficient to provide a space for Syrian women to express themselves, their lived experiences, their perceptions, their drivers for migration, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they adopted during their clandestine asylum journeys. This research uses a descriptive and exploratory approach to understand the nuances of the case of Syrian women's clandestine asylum journeys to the EU and to represent their voices and experiences. This research is limited to the case of Syrian women. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines a case study as "an intensive analysis of an individual unit (such as a person or community) stressing developmental factors in relation to the environment" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). Thus, this thesis examines the individual level—Syrian women—as they are the main unit of analysis. This study approaches women as active actors experiencing structural limitations. In other words, by analysing the individual unit and utilising a gendered lens, the intersection between macro-level structures like the EU securitization of migration and micro-level personal gender identity can be captured.

This qualitative research contains a mix of inductive and deductive elements to offer comprehensive insights into the research question. Inductive elements amplify Syrian women's voices and perceptions, as well as they bring their lived experiences to the centre of the research. Fieldwork-oriented research and a bottom-up approach are significant in challenging gendered, Eurocentric, and essentialized assumptions addressing women affected by conflicts in the Global South as passive victims (Gerard and Pickering, 2014). At the same time, this research draws on the previous literature and theories of gender and securitization. These theories provide the necessary background for understanding the experiences of Syrian women during border crossings. They guide the analysis of the challenges and the interpretations of the shared pattern of gendered discrimination that Syrian women experience because of both patriarchy and the EU securitization of migration.

This research is not aimed at generalising the findings; rather, it aims offering an in-depth and nuanced analysis of the asylum experiences of Syrian women across the EU's external borders to answer the research question in a holistic way by addressing

both the challenges that Syrian women face and the strategies they adopt to overcome these challenges.

1.3.1. Data Collection

This research is based on fieldwork. Empirical data has been collected through a semi-structured, in-depth online interviewing method. Interviews have been conducted with fourteen Syrian refugee women who survived the irregular clandestine journey to Germany during the period 2014–2016. The data collected in this thesis was collected as a part of the "Akdeniz ve Balkan Göç Hatlarında Sınır ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet" research project coordinated by Prof. Dr. Nurcan Özgür Baklacıoğlu at Istanbul University. However, this thesis represents an individual research project and personal effort in research design and analysis.

Collecting data from the field through the semi-structured interviewing method has been widely used in qualitative feminist studies (Dinçer, 2019). Semi-structured interviews give space for both the researcher and the research participant to move beyond the list of research questions and allow for a flexible dialogue during the interview and an in-depth understanding of the research context. Gerard and Pickering (2014) argue that qualitative methods, like in-depth interviews, are more useful in dealing with research with women from the global south, as it allows women to express their memories and lived experiences through their words and from their own standpoint. This offers in-depth data and details about their memories during the journeys, their asylum drivers, their feelings, their perceptions, the difficulties they faced, and how they responded to them. This is gathered during the semi-structured interviewing method.

The online virtual interview method has been adopted as a main tool for collecting data for different reasons. First, this research has been carried out during the extraordinary global health conditions during the outbreak of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. In early 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared that the novel COVID-19 is a global pandemic. This global Corona virus pandemic has affected freedom of movement and the international mobility of goods and people. Since I am, as a researcher, a Syrian national residing in Turkey, obtaining a Schengen

visa from Turkey to the EU was faltering during the period from 2020 to early 2022. In the context of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU adopted additional travel restrictions, entry bans, and extraordinary internal and external border control measures in the Schengen zone. The European Council has issued an entry ban for residents outside the EU and the European Economic Area (EEA). This entry ban was issued on lists defining safe third countries since March 2020 and would be maintained until early 2022. These lists have been updated every two weeks, and Turkey remained outside the safe countries category (Shengenvisainfo, n.d.). An entry ban was issued on non-essential travel from Turkey to the EU as an extraordinary measure during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, the limited time frame given to this master's research required seeking creative and alternative solutions for data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic to enhance the accessibility of the primary data in the field. The global health situation already delayed the research process. The interviews were conducted over a five-month period, from December 2021 to May 2022. Although part of this period was after the waiver of the entry ban from Turkey, being a Syrian national added an extra layer of difficulty to mobility into the EU after COVID-19 regarding the securitization of migration and asylum. Syrian nationals often face a de facto rejection of their Schengen visas to the EU due to the fear of seeking asylum after accessing the Schengen zone; thus, completing the online technique in interviews was the best choice.

To sum up, the context of the research has an impact on the tools used in the data collection; the global health conditions, the limited time frame given to the research, and my positionality as a female Syrian researcher were the main drivers behind turning to online interviewing as an alternative method to face-to-face interviewing to access Syrian women in Germany and collect the required data.

There are advantages to utilising online platforms in the research process. In the context of migration research, it is beneficial to employ digital mediums to reach "hard-to-reach" communities because it goes beyond the limited geographical domain (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). The accessibility advantage is highly relevant to the

circumstances of this research. As it was presented earlier, I, as a researcher, faced barriers to mobility and collecting data. These barriers relate to international health conditions, restrictions on mobility, limited financial resources, gendered norms, and limited time. I was able to overcome these barriers by conducting online interviews with Syrian refugee women. Keen et al. (2022) argue that virtual qualitative research is essential for accessing marginalised voices and hard-to-reach geographies, either because of travel and financial restrictions or because they are conflict-affected and dangerous geographies. Moreover, it is useful in "enhancing international research" (Keen et al., 2022) and providing access to faraway locations and overcoming financial limitations and travel restrictions, especially for female researchers in the global South.

Feminist social researchers have always been creative in ways of data collection and, therefore, have utilised digital platforms for serving feminist research by accessing and presenting women's voices (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). This is relevant to this study in terms of accessing and amplifying Syrian women's voices, which is one of the main aims of this research. Setting limits to knowledge production approaches and forcing specific traditional data collection tools often have a disempowering impact on women in the global south. It maintains the unequal knowledge production process between the global north and south. Female researchers from the global south face difficulties in mobility to the global north for field work and academic careers. These difficulties are related to the political, economic, and social structures that render global South feminist researchers with limited resources and opportunities. These difficulties set boundaries on the choices of research topics and questions, as if global South feminist researchers are deprived of searching in distant geographical locations in the global north because of their limited mobility and access to these territories in the global north, like the EU. As mentioned earlier, being a middle-class Syrian woman in Turkey adds an extra layer of difficulty to acquiring a Schengen visa for accessing the EU for conducting field work, in addition to the financial limitations and travel expenses, as this research has not been funded by any institutions. Given these structural limitations, online interviewing played an important role in facilitating the data collection for the research.

Accordingly, Linabary and Hamel (2017) argue that utilising online networks in data collection has an empowering impact on research for both the researcher and research participants due to its flexibility to access research participants in faraway geographies and listen to the voices of those unrepresented women. It is helpful for the research process and for amplifying the voices of women in academia and knowledge production because it allows the female researcher to overcome travel, financial, and logistical restrictions. In this regard, the online interviewing method has an empowering impact on feminist researchers in terms of challenging power structures and offering flexible and affordable access to research participants and territories. As well as having an empowering impact on the participants. In this study, many Syrian women expressed that they were grateful for hearing their stories. They felt they were heard in online interviews. One Syrian woman said,

> "In my opinion, we need this [kind of research] a lot... I mean, I am provoked... I am provoked by a situation… that it is enough to portray the Arab woman as her right was eaten and as a victim, no [laugh] the story is not like that".

However, there are limitations to virtual qualitative research that should be acknowledged. These limitations will be discussed further in the "research limitations and ethical considerations section". It is also important to note that online interviewing is not a replacement for face-to-face interviews, especially in feminist social research. If so, it may have a disempowering impact on women regarding the global gender gap in accessing technology, the internet, and mobile devices. Relying only and over time on an online interviewing style deprives women from lower classes, higher ages, and marginalized groups of being visible in social research. Therefore, they are underrepresented. The online interviewing method is an additional tool given to the social researcher to enhance the diversity of the data collection tools and the strategies for accessing the field. It is worth noting that this research aims not to generalise Syrian women's experiences, yet it is focused qualitative research that aims to bring the voices of Syrian women to light and deepen the understanding of Syrian women's clandestine asylum experiences.

Regarding the sampling techniques, the purposeful sampling method along with the snowball technique have been used to access the research sample. Purposive sampling

involves selecting participants who meet specific criteria that are relevant to the research question and objectives. The criteria are based on the research question and objectives. This method allows researchers to select participants who can provide relevant and insightful data to answer the research question. Accordingly, in this research, the criteria were based on finding Syrian refugee women who survived the clandestine asylum journey from Syria to Germany using risky and irregular pathways through the Eastern Mediterranean route and the Balkan route. One limitation of purposeful sampling is that it has a limited possibility for generalizability of the findings. Yet, this limitation can be avoided, as this research does not aim to generalize the findings but to understand the experiences of Syrian women.

As a Syrian researcher, being part of the Syrian community allowed me to dig into Syrian women's online networks. I started the recruiting process by accessing the feminist digital sphere and women's clusters on social media platforms, mainly Syrian women's Facebook groups. In these groups, Syrian women share their ideas, concerns, and asylum experiences with the EU. There were discussions among Syrian women on the border crossing and the difficulties they faced, how they negotiate mobility and asylum journeys to the EU, and the recent laws and border policies. These spaces where Syrian women share their knowledge were the starting point for observation of how Syrian women contact each other and describe their journeys.

I started approaching Syrian women through Facebook, particularly the Syrian women in Germany's Facebook solidarity groups. Those who travelled in clandestine and irregular ways were identified by their comments on these topic-related posts and discussions. I asked Syrian women to participate in the research through direct messages on Facebook as well as through sharing posts on women's groups illustrating the research aims and calling for women to participate. From the seventeen women approached on Facebook, only one woman agreed to conduct the online interview. Despite trying to build online trust by showing personal identification and being participants in the same Syrian women's groups, most of the women did not respond to the message.

Therefore, resorting to the snowballing technique was the solution to enhance access to Syrian women and trust relationships. The snowball sampling technique is often used when studying specific populations or accessing "hard-to-reach" communities (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). I started to ask my friends and relatives about Syrian women who could possibly participate in the research. They were asked to refer other women who meet the criteria to participate in the study. I continued to publish posts on Instagram and Facebook addressing the research aims and calling for possible participants.

In my positionality as a Syrian woman and second-generation migrant, I was stepping into both locations: the insider and the outsider. Being a Syrian woman allowed me to understand the social, political, and cultural context of Syrian refugee women. Yet, I am placed in a privileged position in terms of not experiencing and fleeing the war in Syria. I am a second-generation Syrian migrant who was born and raised in Saudi Arabia. This often reflects a privileged location compared to women who fled war. To balance the relations of power, I never introduced myself as the "expert", I asked the Syrian women to share their memories because I wanted to learn more about their lived experiences because they are the experts of their own journeys.

My positionality as an outsider—a second-generation migrant—has impacted the data accessed. Almost all the Syrian women asked me about my origins and to which city I belong in Syria, and some of them asked me in what district I used to live in Aleppo. They probably wanted to make sure that they were safe from social surveillance and control. In my conversation with a Syrian woman informant who works as the head of women's office at a relevant non-governmental organisation (NGO), she remarked that some of the Syrian women prefer to deal with outsiders as they feel ashamed and talk about sensitive issues with the insiders. This was an advantage for the research, as they tended to be relaxed when discussing their personal stories.

Regarding the sample size, in qualitative research, the emphasis is on depth rather than breadth. Therefore, a smaller sample size of participants may be appropriate for some studies, in contrast to quantitative studies, where more participants are required. Interviews are not aimed at generalizing but at understanding how being a woman

affects the process of seeking clandestine asylum in the EU. It is critical to prioritise the quality of interviews conducted over the quantity and depth of the data collected. Generally, there is no fixed number of interviews required in feminist qualitative research. The number of interviews varies in different studies and depends on different factors like the research question, the nature of the topic under study, the scope of the study, the quality of the data obtained, the homogeneity of the sample, and the time given for the research project. In general, the number of interviews conducted in feminist qualitative research should be sufficient to achieve data saturation, which means that the researcher has gathered enough data to fully investigate the research question and that no new information is revealed in subsequent interviews. According to Guest et al. (2006), in qualitative research, data saturation is often achieved in homogeneous and purposeful samples by conducting twelve interviews. In this study, 14 interviews have been conducted with Syrian women residing in Germany who survived the irregular asylum journey between 2014 and 2016.

Regarding the sample, this research was carried out with fourteen Syrian refugee women who have experienced clandestine asylum journeys from Syria to Germany. All of them crossed through the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route from Turkey to Greece, then crossed the Western Balkan route from Greece to Germany between the 2014 and 2016 refugee "crisis". Almost all of them had pre-determined and planned journeys where they fled Syria to Turkey or crossed through Lebanon to Turkey to start their clandestine journeys along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route. Only two women experienced fragmented journeys by staying in Turkey first and then deciding to complete their onward mobility through the Aegean Sea. Therefore, this research will consider the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route's experiences. And the experiences of living in Turkey will be outside the scope of this research. Yet, it will be elaborated on as a part of the migration drivers in the third chapter.

All the interviews with Syrian refugee women were carried out online and lasted between one and three hours. The language of the interviews was Arabic, which is the mother tongue of both the researcher and the interviewed women. The interviews were carried out online using different applications like Zoom, Facebook calls, and WhatsApp video and voice calls, depending on the preferences of the participants.

Some of the interviews were conducted via video call (8 women), and some women preferred to conduct the interview via voice call (6 women). I acknowledge that voice calls are less engaging and offer limited opportunities for observing the body language of the participants. Yet, it is still valuable when attention has been paid to the voice tone, silence, laughter, and other emotions. Moreover, the preference of the participant is a key factor that should be taken into account to comply with the ethical guidelines of the research (Keen et al., 2022).

The research participants were based in Berlin (11 women), Frankfurt (1 woman), and Dresden (2 women). And I, as the researcher, was based in Istanbul. As mentioned earlier, the interviews were conducted between December 2021 and May 2022. The sample was diverse in its sociodemographic characteristics. The age of the sample varied between 23 and 60 years old. Their education level also varied; some of them had completed higher education, while others had not. They came from different parts of Syria, both urban and rural. The sociodemographic information, such as age, marital status, and education, that defines the participants and helps the research is presented in the third chapter.

1.3.2. Data Analysis

The present study employs a thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the in-depth online interviews. Thematic analysis involves the process of identifying characters or themes in the qualitative data collected during the fieldwork. Thematic analysis is the most popular method for qualitative research in social science. In this study, fourteen recorded in-depth interviews with Syrian women have been transcribed in Arabic in a Microsoft Word document. Then it was translated into English in other Microsoft Word documents. The written transcripts have been analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) six-stage thematic analysis framework. This framework is a useful and effective method because it provides a clear, systematic, and structured approach to data analysis. Thematic analysis is about identifying relevant patterns in the data and interpreting them in relation to the research question and objectives. Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) six-stage thematic analysis involves acquainting yourself

with your data, creating the first codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, producing the results, and reporting the results.

Considering the research aims and questions, the analysis of the data collected through the interviews contains three main sections. First, the drivers behind the clandestine journeys to Europe in the exit stage: this analysis includes the push factors from Syria, the push factors behind leaving the region neighbouring Syria, the pull factors to Germany, and the factors behind choosing the clandestine border crossing. Second, the challenges and difficulties during the transit across the Eastern Mediterranean route and the Balkan route, in particular, the patterns of gendered discrimination and the relationships with various actors. Finally, the practices and strategies that Syrian women employed to cope with these challenges during exit and transit are analysed.

1.3.3. Limitations and Ethical Considerations

This section will present the limitations, challenges, and ethical considerations of the current virtual qualitative research on Syrian women's clandestine asylum journeys. As well as that, it will demonstrate the ways in which these challenges and considerations have been addressed to enhance the credibility of the research.

Doing research in the field of forced migration means dealing with sensitive and harmful topics like clandestine asylum journeys, war-related experiences, and gender-based violence. Accordingly, addressing these sensitive topics may render research participants in a vulnerable situation regarding their special lived experiences and vulnerabilities. Moreover, these harmful memories played a role in preventing Syrian refugee women from joining the study and sharing their lived experiences. In this study, it was a challenging process to access and recruit research participants. Many of the Syrian refugee women in Germany had either busy schedules or were reluctant to talk about their past asylum experiences. One of the women who participated in this research remarked the following:

> "There is a good percentage of women who do not want to go back to remembering the journey of refuge and calling it 'the journey of death'. Not everyone has the desire to tell the story, and women do not have the time. They are committed to language courses and to their children. Either they have no desire, or they do not have the time."

Therefore, refugee women who joined the research process were vulnerable to being re-traumatized when addressing hard and painful memories of their journey. Of course, the trauma's impact and response varied according to personal factors. It is important to keep ethical concerns in mind and develop certain practices and strategies to protect the participants and do no harm during the research process. In this regard, open-ended questions have been employed to avoid re-traumatizing the impact of the research topic on refugee women. During the online interviews, in its two styles—video and voice—I used to be attentive to body language, to discomfort, to long silences, and to verbal and non-verbal signals that highlighted possible mental harm. When recognizing such signs of discomfort, I used to avoid addressing the topic. Moreover, informed consent has been obtained verbally by the participants before the interview. The Syrian women's participation in this research is voluntary in nature, and they have the right to leave or stop the interview and not address any of the questions. Their permission has also been sought before recording the interview.

The personal safety of the participants has been guaranteed by employing anonymity and confidentiality principles. Addressing sensitive issues like smuggling across borders and criticizing security measures was problematic for some refugees, as some participants were afraid of legal consequences regarding the refusal of their citizenship applications. It may also render the participants vulnerable to transnational black-market harassment. Therefore, personal, sensitive identifying information has been coded to protect the identity of the participants.

I replaced the names of the participants with nicknames. Allen and Wiles (2016) highlighted the importance of including the research participants in the process of naming as it is a "nuanced act of research, affected by issues of power and voice". In this regard, to ensure the women's voices are heard and to confront the researcher-researched power hierarchy, Syrian women were asked to choose their own nicknames to identify themselves in the research. In that way, the process of naming became more inclusive, and women were involved in the process of decision-making around naming.

Information management has been guaranteed by keeping the fourteen interview transcripts and voice recordings in a safe place. They were kept on a password-protected personal laptop device. Therefore, no access to these information and documents other than the researcher has been ensured.

There are challenges to virtual qualitative research as well. The Internet offers a limited opportunity compared to face-to-face interviews for building trust with the participants. It offers a limited space for contextual and special interaction, thereby reducing the quality of the data gathered. In this research, and to enhance the trust relationships between the participants and the researcher, the snowball technique has been employed. According to Linabary and Hamel (2017), the internet offers an opportunity for long-term interaction, reflection, self-sharing, following up with the interview, and feedback. Therefore, it was possible to establish a long-term interaction through the internet. In this research, the engagement method was through making Facebook friendships, chatting, and following up on WhatsApp.

Despite the fact that this research is limited to women's past experiences and stories of border crossing between 2014 and 2016, I acknowledge that it is essential to employ observations in every interview setting and location. As it is essential to understand and recognize the presence of other family members or any kind of "family surveillance" during the interview. Observations were limited in this research in the case of voice-only interviews. Yet, attention has been given to voice tone and verbal expressions, as was mentioned earlier, to capture any harmful re-traumatizing impact of the research questions.

Moreover, Syrian refugee women had the right to choose the time of the interview. They were asked to set a suitable interview time, date, and location for them. Some of the interviews took place in the late hours after the sleep of children and husbands; some of the interviews were in the early morning before the language class. One interview had to be ended because the interviewee's children were returning from school. She explained that she did not want to speak about this in front of them.

Finally, I acknowledge the gender gap in women's access to mobile phones and the internet globally. Therefore, the online interviewing method may not be suitable for

generalizability and representing all women's voices, especially those from lower social classes and rural areas. However, this research is not aimed at representing all the voices and generalizing the outcomes, but rather it is aimed at offering an in-depth understanding of a sample of Syrian women's clandestine asylum journeys and the impact of securitization on women's experiences, as well as the ways in which these women responded to these challenges. Therefore, the sample size was relatively small in this research and limited to those who have access to mobile phones and the internet; therefore, it may not represent the experiences of all Syrian refugee women.

To conclude, this chapter offered the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological framework of the current study on Syrian women's asylum journeys to Germany. This research is informed by several bodies of literature, including critical security studies, the securitization of migration, and gender IR literature. These bodies of literature will offer the necessary background for understanding the unique experiences of Syrian women in the context of irregular, clandestine asylum journeys to the EU and bringing the voices of these women into the centre of the security debate. In this regard, the securitization of migration concept has been examined first, followed by the feminist approach to security and gender IR theories, and then an overview of the existing literature addressing refugee women's clandestine asylum journeys to the EU revealed the significance of gender in studying clandestine migration to the EU and the limitations in addressing women as active agents of security. The last section presented the qualitative research design and interviews as the main research methods. The next chapter will offer an overview of the securitization of migration on the Eastern Mediterranean route and the Western Balkan route.

CHAPTER II

SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION ON THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA ROUTE AND THE BALKAN ROUTE DURING 2014-2016

This chapter will offer a brief overview of the securitization of the migration along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route between 2014 and 2016. These routes, along with other migration routes such as the Central Mediterranean route, the Western Mediterranean route, and the Balkan route, constitute the main pathways for the mixed flows of asylum seekers and irregular migrants to enter the EU. This chapter will illustrate the growing EU border control that aims to manage migration flows during the European refugee "crisis" and its impact on women's experiences. The securitization of migration and the militarization of the EU's border regime are complex processes that involve various actors at various levels, such as the EU level, EU member states, non-EU countries, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), and private security companies. This chapter will highlight various EU border control and securitization strategies and practices, specifically the role of Frontex as a central actor in EU external border management, then will assess the impact of securitization on women's experiences. This brief overview will offer a necessary context for understanding borders along the irregular migratory routes to the EU as both sites of state security as well as human insecurity and gendered insecurities. In simpler terms, this overview will facilitate the understanding of the consequences of securitizing migration on the experiences of Syrian women seeking asylum in the EU, which will be addressed in the third chapter.

2.1. SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION ON THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA ROUTE 2014-2016

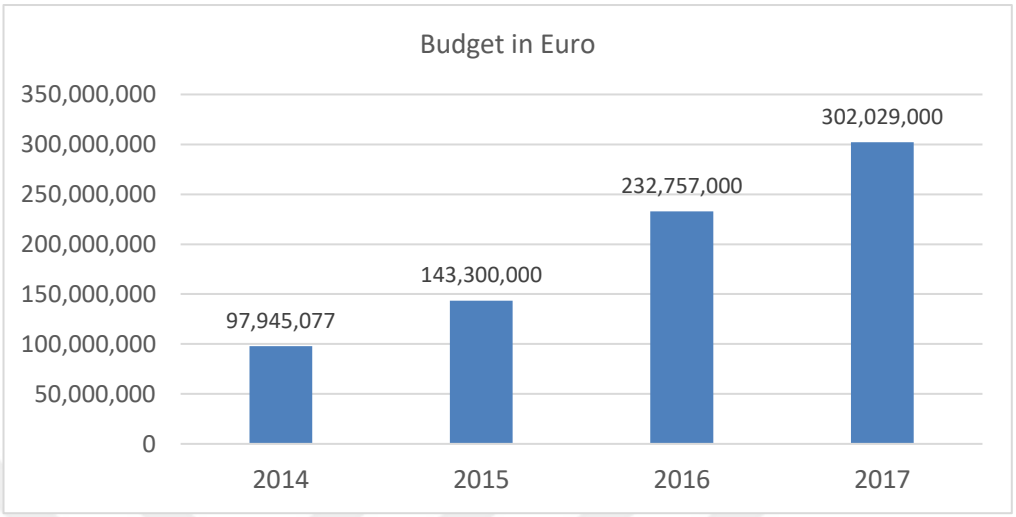
This section will provide an overview of the growing EU's securitization of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route. It will start by introducing Frontex and its operations along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route, then highlight key border policies and practices, and securitization strategies that aim to respond to the growing migratory flows in the Aegean Sea during the European refugee "crisis".

Frontex is a central actor in the EU's border security. It was established by the European Commission regulation EC2007/2004 in 2004 to protect the EU member states and the Schengen zone from external threats, mainly irregular migration and organised crime (Karamanidou, 2015, p. 45). The Frontex agency is responsible for supporting EU member states in border management and migration controls. Through border surveillance of the migratory flows, Frontex annually identifies areas of risk where there is a need for allocating human and technical resources and developing strategies for response.

In its annual risk analysis documents, "illegal" migration has been defined as a "threat" to the EU borders (Sachseder et al., 2022), along with various cross-border crimes like money laundering, weapon trafficking, trafficking in persons, and terrorism. These migratory flows are dominated by young males, thereby posing a security threat to the Schengen zone (Sachseder et al., 2022). Frontex plays an essential role in managing border surveillance, the development of border technology, training, and capacity building for border guards in EU and Schengen member states. It also cooperates with the non-EU countries to enforce the process of voluntary and forced return to these countries. Moreover, it offers support for non-EU states in migration and border control outside the EU territory.

The growing power and influence of Frontex over the years illustrate that the securitization of migration has been adopted as a model for responding to irregular migration flows. There has been an increasing budget for Frontex. For instance, in 2005, Frontex's annual budget was 6 million euros (Frontex, 2005), and in 2017, it reached 302 million euros (Frontex, 2017, p. 2). Moreover, Frontex's budget is mainly spent on missions and operations (Frontex, 2017, p. 3). Therefore, there is a growing border security industry in response to the migratory flows (See Figure 2.1). The securitization process has been growing with the increased activities of Frontex's sea border surveillance. For instance, the activities and performance of Frontex personnel during different maritime joint operations have increased from 33,767 man-days in 2014 to 72,000 man-days in 2015 (Frontex, 2015b, p.52).

Figure 2.1 Frontex Budget 2014-2017.



Source: (Frontex, 2015a; 2017)

There are several sorts of Frontex operations at the EU's external borders, including rapid *ad hoc* border interventions in cases of crisis, voluntary and forced return operations, and joint operations with different state and non-state actors, especially with NATO. These operations took place at different sea, land, and air borders at various locations, like in Italy, Spain, Hungary, Croatia, and Greece.

The Eastern Mediterranean Sea route is one of the main irregular immigration routes in the Mediterranean Sea, located between Turkey and Greece (See Figure 2.2). Frontex initiated Joint Operation Poseidon Sea in 2011 with the aim of assisting Greece in protecting its borders, fighting cross-border crime, identifying "illegal" arrivals, and supporting return operations. The operation name reflects the hegemony in ruling the sea and controlling mobility, as Poseidon refers to the ancient "Greek God of the Sea" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). Poseidon jointly operates with the participation of twenty-seven European Union member states (Benedicto, 2019, p. 19). The Poseidon operation can be traced back to 2006, when it was first launched by the Frontex. This operation was located first at the Greek-Albanian land border as well as the Bulgarian-Turkish land border in 2006 and was expanded later to cover the Aegean Sea (Benedicto, 2019, p.19).

Figure 2.2 The Eastern Mediterranean Sea Route from Turkey to Greece.

Source: (Booth, 2016)

In 2015, the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route witnessed a sharp increase in clandestine sea crossings departing from Turkey to Greece in a hidden way far from the EU border's surveillance. These clandestine crossings were mainly dominated by Syrian asylum seekers, Iraqis, and Afghans who were fleeing violence and seeking protection in the EU. According to the Frontex risk analysis report (2016), the number of detected Syrian asylum seekers at the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route in 2014 was 27,025; in 2015, this number had rapidly increased to nearly half a million (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 : Detected Irregular Border Crossings at the Eastern Mediterranean Route

Year	Sea Border Crossings	Syrian Nationals
2013	11 831	5 361
2014	44 057	27 025
2015	873 179	489 011
2016	174 605	81 570
2017	34 732	13 957

Source: (Frontex Risk Analysis 2016, p.17; 2017, p.19)

Despite the fact that the Aegean Sea provides a relatively short distance for people compared to other sea routes across the Mediterranean, it is a highly securitized border

site. In light of the unfolding crisis in the Mediterranean in 2015, several measures were outlined during the European Council meeting in April 2015 to “protect lives” at sea and address the tragic situation. These measures include fighting traffickers, preventing “illegal” migration flows, bolstering the EU's presence at sea, and promoting internal solidarity and responsibility (European Council 2015). The Greek Coast Guard, the Hellenic Coast Guard, and Frontex have been accused of practicing systematic pushbacks against refugee and migrants’ boats at the Aegean Sea, forcing these overcrowded boats to return to the Turkish waters and preventing them from entering the Greek territorial waters (Human Rights Watch, 2014, 2015). According to Human Rights Watch (2014), the Hellenic Coast Guard is maintaining illegal practices by refusing to help asylum boats, pushing back, and letting them be exposed to death. These pushback operations at the sea border limit access to asylum by enforcing the collective return without any individual assessment of their personal status. The process of expelling refugees violates the principle of non-refoulement in international law and represents a clear violation of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Moreover, these systematic practices of pushback have been conducted by Frontex in various joint operations in the Mediterranean as well as by different EU member states like Italy, Greece, and Spain (European Parliament, 2015, pp. 31–33). Furthermore, Amnesty International petitioned the Frontex Executive Director in April 2014 to cease Joint Operation Poseidon at the Greek sea and land borders due to widely prevalent human rights violations and practices of pushbacks (Amnesty International, 2014, p. 17). Yet there was no concrete response from Frontex. These violent practices of securitization at different sea borders are harshly affecting people on the move, especially women and children, and risking their lives in the Aegean Sea (Cosse, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2014). Between 2014 and 2016, UNHCR assessed that 1605 people died or went missing during clandestine migratory journeys from Turkey to Greece (UNHCR, n.d.-c).

The securitization process increased with the increasing rate of migratory flows during the years of the refugee "crisis", Frontex launched Poseidon Rapid Intervention for a three-month period in December 2015 to further support Greece and enforce border management by deploying vessels at the Greek border and new border guards ("more

than 700") to enforce border surveillance, support identification, and fingerprinting activities for the arrivals at various Greek islands (Frontex, 2015b, p. 28). In February 2016, the European Commission coordinated with NATO to support the Frontex Poseidon Rapid Intervention operation. NATO's Standing Maritime Group 2, a deployment of seven ships, enhanced surveillance, and information sharing "to stem the flow of illegal trafficking and migration" at the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route (NATO, 2016). This militarized response by the EU and its cooperation with NATO has been criticised and labelled as an insufficient response to the growing protection needs in the Aegean Sea (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016).

The Aegean Sea in 2015 was a hotspot for search and rescue (S&R) operations by both state actors and non-state actors. These maritime operations aim to save lives at sea in accordance with international law (Koka & Veshi, 2019). The Turkish Coast Guard, the Greek Coast Guard, IOM, Médecins Sans Frontières, and others have been involved in search and rescue operations to save lives at sea. According to the Greek Embassy in Ankara (2016), more than 103,000 refugees were rescued in the Aegean Sea in 2015 as part of its search and rescue mission. However, these efforts of search and rescue operations were inadequate to respond to the growing migratory flows in the Aegean Sea, as the help comes late or never comes at all, and there were calls for allocating more resources from the EU to protect lives at sea and enhance the S&R operations (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016).

However, even though Frontex has incorporated the fundamental rights approach into its operations, such as complying with the principle of non-refoulement and promoting gender equality in border management (Freedman, 2016a), irregular sea border crossings have still been targeted by heavily securitized border control and punitive practices such as pushbacks. Moreover, the intervention of volunteers and NGOs in rescuing practices and S&R operations has been considered by Frontex a "pull factor" towards the EU and a tool in the hands of smuggling networks because it "strengthens their business model by increasing the chances of success" (Frontex, 2017, p. 32).

The securitization, however, moves beyond the Aegean Sea and covers various practices of punishment for those who crossed the borders irregularly. Those who

survive sea journeys and arrive on the Greek islands are exposed to detention, ill-treatment, and physical violence and abuse by border guards (Aljazeera, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2014; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016). Moreover, during the climate of "panic politics", the implementation of many aspects of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), such as the 2013/33/EU directive on minimum standards of reception and gender-sensitive measures in reception facilities, has proven to be insufficient. There have been reports on inadequate, overcrowded reception facilities in Greece and a lack of access to healthcare, sanitation, legal assistance, and basic rights, which raise human rights concerns (Aljazeera, 2015; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016).

The EU proposed a solution to the 2015 refugee crisis by externalizing its borders with Turkey. The EU-Turkey Statement was signed in March 2016. The Statement includes strengthening cooperation between the EU and Turkey to fight irregular migration from Turkey and respond to the Syrian refugee crisis. According to the agreement, Turkey is required to enforce its border management capacities. The EU will return every Syrian asylum seeker who arrives in Greece back to Turkey, and in return, the EU will resettle Syrian refugees from Turkey on a one-to-one basis: for every returned asylum seeker, one asylum seeker will be resettled in the EU (International Rescue Committee, 2022). The agreement also included 6 billion euros in financial support for Turkey, allocated for Syrian refugees and responding to their growing humanitarian needs. However, human rights groups have accused the EU of failing to respect the rights of asylum seekers on the move and to fulfil its responsibility to protect them (Amnesty International, 2021). Moreover, the resettlement scheme is problematic because of its voluntary nature and the internal divide in the EU member states. Out of the total 72,000 places in the EU allocated for resettlement, only 20,002 people had been resettled under the one-for-one agreement as of March 2019 (European Commission, 2019, p. 4).

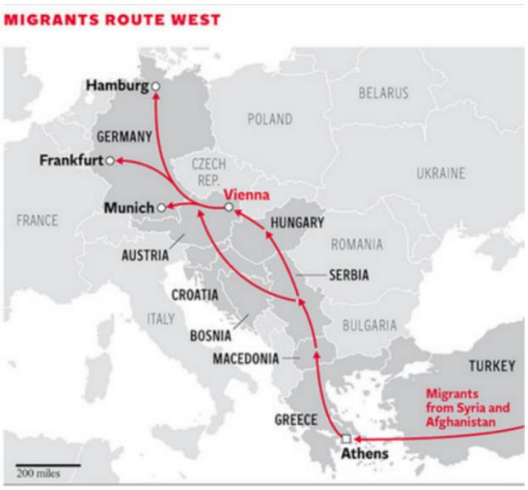
To conclude, refugee flows in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route have been stemmed and dramatically reduced with the growing securitization of the Aegean Sea. As Table 2.1 illustrates, the number of Syrian asylum seekers dropped from nearly half a million in 2015 to 13,957 in 2017. There is a diminishing tendency for the EU to share

responsibility for refugee protection and a growing tendency to control and stem migratory flows. The securitization of migration appears in the growing resources allocated for EU external border protection, the EU's support for Frontex's border surveillance operations, and externalizing EU borders to third countries, as illustrated in the EU-Turkey Statement in 2016. This trend of securitization of migration results in more dangerous and expensive clandestine asylum and migration journeys and more personal insecurity, especially for women on the move, as will be illustrated further in the third chapter.

2.2. SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION ON THE WESTERN BALKAN ROUTE 2014-2016

The Western Balkan Route is a route that runs through several countries in the south-eastern Europe. It has been used by asylum seekers and migrants to reach Western European countries like Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. It encompasses different countries in the Southeast Europe, starting from Greece - the Republic of North Macedonia – Serbia – Hungary – Austria- to Germany. After the closure of Hungary's border in September 2015, the migratory route from Serbia to Austria switched, and the migratory flows crossed from Serbia – Croatia – Slovenia - Austria - to Germany (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 : The Western Balkan Route from Greece to Germany.



Source: (Kallius et al., 2016, p.2.)

During the years of refugee "crisis" in 2014 to 2016, the Western Balkan route witnessed an intense influx of migrants and asylum seekers (Table 2.2). This mobility has been perceived as "illegal" with the dominant securitization paradigm, even for asylum seekers. At the EU level, the onward mobility for refugees and asylum seekers to Northern Europe is restricted. The Dublin III regulation is one of the key regulations under the Common European Asylum system (CEAS) that regulates and determine the country responsible for proceeding the asylum claim, and mainly it is the first country of arrival, in geographical terms; the southern EU member states such as Greece. It aims to limit "asylum shopping" or the onward mobility of asylum seekers to more than one EU member state, in geographical terms: the northern EU member states. In 2015, Germany suspended Dublin III regulation for Syrian refugees for short period allowing their onward mobility to Germany and suspending their return to Greece (Dernback & Tagesspiegel, 2015).

Table 2.2 : Detected Irregular Border Crossings at the Western Balkan Route

Year	Border Crossings	Syrian Nationals
2013	19 951	1 171
2014	43 357	7 320
2015	764 038	90 065
2016	130 261	Undefined
2017	12 178	Undefined

Source: (Frontex Risk Analysis 2016, p.17; 2017, p.19; 2018, p.43)

However, the Western Balkan route witnessed a growing securitization process. Border control and protection have been strengthened in various countries along the route, such as Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, and Croatia. The years of the refugee "crisis" witnessed growing cooperation in border security between the EU, non-EU member states, and Frontex in exchanging information and intelligence regarding irregular border crossings. This route witnessed an increase in security forces, police, and border guards. Surveillance equipment and technologies have been called in to monitor and regulate the movement of migrants and refugees. Additional checkpoints have been created, and security forces have expanded to new geographical

locations. During the clandestine border crossing, people on the move and facilitators usually chose faraway and isolated routes from police surveillance. Accordingly, forests and green borders have been crossed where physical infrastructure and checkpoints were limited. In this regard, the deployment of thermal cameras at the Serbia- Hungary border to detect night-time border crossings was reported, with the intervention of German police in Serbia (Bzganovic, 2015). Moreover, Frontex's "Flexible Operational Activities 2015 Land" was launched, widening the scope of security surveillance at different green borders (Frontex, 2015b, p.52).

The securitization process has been growing with the increased activities and operations of Frontex along the western Balkan route to protect the EU's external borders. The growing "risk" of irregular clandestine migration (see Table 2.2) attracts more operations and budget for Frontex (see Figure 2.1). The activities and performance of Frontex personnel during joint operations on land have increased from 38,335 man-days in 2014 to 73,318 man-days in 2015 (Frontex, 2015b, p.52). For instance, Frontex launched "Joint Operation Focal Points 2015 Land" to support border staff, experts' exchange, border checks, registration, and fingerprinting activities at border entry: especially in hotspots in Greece (Frontex, 2015b, p.25). Frontex also launched "Joint Border Check Teams" land operation in border gates of the EU, particularly in Hungary, Croatia, and Bulgaria, to enhance the surveillance and security checks of travel documents and identity for irregular migrants (Frontex, 2015b, p.49).

However, the dynamics along the Balkan route in late 2015 and the beginning of 2016 shifted and intertwined between securitization and de-securitization as some countries on the Western Balkan route temporarily closed and re-opened their borders to control the flow of irregular immigrants and asylum seekers. The Western Balkan route shifted after Serbia from Hungary to Croatia after the closure of Hungarian borders with Serbia in September 2015 (Kuschminder et al., 2019, p.8) (See Figure 2.2). According to Kukavica and Plesničar (2016), Croatia was "forced" to admit and transfer the refugee flows to Slovenia after the closure of Hungarian borders with Serbia. However, despite the de-facto opening of borders, there were restrictions in terms of admitting specific numbers of daily border crossings. For instance, Austria allowed only 1500

people to cross per day, and Slovenia allowed 2500 people to cross per day. Moreover, these practices of border restrictions that aim to control mobility were leaving thousands of asylum seekers and migrants locked in overcrowded reception and transit facilities along the Croatian and Serbian borders (Kuschminder et al., 2019, p.8).

In line with the securitization process, violent security practices and human rights violations in various countries along the Western Balkan route were documented by different organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. These practices include the use of excessive force and mass violence like hitting, kicking, punching, pushbacks, and detention in Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary (Amnesty International, 2015. P.7). The use of rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse groups was documented at the Macedonian- Greek borders (Amnesty International, 2015b). These practices of mass violence target both women and children in these groups (Amnesty International, 2016). Moreover, Human Rights Watch (2015) investigated the arbitrary detention and the situation in the "Gazi papa" detention facility in Macedonia and reported inhumane conditions such as overcrowded cells, a lack of sanitation, and exposure to sexual assault for women. Arbitrary and administrative detention have also been documented also in Hungary and Serbia (Amnesty International, 2015. P.7).

Furthermore, constructing new or extending existing border barriers has been a common strategy among different EU countries and their neighbours along the western Balkan route. The growing border industry appeared in initiating and constructing five border barriers along the route with the aim of regulating and stemming the refugee flows. These borders include the Hungary-Serbia (Kuschminder et al., 2019, p.8), the Hungary-Croatia steel fence barriers (The Guardian, 2015), the Austria-Slovenia barrier (Frnace24. 2015), the Slovenia-Croatia barrier, and the Macedonia-Greece barrier (Kuschminder et al., 2019, 9).

To conclude, irregular migration on the Western Balkan route has been stemmed and dramatically reduced with the growing securitization of the route. This route was officially closed days before the announcement of the EU-Turkey statement in March

2016 (Kuschminder et al., 2019, 9). Accordingly, the number of detected irregular border crossings dropped from 764 038 in 2015 to 12 178 in 2017 (see table 2.2).

2.3. THE IMPACT OF THE SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION ON WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES ALONG THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN SEA ROUTE AND THE WESTERN BALKAN ROUTE

The securitization of migration on the Eastern Mediterranean Sea Route and the Western Balkan Route from 2014 to 2016 intersects with gender identity and impacts the experiences of women on the move. The available data on women's arrivals estimates that women constituted approximately one-third of the refugee flows during the refugee crisis; women constituted 29% of the refugee flows in 2014, 27% of the flows in 2015, and 32% of the flows in 2016 (Mixed Migration Platform, 2016, p. 2). This section will shed light on how this securitization of migration affected women and girls, focusing on various aspects such as gender-based violence, separation of families, and limited access to protection within the process of securitization.

The principle of gender equality has been included in the EU's border management strategy. In this context, Frontex included gender issues in its Fundamental Rights Training for Border Guards book in 2013 (Frontex, 2013). It recognized the violence against women on the move and suggested a gender-sensitive approach in its operations and among its workforce. Frontex emphasized the importance of gender analysis, considering the various experiences across genders, and emphasizing the gender mainstreaming approach in recognizing and responding to the special needs of women on the move. In this regard, it offered suggestions on providing sex-segregated facilities in both reception facilities and detention centres. It acknowledged the special situation of women detainees and the importance of meeting their special hygiene needs and ensuring their access to medical services and special treatment (Frontex, 2013, p.130). Moreover, it brought up a staff training on the interview techniques with women victims of sexual assaults and trafficking, suggesting the guards avoid pushing women to talk about sexual assaults, ask indirect questions, be attentive to body language, and suggest the necessity of the presence of female border guards during the interview and generally in the field (Frontex, 2013, pp. 94 -100).

Nevertheless, Frontex overlooked the situation of women on the move by providing partial and limited information on the gender dimension of the detected boat incidents and border crossings (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017b, p. 196). In this context, Frontex's 2015 Annual Risk Analysis Report barely highlighted the gender dimension and stated that females constituted 11% of detected "illegal" border crossings in 2014 (Frontex, 2015, P.17). In the following years, Frontex overlooked the gender dimension in its reports (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017b, p. 196). The 2016 report overlooked the gender dimension, while the 2017 report barely referred to the UNHCR's data that women constitute 21% of the arrivals to Greece (Frontex, 2017, Rist analysis, p.41). The invisibility of gender dimensions in the documentation of sea border crossing marginalizes women's special insecurities and experiences. Moreover, it illustrates the tendency to prioritise national security and border security over the security of women on the move.

Pickering and Powell (2017) also illustrate that women remain invisible in the available data on death at the Mediterranean Sea, as there is only partial and fragmented data from NGOs on border deaths and no official publicly accessible data. During the refugee "crisis", although the recoded death numbers differ between UNHCR and IOM, there was a steady increase in border deaths as a common trend in both UNHCR's and IOM's data (Pickering &Powell, 2017). According to IOM's Missing Migrants Project, it was estimated that 104 deaths occurred in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route in 2014, among them 7 males and 13 females, while the rest 84 deaths were unspecified (IOM Missing Migrants Project, n. d.). In 2015, it was estimated that 804 deaths occurred, among them 139 males and 124 females, and the majority of these deaths, 541, were unspecified (IOM Missing Migrants Project, n. d.). In 2016, it was estimated that 434 deaths occurred, among them 57 males and 61 females while the rest, 84, were unspecified (Missing Migrants Project, n.d.).

The deadly nature of asylum journeys across the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route affects women's health and wellbeing. In qualitative terms, the literature revealed that women are more likely to die while crossing international borders as well as during clandestine sea crossings (Freedman, 2016b; Pickering & Cochrane, 2013; Plambech, 2017). It also emphasizes the gendered nature of risk factors leading to women's deaths

while crossing the blue border. Plambech (2017) argues that women are more likely to lack swimming skills compared to men because of their gendered roles and confinement to the private sphere. On the boat, they are placed with their children, and they are the main ones responsible for rescuing them in any case of drowning. They also wear heavier clothes compared to men, and they often have limited access to safety equipment because of their limited financial resources. Moreover, the growing securitization of migration and the violent practices of pushbacks by the Greek authorities had a severe impact on women and children on the overcrowded boats (Cosse, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2014).

At the EU level, a gender-sensitive approach has been emphasized through the 2013/33/EU directive on minimum standards of reception and gender-sensitive measures of refugee applications for international protection, which requires the EU member states to include gender issues into their asylum systems (Official Journal of the European Union, 2013). However, the actual implementation of these gender-sensitive policies was insufficient during the European refugee crisis because of "panic politics" and the securitization of migration, particularly in Greece, Hungary, and Slovenia (Freedman, 2016a; UNHCR, 2015). Therefore, despite the EU's efforts to integrate gender into its border management, women on the move continued to experience gender-based violence during their clandestine journeys across the EU's external borders in various ways.

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights reported that "women and girls, especially those travelling alone, face particularly high risks of certain forms of violence, including sexual violence by smugglers, criminal groups, and individuals in countries along the route" (Commission for Human Rights, 2016). This vulnerability can be attributed to the masculine border policies and practices that create inequal power relations in the context of borders (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017b, pp. 24-26). Borders in this sense can be characterised as a male-dominated environment with the presence of armed groups, organized crime, smuggling and trafficking networks, militarized border guards. Women seeking asylum in such environments are perceived as easy targets of sexual violence and exploitation, with limited or no real protection provided for them.

The issue of gender-based violence remains a concern when it comes to the securitization of migration. Özgür Baklacıoğlu (2017b) argues that Frontex is not preventing violence against women at the borders; it is barely responding to it after it happens. In this context, Frontex identifies the smugglers as the main source of violence at the borders and suggests fighting against the smugglers strategy, which means a growing securitization of migration rather than offering alternatives to protect women on the move (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017b, p. 196). Furthermore, the EU border management policies continue to criminalize human mobility across the EU's external borders by constructing it as a "threat" to the EU borders (Sachseder et al., 2022). Therefore, protecting the collective security of the EU's external borders is prioritised over protecting the security of women crossing these borders (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017b, p. 197).

The inadequate implementation of the 2013/33/EU directive on minimum standards of reception and detention facilities by various member states exposed women to an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence. In 2016, Amnesty International released a report documenting instances of sexual abuse in Greece, Hungary, and Slovenia, in which women were coerced to sleep in insecure accommodations alongside men (Amnesty International, 2016). Furthermore, research conducted by Freedman in the same year examined the experiences of Syrian and Afghan women in locations including the Greek island of Kos, Serbia, and France, highlighted the inadequacies in addressing women's needs, and revealed various sources of gender-based insecurities, such as overcrowded reception facilities (Freedman, 2016a). Moreover, considering the specific healthcare needs that women and girls face during their asylum journeys, women experienced limited access to hygiene facilities, and pregnant women suffered from a lack of basic healthcare services along their asylum journeys (Amnesty International, 2016).

Another consequence of securitization measures and border violence is that women on the move, including pregnant women, were exposed to direct violence, physical harm, and injury from border guards in Greece, Macedonia, and Hungary, as well as administrative detention practices in these states (Amnesty International, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2015). Many women were separated from their children or other

family members because of both direct physical violence from border guards and administrative detention policies. As a result, family separation increases women's vulnerability to sexual violence. Moreover, cases of sexual abuse and rape were documented in various detention centres in Greece, Macedonia, and Hungary (Amnesty International, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2015).

On the Western Balkan route, reports from human rights organizations have emphasized that women and girls face the danger of exploitation and human trafficking during their transit in Macedonia and Serbia, which include sexual, labour, and organ exploitation (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2019; La Strada / Open Gate, 2016). However, documenting and identifying victims of trafficking is a challenging process due to the hidden nature of border crossing, the fear and lack of trust in authorities, the shortage of specialized personnel, the lack of protection and support services, the language barrier, and the fear of social stigma (La Strada / Open Gate, 2016).

Moreover, the lack of legal pathways for migration creates a full dependency on smugglers. In this situation, women on the move are at risk of sexual exploitation by smugglers, especially in cases of family separation and isolation from support networks. The unequal gender power relations facilitate the use of force and coercion; moreover, due to women's financial vulnerability, sexual exploitation was used as a form of payment to facilitate women's mobility.

This systematic gender-based discrimination continued throughout the clandestine journeys, involving various actors and contexts, including the domestic sphere. Freedman (2016a) highlights that women on the move endure abusive relationships due to the fear of being alone during their journeys. Moreover, cases of intimate partner violence and domestic abuse have been reported (Freedman, 2016a).

In conclusion, this chapter offered a brief overview of the securitization process and how the EU has adopted it as a model for responding to irregular migration flows on the Eastern Mediterranean route and the Balkan route. Frontex, EU member states, and transit countries played a role in the securitization process of these migratory routes between 2014 and 2016. These years illustrate a growing border security industry, such as strengthening surveillance, new technologies like thermal cameras, new border

barriers, crossing restrictions, and extensive border joint operations at different land and sea borders. In its fight against the "threat" of irregular migration, Frontex's budget has grown over the years. In this context, women on the move continue to face an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence during their clandestine journeys across the EU's external borders, and inadequate protection is offered to them. This brief overview of the securitization process of irregular migration aimed to facilitate the contextual understanding of the next chapter, which examines the clandestine asylum experiences of Syrian women on the Eastern Mediterranean route and the Western Balkan route.

CHAPTER III

SYRIAN WOMEN'S CLANDESTINE ASYLUM JOURNEYS ACROSS THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE AND THE BALKAN ROUTE BETWEEN 2014-2016

This chapter will give voice to the experiences of Syrian women. It will examine the clandestine asylum experiences of fourteen Syrian women who crossed the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route to seek asylum in Germany between 2014 and 2015. The analysis will examine the intersection between gendered social identities and the EU securitization of migration. This chapter is organized around several sections, starting with introducing the sample of fourteen Syrian women and their drivers for embarking on clandestine asylum journeys to Germany. In the second section, the experiences of transit will be investigated. In particular, the challenges and insecurities that Syrian women face when crossing the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route will be examined. Finally, in the third part, the strategies that these Syrian women developed to deal with various insecurities during the exit and transit stages will be examined.

3.1. GENERAL PROFILE OF THE INTERVIEWED SYRIAN WOMEN AND THEIR CLANDESTINE ASYLUM DRIVERS TO GERMANY

Syrian women who joined asylum flows to the EU made up a growing minority between 2014 and 2016 (Mixed Migration Platform, 2016, p.2). In 2015, Syrian females made 41.527 (only 26.2%) asylum applications in Germany, while Syrian males made 117.130 asylum applications (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2016, p. 22). As was mentioned in the first chapter, women's asylum experiences through clandestine border crossing are characterised by violence at every step of the journey. However, generalising women's experiences reproduces gendered stereotypes and overlooks the diversity of these experiences. In this study, the analysis of the Syrian asylum journeys is limited to the stories of fourteen Syrian refugee women. This study does not aim to generalise the experiences of all Syrian women, as it does not claim a representation of all Syrian women, yet it aims to bring the voice

of a group of Syrian women, the complexities of their experiences, and the role of gender and the securitization of migration in shaping their experiences. Therefore, general information about the interviewed Syrian women will be presented in the first section to facilitate the understanding of their experiences throughout this chapter. The second section will present the intertwined factors behind women's clandestine asylum journeys to Germany. These factors include the push factors from Syria, factors related to the regional asylum policies, pull factors to Germany, and factors behind the clandestine border crossings.

3.1.1. General Profile of the Interviewed Syrian Women

As was mentioned in the first chapter, this study is qualitative in nature; therefore, the sample of the interviewed Syrian women will be presented in this section. All the interviewed Syrian refugee women are residing in Germany, in Berlin (11 women), Frankfurt (1 woman), and Dresden (2 women). All the interviewed Syrian women experienced war in Syria. They expressed accessing Turkey "easily" in two ways: either directly by crossing the Syrian-Turkish land borders or by fleeing from Syria to Lebanon, then taking a flight or a ship to Turkey during the visa-free policy. All the participants experienced crossing the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route from Turkey to the Greek islands, then completing their onward mobility through the Western Balkan route to access Germany.

The sociodemographic characteristics of the research participants varied; the age of the sample varied between 23 and 60 years old. The majority had previously worked in Syria (10) while others had no work experience (4). Their education level also varied; some of them had completed high school, while others had not. They came from different parts of Syria, both urban and rural. All of the participants names have been replaced by pseudonyms. Syrian women were asked to choose their own pseudonyms to identify themselves in the research to make the process of naming more inclusive. The pseudonyms and the sociodemographic information such as age, marital status, and education that define the participants and help to understand this chapter are presented as follows:

1. Farah, married and mother of five, 49 years old, Germany, Frankfurt.

She is 49 years old and from Aleppo. She is married and has five children. She is a university graduate. She worked as a teacher in Syria. She left Syria in 2015 and arrived in Germany with her husband and family in January 2016.

2. Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden.

She is 47 years old and from Salamiyeh, a rural area in Syria. She is single. She is a high school graduate. She worked as a teacher, then worked in her family's business as a merchant. Her family was producing and selling milk and cheese in Syria. She left Syria alone in May 2015 and arrived in Germany in July 2015.

3. Haya, divorced and mother of two, 60 years old, Germany, Dresden.

She is 60 years old and from Salamiyeh, a rural area in Syria. She is divorced and the mother of two sons. She has a diploma. She worked as an art teacher in Syria. She left Syria with her 18-year-old nephew and arrived in Germany in January 2016.

4. Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin.

She is 36 years old and from Damascus. She is a university graduate. She worked as a teacher in Syria. She is married and got married on the route while traveling. In Syria, she got divorced and was deprived of her two sons. She was exposed to domestic violence. She is a mother of three; two of them are in Syria with her ex-husband, and one was born in Germany. She left Syria in June 2015 and arrived in Germany in July 2015.

5. Nirmeen, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin.

She is 37 years old and from Hama. She had a bachelor’s degree in banking. She worked at banks in Syria. She is a mother of four, two of them from her ex-husband, from whom she got divorced once she arrived in Germany. She has 5-year-old twins who were born in Germany. She left Syria with her children and (ex) husband in May 2015 and arrived in Germany in December 2015.

6. Tulay, married and mother of two, 45 years old, Germany, Berlin**.**

She is 45 years old and from Hama. She had a bachelor's degree in the arts. She owned a graphic design studio in Syria. She is married. She got married in Germany. She is a mother of two from her ex-husband, and her children are in Syria. She left Syria with her brother and sister in November 2015 and arrived in Germany in December 2015.

7. Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin.

She is 37 years old and from Damascus. She is married and the mother of four. She studied up to the 11th grade and got married at the age of 17. She is a housewife. She left Syria in 2013 with her family for Turkey, then arrived in Germany in May 2015.

8. Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin.

She is 36 years old and from Damascus. She had a bachelor's degree in Arabic literature. She worked in Syria with INGOs concerning Iraqi refugees. She is a mother of three; one of them was born in Germany. She left Syria with her younger brother and arrived in Germany in September 2015.

9. Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin.

She is 33 years old and from Damascus. She had a diploma in business administration. She had no working experience in Syria. She is divorced. She got divorced once she arrived in Germany. She left Syria with her (ex) husband in January 2014 and arrived in Germany in November 2014.

10. Nahla, single, 26 years old, Germany, Berlin.

She is 26 years old and from Aleppo. She is a high school graduate. She had no working experience in Syria. Nahla, her mother, and sister were separated from her father, who went to Germany then filed a family reunification application. However, the family reunification application was rejected. She left Syria with her family in 2013 and stayed in Turkey for two years. She arrived in Germany in October 2015 with her mother and sister.

11. Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin.

She is 33 years old and from Damascus. She had a diploma and worked as a graphic designer in Syria. She is married and the mother of a 3-year-old girl who was born in Germany. She left Syria with her husband and arrived in Germany in October 2015.

12. Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt.

She is 35 years old and from the countryside of Damascus. She had a high school degree, and she worked as a hairdresser in Syria. She is married and a mother of three. She left Syria with her husband and children and arrived in Germany in December 2015.

13. Omama, separated from her husband and mother of two, 50 years old, Germany, Berlin.

She is 50 years old and from Damascus. She had a high school degree. She worked as a tailor in her house in Syria. She is married and separated from her husband; he stayed in Syria. She is a mother of two. She was exposed to detention and sexual harassment in Syria. She left Syria with her sons in December 2015, and she arrived in Germany in January 2016.

14. Arwa, married and mother of one, 34 years old, Germany, Berlin.

She is 34 years old and from Hama. She had a high school diploma. She is a housewife. She is married and the mother of a 5-month-old daughter who was born in Germany. She left Syria with her husband and brother in October 2015 and arrived in Germany in November 2015.

3.1.2. Syrian Women's Clandestine Asylum Drivers to Germany

Exploring the root causes that drive Syrian women to embark on clandestine journeys to the EU is essential to facilitate the understanding of their journeys and the role of gender and the securitization of migration in shaping the exit and transit stages of their journeys. The drivers for clandestine asylum to Germany among the previous sample of Syrian women varied and intertwined**.** It includes, first, push factors from Syria, second, push factors from the region surrounding Syria, third, pull factors to Germany,

and lastly, the drivers behind choosing the smuggling pathways and the clandestine journeys.

Firstly, the push factors from Syria included war, violence by the government, family violence, and fear for children. All the interviewees expressed their hard situations and memories in Syria during the war. They expressed mass violence and their feeling of danger. They expressed their fear for their lives, fear for male members to be recruited into the army, and fear for their children. They also expressed their fear of political persecution and harassment from the government, especially against those who played an active role in politics and took part in the public demonstrations. As these expressions illustrate:

> "I no longer wanted to live here [in Syria] because I really began to feel that the children were in danger. After the bombing of our house, my daughter became afraid of everything. Loud voices frightened her. I began to feel that there was no future... I want to get out in any way possible. and exit is the only hope for life." (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

> "The repression came from the Syrian regime. We, I was sixteen years old, moved from place to place because the bombing was very heavy on us, and the aerial bombardment was very intense, and we really resisted until the last second until the building in front of us collapsed. We left the house... The situation was very, very bad." (Nahla, single, 26 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "We are among the people who took part in the demonstrations... There was harassment, persecution, threats to life. I thought and calculated a lot, how could I go, and I have no money, but when the harassment became more, and I felt that I was in danger... You feel that life is suffocating you, I mean… I always felt monitored, always prosecuted, whenever the police called you. 'Come, there is an investigation'. It is true that I have not been imprisoned, but there was a constant summons from the police." (Haya, divorced and mother of two, 60 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> "During the war, a missile fell right near my office, where I was working and where I founded my studio and institutionalized my work. I mean, so... the whole issue was completely reduced. I relapsed financially... and... I was no longer able to support myself." (Tulay, married and mother of two, 45 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "Actually the decision came suddenly, his [her ex-husband's] mother called me at that time and told me that we must find a way to get him out [of Syria]... So I booked a room and booked a car and we went out immediately to Beirut. He [her ex-husband] was against going out... He didn't want to go anywhere." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Moreover, some women also cited social factors, gendered norms and practices, and gendered insecurities in Syria as the main drivers for their clandestine asylum. They

expressed the situation of women in Syria and the various kinds of gender-based violence like forced marriages, domestic violence, family control, and honour killings, as well as the sexual assaults from security guards. For instance, Nirmeen was struggling with her ex-husband, who refused to divorce her and kidnapped their children to Lebanon to put pressure on her to return to him. For her, "salvation is not from war but from my familial or social situation" (Nirmeen, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin). The following expressions further describe the gender-related drivers for asylum:

> "The reason that made me leave Syria was not the war, the arrests, nor the economic situation. What drove me out of Syria was the social status of the woman, especially if she was divorced. I fled the house, you know how? And I didn't tell anyone that I was going, and I didn't tell anyone that I was going to get married… I didn't tell anyone.... I just took my small bag on my shoulder, put some clothes in it, and left without telling anyone […] I felt that I had reached the age of thirty. I was not allowed to live. I don't have many requests, but I wanted to study, I wanted to complete my studies, and I wanted to marry someone I would accept... I have no experiences talking with guys or bringing a man as a groom at home, this idea is very rejected. I did not have a choice to choose the person I wanted to marry, nor did I have a choice to study the thing I love. I reached the age of 30, and in the end, I went back to zero point [...] It was impossible to leave, but what happened that there was a lot of pressure on me at home. The pressure arrived that I was beaten by my family because of this issue." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "I ran away from society more than I ran from war […] I felt myself in Syria imprisoned...I could not be what I would like to be [...] Our countries do not protect women, it does not protect women from honor killings, which are often called honor killings, but they have no logic or meaning... If a girl is divorced, then she becomes *Sikket Otl* [useless] ... for women, the situation is not okay... the woman is not free, she is not strong, she is not, she is strong. Our women are very strong. I do not say that the woman is not strong. What I say exactly is that our governments do not help the woman, do not stand with her. Do not help her." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "I stayed in the police station for two days, but don't ask me about anything else [Silence] But they are very dirty people, and people want to do everything in any way. When you reach this stage, [do] you take the risk and go out, or do you stay? I am a woman who had no options left in Damascus: Either you want to do this thing [sexual relationships], or the security forces will take you to jail, either you disappear, or as long as my name reached police, it's over. Your situation is no longer safe." (Omama, separated and mother of two, 50 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Secondly, there are the push factors behind the secondary movement from the countries neighbouring Syria and even from the MENA region to Germany. These push factors are related to the regional asylum policies, including the limited access to

refugee protection and basic rights, the economic conditions, and social factors like gender-based violence against refugee women, gendered norms and expectations, and the social pressure on women with the presence of family members in these countries. These narratives of the interviewed Syrian women illustrate the diverse push factors:

> "Turkey is nice, if you have a good amount of money to invest in it... you can live in it as a normal person because of their exploitation [of refugees] with very long working hours. If you do not have the money to open your project, you will not be happy in Turkey, and this is something we know before we go out. We decide this way. My husband was waiting for a word from his friend; his friend was about to invest money in Turkey. He was waiting to say, "I support you with financial sums". But he did not, so we continued." (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "Turkey lacks a social assistance system comparable to that of Europe, and if there is no money to live on, you will not live. And once the money is gone, how do you want to live? Sorry, I was a woman … at that time…. I was 29 years old. I mean, frankly, I tell you, there is no dog [man] left without seeing you... I mean, when seeing a divorced woman, a man wants to accompany you, and the other wants to approach you. To be honest, there were a lot of Arabs, and I just want to go further, I mean. The situation of the divorced woman in this area... the atmosphere is very ugly… very, very ugly... you know? " (Nirmeen, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "It is a European country where a child can study, and he has a future. I did not want my destination to be Turkey or any Arab country. Egypt, the daughter of my in-laws, went to Egypt; she suffered a lot." (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

> "At that time, my father and my sisters told me that, "We are going let you go in a different way, we bring you to Dubai, we got a regular visa for you, anything, but don't go by smuggling," and at that time, I told them, "I'm sorry, I am going anyway". I do not want to go back to my aunts, and I do not want to go back to Saudi Arabia with my father's wife, and I will not go back to... I don't want to go to any place…that is over, I have this road, either I die, or I arrive." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Thirdly, there are the factors behind asylum journeys to Germany. All the interviewed women expressed their aspirations for a better life and for access to protection, security, and human rights. Some of the women wanted to go to "Europe" and "as far as possible" to flee societal control and gender-based violence, without special aspiration for Germany. Some women addressed their aspirations for ensuring the future of their children and accessing personal security and protection, while some of the women intended to reach Germany because of the presence of social capital there. The political context and Chancellor Merkel's open-door policy played a key role in

their destination choice and in pulling the Syrian asylum flows into Germany during the refugee "crisis". As was mentioned in the second chapter, Dublin III regulations limit the onward mobility of asylum seekers within the EU, however; Germany suspended Dublin III regulations for Syrian refugees for a short period, allowing their onward mobility to Germany and suspending their return to the first country of registration and entry, mostly Greece and Hungary (Dernback & Tagesspiegel, 2015). As these narratives illustrate:

> "Europe will give you a salary... in the first stage, you want [to learn] a language, you want to address the trauma of asylum. They give you money, even if it is a little but you don't die from hunger at least... [They give you] a future for your children and for you as a person who can start from scratch, learn, and enter university no matter your age is." (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "I was going to the farthest country I could have reached. For me, I want to get as far away as possible. For my husband, his friend was going to Norway. He told him that life is better, asylum is better, and welfare is better. He encourages him to go to Norway. But we went to Germany because we were registered and fingerprinted in Hungary. Germany is the only country we could go to." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "In the news, we used to hear that Germany opened and welcomed refugees to come to Germany." (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "We heard of acquaintances there, they were comfortable in Germany. This is what we used to hear... That is why the destination was here. If the journey succeeds, it succeeds... The person will live comfortably." (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

Fourthly, the reason that drives women to choose clandestine journeys is the lack of other alternatives for safe and legal pathways to the EU. The Schengen agreement limits the access of asylum seekers to the EU by obligating non-EU residents to obtain a visa and valid documents in line with fighting "illegal" migration and restricting external border controls. The Directive 2001/51 that supplements Article 26 of the Schengen Agreement exempts asylum seekers from paying financial penalties because of illegal entry (EU Monitor, n.d.), but it does not provide a mechanism for safe entry into the EU in the first place. Moreover, in 2013, there were no Schengen visas issued for Syrian nationals, compared to over 30,000 issued in 2010 before the war (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2015, p. 3). Thereby, entering the smuggling market was the only option for the interviewed Syrian women to access protection in

the EU; there was “no other solution” and "all the people" were doing the same. As these narratives illustrate:

> “You are not allowed to enter legally… if you want to go to any country, you need a visa… and they do not give you a visa, so you have to cross the borders through smuggling. I do not like this... Refugees pay money to enter, and eventually enter despite the closure of the borders. There were people who lost their lives and could not enter and there were people even though they paid a lot of money, but they went through miserable conditions.” (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> “People deal with smugglers because they want to move on... they want to continue... they want to end their suffering. I have walked on a path, and I want to complete it. I won't leave myself in the middle of the road, so I am forced to deal with such people because I have no other solution. You find all the doors closed in your face. You must go; I mean, you must deal with such people.” (Omama, separated and mother of two, 50 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> “Human beings are forced to live this life, or go through this [clandestine irregular] journey...because at the end, all the governments that established these borders and are happy with them… in the end, are also allowing these stories [the smuggling journeys] to happen. If they open their borders in a regular way, people do not go out in this way [clandestine migration]. I mean the only thing that I see is… the only party that I see responsible for the injustice of all humanity that is happening now and has been happening for a long time since those who decided to create states, are governments. As far as they fight smuggling… they, at the end, left room for that [the smuggling] to happen.” (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> “I said to myself, “Get out... all the people are going out... either you will live, or you will die... in any case, I am dead here in Syria. I am not alive.” (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The existing evidence demonstrates a direct relationship between the EU securitization of migration and the reliance on smugglers to facilitate entry to the EU. Furthermore, the securitization of migration restricts family reunification visas in Germany and creates long waiting periods for women in transit countries (Damir-Geilsdorf & Sabra, 2018). In this regard, although the literature revealed the general tendency of Syrian women to avoid clandestine journeys to the EU and to rely on family reunification visas as a safe and legal way to access international protection in the EU (Kvittingen et al. 2019; Chandler et al. 2020), the narratives of the interviewed women illustrate the restrictions on family reunification visas in Germany. Almost all the interviewed women expressed their frustration with the restrictions on family reunification visas and the long-term procedures. Those who were married expressed the difficulty of "staying" and "waiting" in uncertainty, especially when this waiting is practiced under

the control of family members in transit countries. This confirms the previous literature addressing the long waiting period as an obstacle to family reunifications in Germany (Damir-Geilsdorf & Sabra, 2018). On the other hand, Nahla, who preferred to avoid this journey, has received a rejection of her family reunification application to Germany. This was the direct reason for her, as well as her mother and sister, to embark on clandestine border crossings to reunite with their father in Germany. To sum up, the lack of legal and safe routes to the EU, the restrictions in family reunification policy in Germany, and the long period of waiting, as well as women's preference to maintain family cohesion, were the common factors that led Syrian women to embark on clandestine journeys and rely on smuggling services. Smuggling was perceived as a fast way for them to avoid family separation during the asylum process. As these narratives illustrate:

> "We decided to start smuggling immediately. When the [family reunification] rejection came, we started working on the issue of smuggling." (Nahla, single, 26 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "Women who go out with their men either because their children are old [older than 18 years old] and cannot make a [family] reunion for them. Or they were forced; they tell you that it is better to take them [the whole family] out with me than to wait for the family's reunification after three years." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "My brother, who is in Germany, is basically the one who opened the idea of asylum and the smuggling journey, and he had no idea that I could say that I want to go in this way… He was thinking to tell my ex-husband to come by smuggling, then to bring me regularly [by family reunification]. But I did not agree to stay and wait." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "There are many problems with my father-in-law and my mother-in-law. I didn't want to stay with them. My brother also went before me […] He [her brother] said, "Why do you want to be smuggled?". He did not encourage me... because he left his wife in Syria and came out. I told him I didn't want to sit at anyone's mercy. I mean, I got to the point where we [she and her family in law] couldn't deal with each other [...] Reunification has become a stroke of luck... There are people who wait a long time and people who don't. It is not guaranteed... My brother has been reunited with his wife for a period of nine months. My brother-in-law reunited after a year and a half. His wife regretted that she did not come with us. She said, "I wish I travelled with you and came by smuggling"" (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Gender plays a role in the decision-making process during the exit stage. In this study, Syrian women's control over the irregular migration decision varies as the gendered dynamics differ. Some of the women expressed that it was a joint decision with their

husbands and families; those who fled sexual and gender-based violence expressed that it was their personal decision; and a minority of them expressed that it was their husband's decision. Yet, addressing this aspect in a detailed manner is beyond the scope of this section. This section is concerned with one key aspect of the exit phase: the drivers of clandestine journeys to Germany.

In conclusion, this section elaborated on the general profile of the interviewed Syrian refugee women in Germany and their drivers for clandestine journeys to Germany between 2014 and 2016. The findings demonstrate the underlying factors and root causes that drive Syrian women to choose clandestine journeys. These drivers vary between push factors from Syria, like war and violence, and push factors from the region surrounding Syria, such as regional asylum policies and practices. Gendered insecurities have been part of these drivers. Also, there are pull factors in Germany, mainly the de-securitization and the open-door policy at that time, as well as the presence of social capital there. Finally, the findings demonstrated through the perceptions of Syrian women and their decision-making processes that the lack of alternatives for safe entry to the EU was the main driver behind embarking on smuggling and clandestine journeys. Accordingly, gender and the securitization of migration play a role in shaping women's motivations for clandestine asylum journeys. The next section will address the transit phase and the challenges that Syrian women faced during their clandestine journeys.

3.2. SYRIAN WOMEN'S STRUGGLES AND CHALLENGES AT THE EUROPEAN EXTERNAL BORDERS

This section will investigate the challenges, struggles, and insecurities that women face during their transit experiences. It will elaborate on the ways in which the EU securitization of migration reinforces the already existing gendered inequalities and discrimination and further creates new gendered insecurities and various types of violence along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea Route from Turkey to Greece, as well as along the Western Balkan Route from Greece to Germany.

3.2.1. The “Death Journey”: Syrian Women’s Experiences at the Eastern Mediterranean Sea Route

Crossing the EU's external borders using the Eastern Mediterranean route means risking Syrian women’s lives on extremely dangerous journeys. The security industry across the Aegean Sea implies irregular, clandestine, and hidden border crossings. The clandestine nature of asylum journeys at the EU’s external borders requires a complete reliance on the smuggling networks: smugglers, facilitators, and Arabic-speaking brokers. Thus, they are key actors in these journeys, as they determine the cost, the location, and the time of departure from the western shores of Turkey. All the interviewed Syrian women expressed that they have crossed the Aegean Sea and departed from different points on the western shores of Turkey (Izmir, Bodrum, Mogla, Datcha, and Fethiye) to access different Greek islands (the islands of Kos, Samos, Rhodes, Pserimos, Kastellorizo, and Simi) (see Figure 3.1). The Syrian women expressed that the cost of the clandestine sea journey in an inflatable rubber boat was "expensive" between 900 and 2500 dollars per person. The cost differs according to different factors like the boat type, the time, the number of travellers inside the boat, and the extra services provided by smugglers like providing accommodation and life jackets. Moreover, all the Syrian women expressed that their biggest fear was crossing the Aegean Sea. This route was described by all the interviewed Syrian women as the "death journey" referring to the extreme risks and human tolls associated with clandestine border entry across the Mediterranean Sea.

Figure 3.1 : Arrivals to the Main Greek Islands at the Aegean Sea.

Source: (Carassava & Willan, 2020)

3.2.1.1. Engendering Access to the Smuggling Market

Access to the smuggling market is a fundamental element of clandestine journeys to the EU. Yet, gender power relations have an impact on Syrian women's access to smuggling networks across the borders. The cultural expectations of gendered roles and responsibilities shape the distribution of resources and power as Syrian men perform their roles often in the public sphere and women in the private sphere.

The findings of this study suggest that accessing smugglers has been considered a "man's issue" for Syrian women. Thus, they often played a secondary role in access, decision-making, negotiation, and interaction with the smuggling networks in the presence of their male companions. These findings further support the idea of Krystalli et al. (2018) that dealing with the smugglers contains "male to male interaction," and this may pose a gendered threat to women on the move.

Almost all the interviewed Syrian women left Syria and crossed the Eastern Mediterranean route with their male relatives; their husbands, fathers, brothers, nephews, cousins, sons, or kinship groups. In these groups, the male was responsible for accessing smugglers and brokers and interacting with them, and the female took on a secondary role.

Moreover, collecting information from trustworthy resources was an essential step. Hence, the process of accessing smugglers was mainly dependent on Syrian transnational networks of relatives, friends, and social capital in transit and destination countries. These networks, which were experienced with the smuggling market, were composed mainly of men, as women were a minority in these journeys to the EU. The following narratives illustrate the gendered hierarchy and the secondary position of Syrian women in accessing the smuggling market:

> "Of course, my husband took the role, he and his cousins searched for the smuggler." (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "My friend's son and his relatives. They are the ones who arranged everything... I didn't know anything, and my son didn't know anything, either." (Omama, separated and mother of two, 50 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> “My husband’s cousin came out a week before us and he gave him [her husband] the smuggler's name only. We went to Izmir looking for the smuggler and we had his phone number.” (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> “We searched for a smuggler who could be less evil and less harmful. [Laugh] My brother-in-law had two brothers who came out to Sweden before. He found a smuggler through the people who came out with him.” (Tulay, married and mother of two, 45 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> “Personally, I do not know about this issue, but the group with which we were travelling was communicating with him [the smuggler] and coordinating with him. They told us, "Would you like to stay with us? We are in contact with a smuggler." We told them, "As long as you trust the smuggler, you coordinate the matter." We did not have the burden of looking for a smuggler, no. The smuggler, I mean, he is the son of our country, from Salamiyeh. The interaction was kind of comfortable.” (Haya, divorced and mother of two, 60 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> “My husband's brother travelled before us, and he gave him the number of smugglers. And when you go, you meet a lot of people. And also, my cousin went to Europe. My husband made me call him and ask about the name of the smuggler who came out with him and to give us his number. We collected more than a number […] I remember that my husband had the numbers of smugglers from Istanbul because he called someone and promised him that we would meet at a place in Bodrum.” (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The inequal gendered power relations also affect the decision-making authority among Syrian families on the move. The dominance of male authority in decision-making inside the hierarchical family structure marginalizes women’s voices. Nirmeen’s ex-husband resisted her desire and asked her not to intervene when she suggested a different way of travelling, using a tourist boat from Mersin to Italy like her sister. She said in the interview,

> “My idea was to go, like my sister, by sea from Mersin to Italy, but he [her ex-husband] had searched and talked with his friend, who is a smuggler or a broker, on the basis that we would get us out by plane [...] my ex-husband told me not to interfere, the man [broker] is his friend, and he is the one who is responsible for the matter.” (Nirmeen, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

However, some Syrian women who were unaccompanied by male relatives played an active role in planning and managing the journey on their own. Ghada and Nahla, were unaccompanied by male relatives on their sea journeys. Both of them played an active role in accessing the smuggling market, and they used their social capital in the EU to access the smuggling network. They asked their male relatives to direct them to a "good smuggler" and trusted one, as these narratives illustrate:

> "My relative is the one who directed me to the smuggler; he came [to Germany] with the same smuggler; he [the smuggler] is from our city". (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> "My sister asked a lot of people, because she knew a lot of people, until she reached a smuggler who took people from more than one area in Turkey and [he] told her, "Come to Cesme"" (Nahla, single, 26 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The socioeconomic situation of women and their accessibility to financial resources determined the means of mobility and the degree of safety for Syrian women. Despite the fact that in most cases, Syrian women expressed that men were responsible for paying the expenses of the smuggling services, there are some women, especially those who fled sexual and gender-based violence and were working in Syria, who played an active role in collecting the resources, such as selling their gold, their houses, their furniture, and their items, and borrowing from their social capital, such as family and friends. The active role that Syrian women played will be elaborated on in more detail in the last section that addresses Syrian women's strategies during the clandestine journeys.

3.2.1.2. Waiting for a Smuggler: Insecure Spaces and Sexual Assaults

All the interviewed women expressed that they had to "wait" several days or weeks for the smuggler to take them out of Turkey. The waiting for the smuggler was practiced in Istanbul as well as in the cities located on the western shores of Turkey, like Izmir, Bodrum, Mogla, Datcha, and Fethiye. The waiting was also located in local hotels as well as in isolated areas and forests near the Aegean Sea. This waiting implies interaction with locals as well as with smugglers and facilitators. Most of the interviewed Syrian women expressed their insecurities while entering the back market. They expressed feelings of "fear" and the "atmosphere of mafias" while waiting in spaces "full of men". As these narratives illustrate:

> "They were very, very low-class hotels in which I felt the atmosphere of mafias. You feel that you were being watched... and those around you know where you are going. There are looks of anticipation and waiting to feel the atmosphere of the mafia, starting from the reception work and ending with the people who are passing on the street. The cost per person was about 50 Turkish lira per night. Sleeping cost, me and my brother 100 lira a day, of course, without food or breakfast." (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "The cost of the hotel was on the smuggler. The hotel was full of men and smugglers. The hotel can have two stars [laugh] the room has two iron beds, and we were five people. I don't know how we slept. We stayed twelve days like that." (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "You feel that you have entered a mafia atmosphere, a world where they are not human beings but really human traffickers. You deal with people who have no mercy in their hearts. We were in contact with someone on the basis that after coming to Istanbul, he would take us to Izmir and complete the rest. We arrived in Istanbul, and he told us to come to the address. We went to the address, and there was a man alone in the house... The apartment was very luxurious, frankly, but we did not see anyone but the man. His words were short, but terrifying. He told us that tomorrow, the next day, we would go to Izmir, and there is a person who would receive us and take us to a hotel, and that the weather is clear, and we could go out, and he would determine everything for us […]We went to Izmir. The smuggler took us to a place. We stayed in a place temporarily. It was more than one hotbed of disease... A place with lots of dirt and insects. It was like a hidden place. You're on your nerves; you don't know when to go out. During this period, there was a storm, and the sea was rough. We were waiting for the smuggler to tell us when to go, and you are tense and afraid. I remember that I couldn't bear my son's fuss. I was afraid." (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

The reliance on the smugglers and the uncertain time for departure imply a financial burden, especially on unaccompanied women. Thereby, they must negotiate their limited financial resources with locals and with smugglers to keep their money for the long journey. The literature revealed that in such insecure physical and financial conditions, unaccompanied women or women with their children are vulnerable to sexual violence (Freedman, 2016b). The literature also reveals that women are exposed to sexual exploitation by smugglers to let them enter the smuggling market and means of transit (Amnesty International, 2016). This study also confirms the previous literature, as some of the interviewed women experienced or witnessed different types of assault and exploitation of women's bodies by different actors. In this study, Ghada was the only woman interviewed who was unaccompanied on her long journey to Germany. In her struggle to save her money, she was exposed to sexual harassment and assault from a local hotel owner in Aksaray district in Istanbul during her negotiation for a discount. Tasneem also addressed the story of women being exploited sexually in exchange for a free trip. As these narratives illustrate:

> "I wanted the money to be enough for me until the end of Greece. I mean, I have no way to give up the 45 Turkish liras. […] He [the hotel owner] said, "I loved her; let her marry me, and I have a palace in Izmir." I told them [to Syrian men as translators], "I don't want him, neither he nor his palace. Tell him to forget the 45 lire. Let him consider them as charity for him as long as he has the hotel." He [the hotel owner] came and

> wanted to kiss me. Of course, I moved away, and he was getting closer. I was moving away, and he was getting closer. At the end, he said, "Okay, not on your mouth"; this is what he said to the Syrian man [a translator]: "Not on her mouth but on her cheek", and I told him, "Where on my cheek? I don't want him to come close to me," and I was moving away, and the Syrian man was laughing and said to me, "Come on, do you want him to forgive you with money?" I told him what it meant that he would forgive me for 45 liras; I swear, if I had the money, I would have given it to him, and I don't want him to kiss me, he insisted, and he insisted, until he kissed me on my cheek. Then he invited me to have a cup of coffee before leaving." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> "There was a woman… once who told me that she had to... she didn't... but she thought it was easier to accompany the smuggler [had sexual relationship], so she accompanied him during the journey so that she could go out without paying the money […]these women I stayed with them in the same room for hours in the camp when I first arrived in Germany." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Waiting for the smugglers was not experienced only in the hotels or urban areas; it was also experienced in the forests and other isolated spaces far from the authority's surveillance on the western shores of Turkey. Asylum seekers and other migrants on their way to the EU must hide from the surveillance of the Turkish police and wait for the smugglers to tell them when and how to move. In such conditions, women are vulnerable to sexual attacks, especially rape, while waiting in isolated areas for days and nights. Even though none of the interviewed Syrian women had reported their personal experiences of rape, Huda witnessed two sisters in Germany who had been raped by the smuggler in the forest in Turkey. She said;

> "I met two sisters and their young brother in the camp in Germany... They suffered in Turkey; on their first attempt, they were unable to access the boat, and when the police saw them, they fled. In the second attempt, while they were waiting in the forest, they stayed for a long time in the woods, I don't know how many days and how many hours... The smuggler was bad, and they were afraid of him, so he gave them pills... sleeping pills. He gave them on the basis of... I don't know on what basis... to sleep and did not resist him... this happened a lot." (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

3.2.1.3. Hierarchies of Drowning, Trauma, and Access to Safety Equipment

All asylum seekers and other migrants on their clandestine journeys across the Mediterranean are exposed to the risk of drowning and death. The secret and hidden nature of these sea journeys creates difficulty in data collection, as do the cases of disappearance and vanishing in the sea without any trace, witnesses, or survivors,

making the documentation much harder (IOM Missing Migrants Project, n. d.). However, within these data collection limitations, 2015 was the year with the highest number of deaths on the Eastern Mediterranean route. It was estimated that 804 deaths occurred in that year, among them 124 females and 139 males, and the majority of these deaths; 541 deaths were unspecified (IOM Missing Migrants Project, n. d.). As was mentioned earlier, the sea journey was described as a "death journey". Ghada expressed that when she arrived at the Greek island of Kos in May 2015, mass graves were established for those who had died during the sea journey, most of whom were women and children. She said;

> "There are a lot of people who have died. When I was in Kos, I met the imam of a mosque of Turkish clergymen. He said that many people drowned, most of them women and children. They buried them in mass graves. The man knows Arabic. He studied Sharia law in Egypt. He was speaking Arabic. He told me that the mosque used to gain security approvals to bury them. He told me a lot of people had died […] sometimes 250 corpses per burial in mass graves. Whole families died on the sea journey. We were 45 people in the boat, other people were 60 or 70 in one boat and they were drowning, and there were corpses floating on the water." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

The literature revealed that women are more likely to die while crossing international borders as well as at sea crossings (Freedman, 2016b; Pickering & Cochrane, 2013; Plambech, 2017). In the context of the Mediterranean Sea crossing, Plambech (2017) showed that women are more likely to lack swimming skills compared to men because of their gendered roles and confinement to the private sphere. On the boat, they are placed with their children, and they are the main ones responsible for rescuing them in any case of drowning. They also wear heavier clothes compared to men, and they often have limited access to safety equipment because of their limited financial resources. The findings of this study support the previous research in terms of the trend of women's limited swimming skills and class-based access to safety equipment. Most of the interviewed women expressed that they don't know how to swim, in contrast to their husbands. As these narratives illustrate:

> "In the past I learned swimming, but since then I have not been swimming in the sea, so I do not know swimming." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "I know swimming a little bit, and my husband knows better than me, but we bought life jackets from Bodrum". (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "I, my mother, and my pregnant sister did not know how to swim." (Nahla, single, 26 years old, Germany, Berlin).

However, to move beyond essentialising Syrian women's experiences that overlook their individual differences and diversity in swimming skills, Rama acknowledged both the general gender gap in swimming skills among Syrian women and the exceptions, such as the cases of the famous Syrian female swimmers Yusra Mardini and her sister Sarah Mardini. As her narrative illustrates:

> "In terms of the sea journey; with regard to swimming, if something happens in *Al-Balm* [rubber boat], you will find a percentage of men who know how to swim more than women. Although this rule is not a general rule, for example, Yusra Mardini and her sister Sarah Mardini, when the *Balm* drowned, they pulled it out" (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

In terms of access to safety equipment, the previous literature reveals that social position in terms of gender and access to financial resources in terms of class determine women's access to life jackets (Gerard & Pickering, 2014). The narratives of the interviewed Syrian women further explored this aspect. The interviewed women described the life jackets as being expensive, useless, and fake, and in many cases, there was no space for them in the overcrowded beats. Furthermore, women expressed that the problem is not about having one-time access to life jackets. The case was that there was a need to buy life jackets in a regular manner, more than once at every crossing attempt, because the Turkish police were confiscating them in their failed crossing attempts. These narratives illustrate the case of women's access to life jackets:

> "It was expensive. It was expensive. I don't know at the time in 2015. The price of the [life] jacket was 110 Turkish lira. I remember this amount [...] Everyone has their own [life] jacket, and those who has no money were without a [life] jacket. There were many people without a [life] jacket. Women without [life] jackets." (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "When we went out to sea, we didn't have enough money and we had to wear a life jacket. I said to my son, "We buy one for your little brother only. And you and I know swimming, it is not necessary." The smuggler told us, "No. You must all wear life jackets." My son sold his phone so we could buy them. He gave them his mobile phone." (Omama, separated and mother of two, 50 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "We had life jackets, but it is like the one who is deceiving himself. It doesn't help you with anything. They are sold, and in every attempt, we had to go and pay their costs again". (Nirmeen, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Women's narratives reflected on the issue of fake life jackets being sold in the smuggling markets and exposing asylum seekers and other travellers to death during the clandestine asylum journeys ("Fake lifejackets play a role in drowning of refugees," 2016). These narratives, considering the issue of fake life jackets, are as follows:

> "It is useless. I felt that it did not save [you], on the contrary, it drowns you more." (Nahla, single, 26 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "We were wearing life jackets, but around us there were many people who drowned despite wearing life jackets, which turned out to be unusable, but thank God we did not drown". (Haya, divorced and mother of two, 60 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> "No one gives it [life jacket] to you. You should buy it, and I remember that at some point I threw it away because we didn't fit in the boat. I wore it the first time, and the second time, I started to feel that it was useless." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany)

> "Most of the life jackets were ruined. It was never fit to help people ever to survive at sea. It protects you for a period not exceeding an hour, and then it kills you. Because it fills with water and pulls you down to the water. After the drowning incidents began to increase in intensity, the Turkish and Greek guards began to seize shipments of unusable lifejackets in the markets, which caused the deaths of many immigrants. This was said in the news. You go to pay and find the [life jacket] expensive, and you trust that the brand and quality are good, but you are buying your death at an expensive price". (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Based on these findings, this research argues that the issue of fake life jackets further exposes women to death at sea. Stated differently, fake life jackets and the limited access to safety equipment have gendered implications when considering the limited swimming skills of women because of their gendered roles. These conditions create gendered hierarchies of drowning. This finding supports the previous literature that suggests gendered hierarchies of death at sea (Pickering & Cochrane, 2013; Plambech, 2017).

Another aspect of the clandestine sea journeys is trauma. Women's clandestine border crossing experiences at the Eastern Mediterranean Sea were characterised as traumatic (Freedman, 2016b). All the interviewed Syrian women expressed the difficulties and

insecurities they went through at the sea and before entering the sea, as well as at the sea. Women told stories of overcrowded inflatable rubber boats and being forced by the smugglers to throw their bags, their medicines, and the babies' milk, and sometimes being forced by the smugglers to enter the boat against their will. The narrative below illustrates the situation as follows:

> "We were thinking that *Al-Balm* [the rubber boat] cannot accommodate many people, that we would be around 35 people. This was the first lie that the smuggler told us. When we got to the point on the beach, there were a lot of people...a lot. There were about 85 people, all in the same *Balm*. We were so many, that when you were sitting, you could not move your leg, neither right nor left. You should remain seated in the same position, there was no space for any movement. When we saw the situation, we started throwing our bags. We could not carry the children's clothes, milk, and these things […] He [the smuggler] was shouting, to the extent that when one woman said, "I'm done; I don't want to go anymore". He shouts, "You don't have the choice to go out or not. You just reached *Al-Balm* [the rubber boat], and you are now forced to go out. "Did you know?" You are no longer allowed to go back; you are forbidden to go back; you want to go out against your will, that you have arrived here, there is no longer room for you to retreat or withdraw, or say that I no longer want." (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

The interviewed women spent from one hour to six hours in the inflatable rubber boats in the Aegean Sea. All of these journeys were at night to avoid Greece's and Turkey's border surveillance. Women told stories about overcrowded boats and their fear of being captured by both the Turkish and Greek coast guards. They expressed a common theme of stopped engines, a lack of gasoline, unqualified boat drivers, fear of family separation, fear of losing their children, and being lost in the dark. The narratives of the interviewed Syrian women reveal that these human insecurities are further exacerbated by the presence of children with women, either their own children or not. Women play a primary role in childcare, and they are the main ones responsible for maintaining safety for the children. These narratives illustrate the traumatic events for women in the presence of children:

> "There was a lot of pressure... if I am a man and I ventured alone without children, I believe it would be easier... but when a mother with her children, it is very difficult, and there is a lot of fear... At sea, I felt helpless and thought, "What have I done to my children?" I mean, my little son was sitting between my legs. If he drowned or something like that, it is very difficult". (Omama, separated and mother of two, 50 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "There was a mother with two twin babies, and the babies didn't have life jackets. When *Al-Balm* [the rubber boat] stopped [in the sea], I told her that if we drowned... and she was young; sixteen years old […] Her husband was with her, and this is the disaster. She was young and he had no responsibility. She was very afraid and crying, and her husband was irresponsible, he was about nineteen years old. I told her, "Do not be afraid I would carry a child for you." Their age was less than six months, they could not crawl, and I told her I would carry a child for her. [Silence] It was difficult...the memory is very difficult [crying]." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "When they tell you that this is a journey of death, it is not an exaggeration. Never. People were never exaggerating. It really is a death journey. I mean, you are entering the sea, and you don't know if you will get out of it, and at that moment, when we were in the sea with my children, one of whom was seasick, and two of them fainted [crying]... I am very affected by the fact that I lived through this very difficult moment. You know, it's the worst thing I've ever seen." (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

> "I used to hear the children's voices all the time, and they were screaming, "We didn't want to die, we didn't want to die in the sea," because *Al-Balm* [the rubber boat] stopped for about half an hour, the engine was not working, and we stopped in the middle of the sea... It was the worst moment when *Al-Balm* stopped." (Nahla, single, 26 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "When I settled into a shared residence later [in Germany], we met with Syrians who were... God have mercy on her children. All… three of them drowned in front of her eyes, and only the little girl remained alive. She was always waking up at night crying. I hear her voice." (Tulay, married and mother of two, 45 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Finally, death, trauma, and separation in refugee families attempting to cross the Aegean Sea had gendered consequences for women, especially for those who lost their husbands and were left out without financial or social support on the way. These consequences include going back to the war zone. Nirmeen shared the story of her friend, who lost her husband and baby in the Aegean Sea. She retreated from the asylum journey and returned to her extended family in Syria. She said,

> "My friend and her husband drowned at sea. Her husband drowned and her 5-month-old daughter died of cold in her hands, and her husband ran to save the girl by swimming to the beach, but due to the breach of the yacht and the delay of the rescue ships, her husband could not arrive at the beach. Although you see the beach close to you, like fifteen meters away, it is impossible to reach it by swimming. Her husband drowned while holding the girl, and she returned to Hama alone; she couldn't continue [the journey]." (Nirmeen, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

In summary, women's narratives illustrated various gendered challenges and insecurities during the clandestine sea journey in the Aegean Sea. First, the findings

revealed that the majority of the interviewed Syrian women often have limited swimming skills compared to men due to their gendered roles and confinement to the private sphere, as they had limited chances to practice swimming in Syria. There are other risk factors that contribute to creating hierarchies of drowning, such as fake life jackets and limited access to safety equipment. This finding is consistent with Pickering and Cochrane's (2013) study, which illustrates that gender and the conditions of the smuggling markets contribute to women's deaths during irregular border crossing. Second, women's traumatic experiences in the Aegean Sea are exacerbated by the caregiving role and the presence of children on the boat. Moreover, the death at sea has gendered implications for women, such as retreating from the asylum journey to Europe and going back to the war zone.

3.2.1.4. Pushbacks and Rescue at the Eastern Mediterranean Sea Route

As was mentioned in the second chapter, the Aegean Sea in 2015 was a hotspot for search and rescue (S&R) operations by both state actors (Turkish and Greek) and non-state actors (NGOs, volunteers). These maritime operations aim to save lives at sea in accordance with international law (Koka & Veshi, 2019). However, at the same time, the irregular sea border crossing had been targeted by highly securitized border control and punishment practices, such as pushbacks to Turkish territorial waters and pullbacks to Turkey. The interviewed women expressed some securitized practices of the Greek border guards, such as refusal to rescue and pushbacks. They also expressed being subject to extensive S&R operations by the Turkish coast guard in Turkish territorial waters. However, no problems have been reported in their interaction with the Turkish coast guard.

In the context of border securitization practices, although some of the interviewed women who experienced interaction with the Greek coast guard in the Aegean Sea had been rescued, like Omama and Roza, they expressed their fear of violent border practices like pushbacks. Moreover, they expressed their fear of family separation during the rescue operations on the sea journey. As these narratives illustrate:

> "The [the Greek] coast guard came, so he [the driver] had to take us back to hide from them. People said that they [the Greek coast guard] were taking the Syrians and

throwing them into the sea and leaving them to drown." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

"We were only 30 minutes away from Greece, the engine stopped. At that moment, we called the Greek coast guard a lot... Of course, the Greek guard will not save you... It's all a lie... They neglected us; no one answered us. A lie, I mean, these are the sensitive feelings that we used to see a lot in television. They hung up the phone, hung up on us, even though we spoke to them in English, they understood completely what was happening. You know? And they did not agree to come and save us. They did not agree to come and save us. On the contrary, they hung up on us and told us, "Call Turkey and let it take you back". Although we were on their borders and close to the island, [there was] a very close distance [...] At that moment, there was a Greek fisherman. We were whistling for someone to help us [...] he helped us reach the Greek shore." (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

"When we came across the Greek [coast] guards, they started saying, "We rescue only mothers with children." We did not agree. Women began to express that: "We want to stay with our husbands." Women began to fear for their husbands. They fear that they would kill them, for example, or that their children would be taken away from them after they have been rescued and [women] could be thrown into the sea. They did not push us back, but they told us in English that they were coming to save us. We refused; they told us, "Then go from here; we don't want you here." They left, repeating these words. At first, the Greek guard was not bothering people. And the Greek police did not say anything. Then the orders came to annoy the people [on the move] and not let them to enter [Greece]." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

"The Greek coast guard came and took the children, and left us... They point weapons and lights at you and, I do not know what else they point at you, they treat you as if you were a criminal. Then the men would scream and say, "We have children with us. We have children with us". They grabbed my little daughter and carried her. They lifted her up to see her. She was crying and terrified... I remember the feelings and my eyes are teary. [Silence and crying] . Then they came and took all the children. They took my children, and my husband threw himself into the sea. He was afraid that they would take the children and go. He threw himself from the boat onto the yacht following them, and I stayed in the boat alone. I was very scared. Then they tied us with a rope and pulled out Kos. We were scared that they would take the children. […] The most fearful thing I felt was when we were at sea and the Greek coastguard came to us. The way they pull weapons on us and start talking with the microphone and circling around us. I mean, are they coming to save us or frighten us?." (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The previous narratives illustrate that border management practices and search and rescue operations have gendered implications. First, the limited capacity for rescue operations and the tendency to save the lives of the most vulnerable people, like women with children, create gendered insecurities for women regarding their fear of family separation and being separated from their husbands and their children. Therefore, the direct gendered implication is creating women's fear of family

separation during these operations, which creates a tendency for women to refuse to be rescued without the rest of their families.

Second, women's narratives confirm the previous literature accusing the practices of pushbacks and their role in exacerbating death cases in the Aegean Sea. The Greek authorities were accused of practicing pushbacks and risking the lives of asylum seekers in the overcrowded inflatable boats, and these violent practices are harshly affecting women and children in the Aegean Sea (Cosse, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2014). Therefore, the impact of pushbacks is exposure to drowning at sea. As was mentioned in the previous section, there are gendered hierarchies of drowning due to the limited swimming capacities of women and their limited access to safety equipment.

In summary, the narratives and lived experiences of the interviewed women illustrate the gendered implications of securitization practices, particularly pushbacks and the limited S&R capacities. It becomes evident that women were disproportionally affected by these practices during the clandestine crossing of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route.

3.2.2. Onward Mobility Within Europe: Syrian Women's Experiences at the Western Balkan Route

The Western Balkan Route includes various countries in Southeast Europe, starting from Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Austria, and Germany, or countries in western Europe. After the closure of Hungary's border in September 2015, the route from Serbia to Austria switched, and the migratory flows crossed from Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, and Germany (see Figure 2.2).

The Western Balkan route is longer than the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route. It is a challenging route in which asylum seekers cross various states to reach their destination, Germany, in a clandestine and insecure way. This implies: first, some of the interviewed women did not remember the exact trajectory or the names of the countries they went through, and many of them called it "the land route" basing this naming on the geography of this route. Second, the interviewed Syrian women

expressed their insecurities and their fear of being unaccompanied on this long route. Expressions like "need for a man" and "exposure to bad things" make it apparent that women crossing this route are exposed to different types of insecurities and sexual gender-based violence by a wide range of actors and in different locations.

All the interviewed Syrian women crossed the Western Balkan Route, except Tasneem, who crossed the Athens airport using fake passports to Germany in 2014 because of fear of sexual assaults and the context of highly securitized borders at that time. Tasneem expressed that she had to wait for a month in Athens, and she has had six failed border crossing attempts at Athens Airport. She said as follows:

> "In fact, at the time, my ex-husband did not want me to go out by land [route]. He was completely rejecting the idea, [saying] that, "if whatever happened, no matter how long we stayed [in Greece], it was impossible to let you continue by land [route], because it is impossible for me to expose you to bad things". So, we did not use the land route. But when he came to Germany, he came by land, and I came by plane." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The interviewed women who crossed the Balkan route did so between May 2015 and January 2016. The time spent on the Western Balkan route after Greece was between two months and three days, depending on different factors like the journey timing, the availability of transportation, the dynamics of border policies, and the presence of NGOs during the refugee "crisis" years. The findings, of course, are not fully representative of the women's experiences on the Balkan route, but they offer in-depth insights on the gendered nature of the insecurities and difficulties that Syrian women faced.

3.2.2.1. Insecure, Overcrowded Reception and Transit Accommodation

All the interviewed Syrian women expressed their feelings of insecurity at different reception and transit centres in Greece, Serbia, Croatia, and Hungary. They expressed the conditions of overcrowded reception centres and how they were being exposed to a lot of men. This situation created a common concern among Syrian women regarding their exposure to sexual attacks and harassment in these overcrowded spaces, especially at night, by the other male migrants and asylum seekers. For instance, Omama said that she left the reception centre in Greece and slept with her son

outdoors, and Roza could not enter the reception centre in Kos. Expressions like being unable to sleep illustrate the gendered insecurities that women face. Although the EU member states are obliged to implement gender-sensitive responses in their reception facilities under the CEAS and 2013/33/EU directives, the actual implementation of these policies was insufficient during the European refugee crisis as a result of "panic politics" and the securitization of migration (Freedman, 2016a; UNHCR, 2015). Gendered vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by the inadequate response and the inadequate reception centres in various states during the asylum journey. The following narratives demonstrate the sense of insecurity that women felt while staying in these facilities:

> "We were afraid. We were terrified because in our dormitory [in Samos island] there were fifty men and women. No proper sleep; no proper toilet; no proper food; nothing". (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "There is no security all the way, and I was not able to sleep for 15 days". (Arwa, married and mother of one, 34years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "They [the Hungarian police] put us in the big dormitory; it was very crowded, and there was no place to sleep. You could not sleep comfortably with each bed next to the other; there was no space. Obligatory; you can't sleep. The people were about 500, and the blankets had insects that were biting people." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> "I remember in one area on borders, there were very long queues, and they were treating us in a bad way. They made the people sleep in very big hangars, and everyone was next to each other. I could not sleep." (Tulay, married and mother of two, 45 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "We arrived in Kos. The police put us in a camp like a hotel. People were sleeping outside on the ground, and the smell, the smell was killing, the toilets. You want to enter. I couldn't enter the toilet. I didn't agree to go inside the camp. We stayed outside to the dawn. We all sat down, and we were wet. I didn't agree to go inside." (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Moreover, Huda expressed that "we", women as a social group are subject to sexual harassment in such overcrowded spaces. While she was accompanied by her husband, he was making problems with other men and trying to protect her from sexual harassment. She said,

> "We, women, have been subjected to more harassment, or like this... When they gather us in a place where there are other nationalities, that is, non-Arabs... there were Arabs, Iraqis... and in many non-Arabs like Afghans... So maybe these Afghans try; I mean, they stick a lot, and my husband often had conflicts with them, and they didn't

> understand. You feel them, like they want to come close to you and stick to you. They will overwhelm you because the place was very crowded." (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The existing evidence supports the previous research highlighting the role of inadequate reception and transit centres located in various Greek islands, Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary in exposing women on the move, especially those who were unaccompanied, to sexual and gender-based violence (Freedman, 2016a; UNHCR, 2015).

3.2.2.2. Poor Access to Sanitary Facilities and Its Gendered Dimensions

Poor hygiene conditions were a central theme in Syrian women's narratives on the difficulties encountered during their asylum journey, and this has two gendered dimensions. The first dimension of this difficulty is the need for a guard and protector during women's usage of toilets and showers; though they did not explicitly mention sexual violence, they expressed their gendered fear and insecurity. The spread of men along the road to these facilities and the design of toilets with no locks or doors were prominent risk factors that hindered women's access to these facilities. Many women expressed that they preferred to avoid these facilities and further avoid eating and drinking. Moreover, the night-time was a special concern for women and required additional protection. Women's vulnerability to sexual violence during the usage of sanitary facilities has been highlighted in previous literature, and in many cases, women have to use the same facilities as men (Amnesty International 2016). As these narratives illustrate:

> "I was afraid; frankly, there was no security. You are afraid... you don't feel safe. I mean, if I wanted to go to the toilet, I would take my sons, we always used to be the three of us together, or I would take with me the ones I knew, the women I had with me. Of course, all toilets were filthy." (Omama, separated and mother of two, 50 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "The toilet [in the prison in Samos] also does not have a door or a curtain. The two girls who were with me were guarding me, for example, and I was also guarding them". (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "My children go with me if I want toilet during the day. We guard each other... If I need a toilet at night, my husband guards me". (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> “At the place where we were [in a Greek island] there were no toilets and no showers. I'm sorry to tell you this. You know how the Bedouin life is? from defecating under the tree, behind the grass. You should manage it by yourself. We used to take showers inside the plastic tent. My brother used to buy bottled water and shampoo. I used to take a shower while he was standing in front of the tent as a precaution to protect me.” (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> “Don’t remind me of the toilets, I am begging you [laughter]. torment, torment, torment... to see a clean toilet on the road was one of my biggest dreams... don’t remind me, I want to tell you but I'm ashamed. We were in Serbia. We wanted to take the registration documents. I wanted to go to the toilet... We were in a forest. We walked 300 meters away from people, me and my mother; I found someone smelling me... I looked and saw a dog, bigger than me... I ran, and he ran after me... Bad, bad, bad... there were no toilets in the first stance” (Nahla, single, 26 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> “There are plastic public toilets in places where there are organizations. But, they are very bad. You feel the germs, the place is closed, and people stand in long queues. If you want to go to the toilet you hate your life. You prefer not to eat or drink anything, to never need a toilet’. (Tulay, married and mother of two, 45 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The second dimension is related to the physical formation of women’s bodies, which further exacerbates the need for hygiene and gendered vulnerabilities to sexual violence during access to toilet facilities. The conditions and the stress of the clandestine journeys have an impact on women’s bodies. Stress may affect hormones and lead to irregular menstrual cycles for women (Allsworth et. al., 2007). Moreover, women expressed that they were in disadvantaged situations compared to men in this regard. As these narratives illustrate:

> “Excuse me, menstruation comes on the road. We walked up mountains that you can't go up, and through agricultural lands that were all water and mud.” (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> “We all know that a woman may have her period during her migration. For women, this shame of divine gift or divine punishment was difficult. I used to encounter many women who had lost their bags and had their periods. Women were ashamed and didn't know much about how to ask and search. And men were looking for this piece that hid the blood of the menstrual cycle. Taking shower, men can undress, bathe in shorts, and bathe in the open spaces. As for women, they have privacy as the covering of their bodies” (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> “The matter is difficult... You saw that on the level of the toilets, the issue is difficult... So, what do you think about more than this? The man pees at any time; he does not care [laugh]. All these details differ. This issue is very difficult for us.” (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

In conclusion, the previous narratives show that Syrian women faced various challenges based on their gender when accessing sanitary facilities. These challenges and gendered insecurities evolved with the fear of sexual attacks by other men and the need for "protector" while using toilets. Moreover, the narratives illustrate that women are in a disadvantageous situation compared to men regarding their special hygiene needs and health conditions. The findings support Freedman's (2016a) findings indicating the special protection needs for women on the move and the inadequate response in terms of providing hygiene facilities along the Balkan route. Subsequently, this undermines women's well-being and exacerbates women's health problems (Freedman, 2016a).

3.2.2.3. Insecure Means of Transport: Vulnerability to Gangs and Abduction

The securitization of migration along the western Balkan route renders human mobility invisible and irregular. The interviewed Syrian women expressed being forced to walk through long and risky routes through forests and mountains, and many of them expressed being exposed to gangs and rubbers. Many of them relied on the smuggling services on the western Balkan route to facilitate their mobility beyond the states' restrictions and surveillance. The route from Macedonia, Serbia to Hungary was described as a risky route where women are exposed to thieves and gangs in different forests and are exposed to possible sexual attacks. These narratives illustrate this idea:

> "What I heard was that the gangs used to come out armed in the forests and steel them [migrants]. They steel everything, including money and gold, and they could do something sexual with women. These are the stories I heard here in Germany. Women told me their stories of gangs doing this with women, but on the road, I did not see anyone." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "It is difficult for the person to put any imagination or idea of what she can find inside the forests where she is walking… it is not normal." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "We arrived at the Serbian-Hungarian border at night. We were a small group. The rest left us to go out in cars. The cost of the car was between 1300 and 1500 euros, and it was difficult for us to pay this amount […] We were walking to the Hungarian border by ourselves. As we were walking, a gang of masked Serbs came across with a stun gun. They told us: "Give us money or we will electrocute you," and I don't know what. They took 150 euros from the young man […] I only had 5 euros left, and they took it from me." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

The risk of the gangs extends even beyond the forests and isolated areas. The route from Macedonia, Serbia to Croatia was described as a risky route, where gangs appear in the form of taxi and private car drivers offering a car drive on the route from Macedonia, Serbia to Croatia. Some of the interviewed women expressed the necessity of walking in groups during border crossings. As these narratives illustrate:

> "In Serbia, there were taxis... There were taxis, for example, who were standing there waiting for people, and someone came and told us, "Taxi, come and let's go". Most of them were thieves or gangs. I mean, we didn't go with them. We kept walking. We were about 200 people walking together. They were like a gang distributed along the road in Serbia more than any other country." (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "We arrived at an area that is between the border of Serbia and Croatia. This is the border where we were at night, and its distance was very long. They told us that this border must be crossed on foot, but this road, they told us, is all bandits; you must beware, and if a car comes, do not ride. They scared us. We walked quickly and in groups together" (Omama, separated and mother of two, 50 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The previous literature highlighted that human smuggling could be a starting point or a foundation for human trafficking (Brunovskis & Surtees 2019). The existing literature and human rights reports regarding the Balkan route highlighted the exposure of asylum seekers on the move to various forms of exploitation and human trafficking, including sexual, and labour exploitation, and organ removal, especially in Macedonia and Serbia. Women with their children or alone are among highly vulnerable groups that could be more exposed to trafficking; however, there is a general difficulty in recognizing and documenting the trafficking victims (Brunovskis & Surtees 2019; La Strada / Open Gate, 2016). In line with this literature, some Syrian women experience exposure to gangs and abduction. Roza and Nahla survived abduction attempts during transport through Serbia. Roza was exposed to abduction with her husband and children at a smuggler house in Serbia on their way to Hungary, and Nahla expressed being exposed to abduction during a car ride after arriving in Serbia. In such insecure conditions, women are exposed to possible sexual attacks and severe insecurity, as these narratives illustrate:

> "There were people who were killed, and a lot of people were kidnapped. We stuck with people, and we would have been taken [in abduction]. We; I, my mother, my brother, and a person we got acquainted with rode an ordinary car on the Serbian borders, on the

> basis that he would deliver us to the police station to get the registration papers and we would get out of Serbia. He went on paved ways first, then went out between the forests, and someone called him on the phone […] He spoke to someone on the phone and told him, "I brought you goods; there are four with me and their health condition is good". Clear! It was an abduction. We told him to go back [...] It was a real kidnapping process. He was driving the car and passing through terrifying ways, between the forests, and it was horrible. It was night... All our way was at night... There were no taxi cars, they say they are taxis, but they are criminals. I do not know who they are and what they do." (Nahla, single, 26 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "I remember that one woman, during walking out [on the the Balkan route] there was a smuggler who took her on one side… or she got lost from the people she was with, so she was locked in a house and a lot of things happened to her… she was raped, maybe by four guys... I get nervous when I hear this topic." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "When we arrived in Serbia, we got to know a female Serbian smuggler who wants to get us out of Serbia to Hungary. She is Serbian, but she knows little Arabic. She took us to a house to sit in, and they were bargaining with us on the price. […] We were afraid that they wanted to do something to us, that she wanted to kidnap us. Why did she no longer come or call? My husband and I decided to run away from the house. The house was on the first floor with a balcony. We jumped off the balcony. I remember that night, if I drank water, I vomited... We were hungry, we didn't eat, and we were afraid." (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

To summarise, the narratives and lived experiences of the interviewed Syrian women demonstrate their insecurity along the clandestine journey on the western Balkan route regarding the means of transport. The results showed that the risk of kidnapping, robbery, and exposure to gangs appears in remote places and in the form of cars offering delivery services in Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, and Croatia. The narratives illustrate the gendered dimension of this insecurity and its implications for women's vulnerability to sexual assault. Finally, the results showed that the risk of being kidnapped by gangs deployed on the road and human trafficking is part of the transit journey in the Balkan countries.

3.2.2.4. Gendered Dynamics of Group Walking

The main characteristic of the Western Balkan route was "lots of walking" (Hess & Petrogiannis 2020). In this regard, the interviewed women expressed that during group walking across borders, women are "always behind". They expressed being disadvantaged and pressured in different ways during group walking through the Western Balkan route compared to their male counterparts.

There are several factors that impact these inequal gender patterns of walking. First, since women's bodies undergo menstrual cycles and pregnancy, the interviewed Syrian women perceive themselves as having certain disadvantages, so men were perceived as having better health conditions, fitness, and physical strength compared to women in terms of jumping, walking, and endurance. Most of the interviewed women expressed a feeling of pressure to maintain a walking pace with men, who may walk at a faster pace than women. Second, the gendered roles of women play a role in this disadvantageous situation, as women are responsible for children. This gendered factor influences the practice of walking and renders women's walking slower than others, as well as creating the need to rely on others to carry bags and children. Third, the cultural dress code of Muslim Syrian women was another factor that made walking difficult for women. For instance, Roza remarked that the clothing heavy weight added a layer of difficulty compared to men's. The following narratives illustrate this idea:

> "When we have women and children with us, the movement is very slow, and the women and children are always behind, and they always need the help of those who carry the children for them. We used to walk long distances. The guys, no matter how much they help, say to you in the end, "I want to survive; why do I get stuck with them?" They [women] were like a burden or a load." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "It is difficult for women to jump like men across the border. Women have thinner jump. If a man runs, he is physically and structurally faster than a woman's running." (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "Men are [crossing] easier […] the journey does not require intelligence from you. The journey requires a lot of physical strength." (Nahla, single, 26 years old, Germany).

> "In Hungary, we walked and all of the lands were irrigated and wet agricultural lands. The rain fell on it. As you walk, you get muddy, and the clay reaches the middle of your leg. I also wear a *Manto* [long coat] and it was very difficult to walk." (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "When you have a small child, and you are walking in the mud, you have to put him on your shoulders so that he doesn't sink in the mud, and he falls, and you carry him again, and he falls, and so on... very tiring." (Nirmeen, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "I stayed with young men because most of the women on the road have children, and children are a hindrance to us... For example, I wanted to walk ten kilometers in five hours, so I did not try to accompany a group of women and children, because they always needed rest and someone to help them. I felt sad for them, but it was difficult for me on the road. We started walking in an unnatural way; imagine walking twenty

> kilometers in one day... It was difficult for me to carry bags and children with other people. I wanted to arrive quickly." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

Moreover, the gendered dynamics during group walking along the Balkan route and the disadvantageous situation of women may have an impact on women's ability to make independent decisions about the directions and paths they wish to take, as they were placed in the frame of "followers". Moreover, it may create safety concerns for women and raise the chances of getting lost and being isolated from the group because of being "behind" and struggling to follow the path of other men.

The long walk is a common challenge for women seeking asylum on the Balkan route in the context of the securitization of migration. Hess and Petrogiannis (2020) argue that women's bodies are neglected during walking and long, tiring journeys as women may experience menstrual cycles and pregnancy. The findings of this study confirm the findings of Hess and Petrogiannis, as some Syrian women expressed the difficulty of pregnant women crossing the Balkan route and the implications of this walking on their health conditions. As these narratives illustrate:

> "It is impossible for a pregnant woman to use to the land route." (Nahla, single, 26 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "You need physical strength. I mean, I was carrying a small bag, and I threw it away. My husband, for example, was carrying a bag, and his son and my brother were carrying a large bag, and they walked long distances. I'm not telling you about a 10-minute walk. I tell you about a distance that will take you several hours to walk. There is a long period of waiting that you have to endure. You know. My sister, for example, passed out a hundred times while we were just standing at the border to sign, fingerprint, or do anything. [When] she arrived here; she was admitted to the hospital for 15 days, which means that for 15 days she got sick, while my brother and husband did not" (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

3.2.2.5. Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence

Women's victimization process continued at the private level. Being accompanied by a husband or family member, on the one hand, ensures protection for women but, on the other hand, poses a threat to these women. The changing gender power relations during the migration process and the high levels of stress, fear, and uncertainty during the clandestine asylum journey would create forms of domestic violence. The previous

literature reveals that the need to take control of anything after losing control would create and exacerbate cases of domestic and intimate partner violence among couples on the move, and this was a source of insecurity for women on their journey to the EU (Freedman, 2016a). In accordance with the literature, in this study, some Syrian women said that they were exposed to intimate partner violence. Nirmeen and Tasneem expressed that they had experienced domestic, emotional, and physical abuse with their ex-husbands on the way to Germany. Nirmeen was experiencing this type of violence in Syria, while Tasneem was experiencing it during the journey to the EU. As these narratives illustrate:

> "While I was on the road, in Austria, I separated his [her ex-husband's] things from mine... There was a situation on the road where he insulted me in front of other people... He had a cigarette in his hand and hit me with it. He put it out on me... This thing made me more insistent that I wanted to leave him... It's over. This is the thousandth time it appears that there is no way to fix this man." (Nirmeen, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "I did not notice domestic violence. But in an incident that happened between my friend and her ex-husband, he started beating her on the road. He started to beat her in front of people. He was venting his anger on her, and he practiced all kinds of violence against her. None of her family was present. *Al-tase Daiia* [The bowl is lost: confusion and general chaos] in the way of asylum, but thank God, once she arrived, she was separated from him" (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "We were killing each other [laugh]. It wasn't domestic violence. It was more than that. I mean, [laugh], we were fighting a lot... along the journey... [silence] .. Also, he was under pressure in the end. He didn't want to go out [of Syria], and I was under pressure, and he used to open Facebook, and every time he heard that So-and-so was arrested, so-and-so died, and so-and-so was martyred, so his nerves were damaged, and my nerves were damaged [...] There was a beating... but I also wouldn't tell you I., I am not a submissive woman, so I was also… a hit for a hit… but it was not a life to be lived within all this pressure that I was experiencing." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The previous narratives demonstrated that violence continued at domestic and private levels along the clandestine journeys to the EU.

3.2.2.6. "No one to help" and Lack of Socio-legal Protection

The previous literature found that Syrian refugee women preferred not to report domestic violence and were reluctant to seek external support (Al-Shdayfat and Hatamleh, 2017; Freedman, 2016a). There are several reasons behind this social

attitude. Cankurtaran and Albayrak (2019) remarked that Syrian women exposed to this type of violence prefer to maintain family structures and solidarity. Hassan (2022) demonstrated different factors behind this attitude, including culture and society, the conditions of asylum, factors related to services and lack of trust, women's perceptions like lack of support and inability to help, and a lack of knowledge. In this regard, a common theme appeared among all the participants: there was a lack of social protection and "no one to help" during the clandestine asylum journey to Europe. The findings of this study reveal that Syrian women were unable to report domestic violence because of different factors: first, the conditions of irregular migration. The nature of clandestine asylum mobility require being hidden form authorities, thereby, there was a lack of legal security and protection. As these narratives illustrate.

> "No one [to help]... This is my decision, and I was taking a complete risk [...] we were all the time running away from the police, we were all the time running away from the police". (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "[Laughter]. I can tell you there is no one [...] in general, it is your choice. If something happens to you, who wants to save you? There is nobody. There were no options to rescue after Greece." (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "There was never, ever any institution ... no one to help on this journey. In the first place, it is because it is against the law and everyone warns of it, so they did not open an entity to help people take the risk". (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "There were no humanitarian organizations on the road; we did not meet any organizations, only volunteers from the people. For example, in Macedonia, a man with his wife and children gave us water. There was a Turkish man in Macedonia who helped us get a car. People were helping us". (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

Second, during the European refugee "crisis" and the panic mentality, quick mobility is required. The women's fear of staying in transit was a barrier for women on the move to seek help. The previous literature reveals that women preferred to arrive at their destination quickly and then leave abusive relationships (Freedman, 2016a). Even during the humanitarian corridor in last 2015, social support was present with the presence of different humanitarian organisations and social workers; however, the literature revealed that social workers reported difficulty intervening in these cases where women preferred to continue their journeys with their husbands (Freedman,

2016a). The findings of this study support the previous literature. Tasneem and Nirmeen were exposed to domestic violence, and they expressed that their priority was to arrive at their destination, then file for divorce and leave their husbands. Healing and wellbeing were not options for them in transit countries where there is inadequate refugee protection and a fear of return and deportation. These narratives demonstrate their plans:

> "The goal was to reach a healthy place and tell him [her husband] goodbye. My goal was just... I want to get there, and I want him to reach a safe place, then it is over, we have finished." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "I have a friend; she came here, and she was coming on the way and saying, "I want to get divorced. The first step I want to take when I arrive is to divorce him". (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

3.2.2.7. Interaction with Police

In the context of the securitization of migration and the framing of migrants as "threat", many of the interviewed women reported practices of violence by border guards and authorities in Greece, Macedonia, and Hungary. They expressed mass beatings, pushbacks, administrative detention, and enforced asylum registration in Hungary. As these narratives illustrate:

> "We arrived on a small Greek island where there was nothing. We walked for three hours to the police station, then they took us by ship to a military island called Samos, as if we were entering a prison. They beat men. They took us to a regular prison, where there were about a thousand men, mostly Africans and Afghans. As you can imagine, of course they took everything from us: your shoes tie, bra, cameras, headphones, mobile phone, money, passport, and hijab pin. They did not leave a single thing except clothes covering our bodies." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "The Macedonian border guards were very, very filthy, holding sticks and beating people, and insulting in both Macedonian and English so that people could understand […] In Hungary, they force people to register and finger print. At that time, people began to flee the authorities and resort to smuggling again." (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "My friend was pregnant, and they [the Macedonian police] beat her... At the border, she was beaten while she was pregnant. She was humiliated a lot. She came here before me in 2015. She told me that they imprisoned them as well. She was eight months pregnant. But when she arrived in Germany, she gave birth." (Omama, separated and mother of two, 50 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "They caught us. They put us in big cars. And they took us to a big car garage. Papers, papers. They took our IDs and passports, wanted to register us, and wanted to take our fingerprints in Hungary before we could leave. And if your fingerprint was taken in Hungary and no European country receives you." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

However, the narratives suggest the gendered dimensions in the interaction with border authorities. The stereotype of males as threats and females as victims exacerbates various gendered insecurities for men and women on the move. In this regard, many interviewed women expressed that men were in a disadvantageous situation as they were exposed more to physical violence by border authorities than women in Greece, Macedonia, and Hungary, while women were exposed to sexual assaults and harassment during administrative detention in Greece and Hungary. Some of the women expressed their feelings of fear while being in overcrowded detention facilities with other men. This fear is particularly related to their vulnerability to sexual assaults during the night and during access to hygiene facilities. This inadequate implementation of gender-sensitive policies and directives has been highlighted in literature during the refugee "crisis" (Freedman, 2016a). These narratives illustrate the feeling of insecurity during administrative detention in Greece and Hungary:

> "We were more than a thousand men of different nationalities [in Samos island]; even the Syrians from *Al-Balm* [the rubber boat], we did not know, and we did not feel safe with all of them. We were afraid. We were terrified because in our dormitory there were fifty men and women. No proper sleep; no proper toilet; no proper food; nothing." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany).

> "We stayed five days in prison [in Hungary]. They put fifty people in a small room, like the political prison in Syria. There is no place for you to sleep or stretch out. New groups would come and leave, and we would stay as a punishment for us." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

These narratives illustrate that men were exposed more to physical violence than women:

> "They [the Greek border guards] were very bad, and our clothes were wet. The people who received us on the island beat the men, and yelled at the women if the children were crying. They only gave us nylon blankets for the children. We slept on the floor next to each other, and our clothes were wet. Of course, you don't sleep in such an atmosphere." (Omama, separated and mother of two, 50 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "In many places on the borders and with the foreign police, because I am a woman they were tolerant with me, the men on the borders of Greece [on the island of Samos] were beaten, but we [the women] they did not approach us. At the Macedonian border, I told the policeman that I could not walk, so he put me in the [police] car. Do you understand how? Even in Hungary, when they arrested the young men, they grabbed them, surrounded them, pushed them, imprisoned them in a cell, and confiscated their belongings ... As for me, they put me in another place." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany).

In summary, women's journeys across the Western Balkan route require interaction with various authorities and border guards. The securitization of migration implies practices like mass detention, physical violence, pushbacks, surveillance, and registration. The interviewed Syrian women expressed their exposure to these practices. However, they expressed being in a disadvantageous situation regarding their fear of sexual assaults; on the other hand, they expressed a gendered pattern of being exposed to less physical violence in contrast to men.

3.3. SYRIAN WOMEN'S STRATEGIES AT THE EUROPEAN BORDERS

This section will present the ways in which Syrian women negotiated their clandestine asylum journeys from Syria to Germany. It will examine the strategies and practices that Syrian women employed to challenge systems of oppression and maintain their security and well-being. This section will also discuss the possible implications of these strategies for Syrian women's lives.

3.3.1. Strategies to Access Information: Using Online Solidarity Groups

Gathering information is part of the pre-departure preparations and arrangements in the exit phase. However, access to information about clandestine asylum journeys and smuggling networks is impacted by gendered roles; as was mentioned earlier, Syrian men are exposed to the public sphere and have access to social capital in destination countries, as well as access to information about the smugglers, the prices, and the procedures. Syrian women, due to their gender roles, have often been excluded from this preparation. However, while many of the interviewed Syrian women who were accompanied with their families, expressed that they relied on their husbands to get information, some women who were unaccompanied or only accompanied with their younger relatives expressed playing an active role in this regard. Those Syrian women

navigated masculine smuggling journeys by accessing information and knowledge in a relatively safe way using social media platforms. Syrian women coming from middle and higher social classes who have internet access, mobile phones, and laptops were able to access Facebook solidarity groups and read about previous experiences. This formed a safe avenue for sharing and accessing information for them. Accessing information helped Syrian women plan their journeys and kept them informed about the challenges and possibilities along the way.

For instance, Rama expressed that she was the first woman from her family to leave Syria, and she was accompanied by her younger brother. Therefore, she made a smugglers' blacklist; she did extensive research to collect the names of the smugglers by reading other people's recommendations and experiences with these smugglers, and she put smugglers who defrauded refugees on a special list to avoid dealing with them later. However, some women expressed that they prefer to get information from their social capital rather than from the internet because it is more reliable. Yet, Rama, Nahla, and Tulay expressed that they used social media to access information while they were in Syria and Turkey before the start of their clandestine journeys. They learned about what to carry in their bags, what the possible difficulties were, and other information to overcome the uncertainty of the clandestine journeys. As these narratives illustrate:

> "I am the first woman from the family who dared to come out. Going to Europe is not common for us, the patriotic Damascene families […] You look at all the equipment through social media. Facebook groups that were at the time of 2015. Here, you ask what I should take with me, what should I have with me, because it has become like a summary of the experiences of many people who have gone through the same ways, so they give you butter, what do you take and what? Do you dispense […] I intensively spend four hours per day after the children sleep, and I search extensively for ways... for the names of the smugglers.... about the people who say we got out with this smuggler and he was *Ibn Halal* [good]... About the people who criticize certain smugglers, I made a list and highlight the bad names in case they pass me by during the immigration, to not to deal with them." (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "Of course, before the journey I used the social media groups. I benefited from seeing what the necessary items are to take with you and what the unnecessary items are that you can bring later. For example, they tell you about the route. They tell you the experiences of the people before you. They warn you how to avoid being deceived. It is

> very useful and effective. The truth is, of course, not all of the groups, but some of them were very good." (Tulay, married and mother of two, 45 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The previously mentioned expressions and findings go in line with the literature emphasizing the role of smartphones, the internet, and new communication technologies in navigating and planning the experiences of Syrian asylum journeys to the EU (Gillespie et al., 2018).

3.3.2. Safety Strategies: "Hiding Behind a Man"

Women on clandestine asylum journeys across various borders are vulnerable to sexual attacks from different actors, like smugglers and facilitators, other refugees and migrants, and police in different locations. This gendered vulnerability has nothing to do with how women defend themselves or how physically and mentally strong they are. In this regard, all the interviewed Syrian women expressed that the visibility of women on clandestine journeys is very risky. All the interviewed Syrian women were aware of this gendered vulnerability to sexual assaults and the structures that create and exacerbate this vulnerability. They expressed that the presence of trusted men is necessary on this journey to protect them from other men. They perceive that the presence of a male companion offers a great level of protection, and almost all of them approached the borders with men from their families. As these narratives illustrate:

> "If my husband was not with me, something worse would have happened. I mean, always always there is a woman … you always find her hiding behind a man… behind her boyfriend, behind her lover, behind her husband, behind anything… It is difficult for the person to put any imagination or idea of what she can find inside the forests where she is walking… it is not normal […] I mean that if he [her ex-husband] did not exist and I made the decision to go out, I would have hide behind a man." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany).

> "When they [men] see a woman, all their eyes point at her. All men and young people, no certain nationality. When a woman's husband and children are with her, she becomes protected. Like in... just protected, you know? So, no one comes close to her, she is with her husband […] On borders, whenever a woman is alone, or divorced, or does not have her husband, or anything. Everyone becomes greedy to get her, you know? people become like wild beasts. Women have become desired by all." (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "It is very difficult for a woman to be on the border on her own, it is impossible […] women are subject to rape… They are subject to anything... No matter how hard they try to defend themselves, they do not have the physical strength to defend themselves.

> Even if she caught a stick and hit the smuggler, the smugglers are used to violence. The smuggler is only a mediator, and the mediator is a mediator and there is the big head. It is not known where he is from, is he from Germany, from Britain, France, from America." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> "I didn't have the courage to go out by myself, and I needed a man with me to protect myself from people like me who were going out with me. Because, unfortunately, I feel that if you are going out with a Syrian person like you at the border and a refugee like you, but he sees you alone, even if you are not talking to him, he will not stop [to harass you]." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "It is difficult. It is not possible. It is very difficult. It is difficult. It is beyond imagination. Despite everything I did, I could not do it without my husband." (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

Moreover, in this study, Amal was exposed to gender-based violence in Syria; she was divorced, deprived of her children, exposed to forced marriage again, and exposed to domestic violence. She considered accepting her university friend's marriage proposal to be able to accompany him and flee Syria together, despite her perception of him as her younger brother. She observed cases like hers on the route where Syrian women were travelling with male companions during the clandestine asylum journeys. She expressed:

> "I kept thinking, I said it was an opportunity; I trust this person [...] I trust his morals. I thought about the matter; [I considered] going with him on the way so that I could be safe for myself. He is my friend from the university and like my brother, I trust this man, so I am safe for myself. It's like protection for me. In the end, the journey is very difficult. I can't go out on my own outside of Damascus […] On the way, the majority of women are within families. I saw two women in the same situation as me who had taken a guy and wanted to marry him too." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

These findings are in line with the previous literature indicating that Syrian women tend to be accompanied by their family members to ensure their protection while crossing the highly masculinized and securitized EU borders (Özgür Baklacıoğlu, 2017a). The findings suggest that the EU's securitization of migration and the conditions of clandestine asylum journeys exacerbate gendered discrimination and create women's dependency on men. This creates limited chances for women's self-determination on the clandestine routes, and this renders Syrian women at risk of being exposed to domestic violence, stuck, and trapped in abusive relationships with limited options for leaving, as was illustrated earlier.

3.3.3. Strategies for Navigating Gendered Hierarchies in the Smuggling Hubs

As was mentioned earlier, gendered roles impact the interaction with smugglers and facilitators; it constitutes a man-to-man interaction. The secondary position given to women in this hierarchy renders them insecure and leaves them with little control over their mobility. The findings of this study reveal that there are cases where Syrian women were facing intimate partner violence during the journey, or they were fleeing gender-based violence and sexual assaults and wanted to arrive at their destinations as soon as possible. They tend to play an active role to accelerate the process of their passage and gain some control over their journeys. In this regard, Nirmeen, Tasneem, and Omama played an active role and negotiated the hierarchies of the smuggling market. They used their soft power to accelerate their Aegean Sea boat journeys by interacting with smugglers or facilitators with "confidence", building friendship relationships with them, asking about their last names and families, searching for common networks, and imposing their terms upon the smugglers to gain some control over the process and feel a sense of security. These strategies will be illustrated in the three cases as follows:

First, Tasneem was exposed to domestic violence during her journey, and the long waiting for the smugglers in Turkey kept her feeling insecure and uncertain about the timing of the boat journey, so she maintained her interaction with one young Syrian facilitator and one Iraqi smuggler to access information and ensure being transferred as soon as possible by boat. She expressed:

> "I was under pressure from this person [her ex-husband], but at the same time I did not give up. I kept trying. The smuggler [in Turkey] with whom we went out... every morning, I stood in front of his room door until he came out to drink a cup of morning coffee with him... and ask him: "what are the news?". At that time, we became friends with the smuggler, and he started telling me about his fiancée that she did not like his profession and that he had to leave the job... and after we got out, he left the job […] The last one [smuggler] was scary... We were sitting with him at home... We only sat for a few days until he managed to get us out. He always sat with the gun in front of him, and the young man who was before that was a young guy from Syria, I was drinking a cup of coffee with him. He was a little guy...you didn't feel that he is so dangerous, but this [The Iraqi smuggler][…] I had a way to make others feel comfortable with me… I don't know how, so he [The Iraqi smuggler]did not feel that he should be careful, so, he [The Iraqi smuggler] started telling us about a lot of things.... He started telling us about smuggling from a long time ago, how his mother and father

> knew each other, the dangerous smuggling journeys in which he participated". (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Second, Omama, who fled sexual assaults and domestic violence in Syria with her children, expressed that she was afraid, however, she navigated the insecure waiting conditions by asking about the family name -the last name- of the Syrian smuggler before approaching him, and then she built a trust relationship with him based on the presence of joint acquaintances and a common social network. She said as follows:

> "In the hotel, people told me this is *Al-Balm's* [the rubber boat] owner. I asked people around me, "Do you know who the family of the smuggler is?" They told me that the smuggler was from [the smuggler's last name]. I have many acquaintances because I used to work in Syria with many women, and I especially, I know the biggest families in Damascus. So, I went to him and spoke to him. I told him, "Do you know [a woman's name?]" He said, "Yes, she is my uncle's wife; where do you know her from?" I told him, "She is my friend." The smuggler took care of us. When we got to *Al-Balm* [the rubber boat], he let me in first. He told me that there is more protection on the motor side. On the motor side, it is safer because the other side is on top and is exposed to water. I asked, and people told me; I did not go to the smuggler and talk to him without a pre-question." (Omama, separated and mother of two, 50 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Third, Nirmeen, too, was exposed to intimate partner violence and was deceived by a smuggler, who was a friend of her ex-husband. At that time, her husband told her not to intervene, but after the deception issue, she expressed that she played an active role in searching for, negotiating, and accelerating the clandestine sea journey. For instance, she imposed her terms upon a smuggler in Fethiye, saying that she would not pay the money if she did not arrive at the Greek island of Kastellorizo in 30 minutes. And if she arrived, she would give the money to the driver. As her narrative illustrates:

> "All the boats, when a boat arrives to [Greece], they tear it up and dispose of it. Unlike other boats, they return this boat to Turkey. The driver of the ship is often a minor. And I imposed a term upon him. I told him, "You told me I need 25 to 30 minutes to arrive in Greece." He said, "Yes." I told him, "What do you think about the road fee, I won't give it to you until I reach my destination. I will send it to you with the guy [the boat driver]... If we are late at sea for more than 30 minutes, I will not give you anything. " So he was OK. Here I was guaranteeing something, at least." (Nirmeen, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The previous findings illustrate the active role that some of the Syrian women played in navigating and responding to the limitations of the asylum journey to the EU. Some of the interviewed Syrian women expressed their interaction with the smugglers and

facilitators, who were the main actors in the process of refugees' boat journeys from Turkey to Greece. These findings are consistent with those of Krystalli et al. (2018), who suggest that women on the move often played an active role and used their soft skills during their interaction with different border actors as a strategy to respond to and navigate the inequal hierarchies in the asylum process.

3.3.4. Joining and Negotiating Social Networks on the Route

The narratives of all the interviewed Syrian women indicate being in larger groups and forming social capital with fellow migrants along their clandestine journeys. On the one hand, this blending in with other groups was a safety strategy for Syrian women to ensure being surrounded with support once it was needed. On the other hand, their narratives also illustrate that the gendered dynamics in these groups render them in marginal positions. However, there are women who are able to navigate these gendered structures. Joining the groups was mainly done in Turkey and Greece. For instance, Ghada, an unaccompanied woman, preferred to wait for her friend's relatives in Athens before moving forward through the Western Balkan route, as she was afraid of being unaccompanied, especially during the night and sleeping time. As these narratives illustrate:

> "I was the only one travelling by myself. There were women, but all of them were with their husbands and children [...] Of course, I had to continue with the group that was with me. But when my friend called me, her brother, and her nephew, who were in Turkey, she said to me, "You can wait for them to arrive to Athens if you like to be accompanied by them." I told her, "Frankly, it is better for me to go out with someone from my city and get to know him than to go out on the roads alone". Because we would be forced to sleep at night on the road; that's what they told us. Those who went before us told us most of them slept on the streets. And this is what really happened. I waited in Athens for them to come, and I went with them." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> "I joined a group from Turkey to Austria, and we all stayed together". (Arwa, married and mother of one, 34 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The interviewed Syrian women expressed the positive aspects of forming social networks and being in larger groups. It enhances their security; they can access information, mutual support, a sense of belonging, emotional support, and reduce the costs of transportation like taxis. As these narratives illustrate:

> "In that period, all people come out. You can say that if a woman could not find anyone from her family, she could find a companion to go out with. Someone from her country, from her city, not a stranger, someone she trusts, I mean.. the important thing is someone you know, but not a stranger... It is psychological relief." (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "We always travelled in groups, even if we didn't know them. We would go out with the groups to reduce expenses as much as possible because the road is long". (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> "The road was either with large groups to protect ourselves from gangs and thieves or we walked alone to avoid being seen by the police". (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

In line with the previous literature indicating gendered power relations in these groups (UN Women, 2016), the findings of this study suggest that forming and maintaining these groups on the route intersects with existing gendered social hierarchies. The inequal gendered power dynamics inside these groups often render women less accessible to resources and information or expose them to violence. Yet, there are narratives among the interviewed Syrian women which illustrate that women can resist these structures of inequality within groups in different ways. For instance, Roza expressed her husband's control over her interaction with other men in the group in Greece, and this impacted her access to information, yet she resisted this by secretly seeking to join men's conversations and talks. She expressed:

> "The men's group was more, you know, of women. I liked to sit with them when we were in Turkey. It was a group of young men. I like to sit with them. We are from a conservative environment. I like to sit, to know what the men are talking about. I learn. My husband always takes me away. He doesn't like sitting with men. He did not like to mix with them. He is very jealous. We got to know a group of Syrian men when we arrived at the camp in Kos, that had a bad smell. We met with them, sat down, and talked. I always told my husband to go and sit with them together, but he did not agree. When I see my husband not seeing me [smile], I go to sit with them, inquire, talk, and hear what is this, and what is that." (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Ghada, who chose to be accompanied by her friend's relatives, expressed that she was exposed to psychological violence as one of them was shouting at her. Yet she separated from him once she found trusted guys as alternatives. As her narrative illustrates:

> "I completed the road with two young men; a Christian young man and a young man from Homs, and we got separated from other people. I left the guy from Salamiyah because he and I argued about everything [laugh] He used to take out his anger on me... I can't take it anymore. I mean, we were all upset about the situation, and you are reaching a stage where you are not just disgusted with yourself... You forget your dirt, you forget your bathroom, you forget everything, but you want to arrive because we have been on our way for weeks." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

The previous findings indicate that Syrian women sought to accompany and blend into social groups on the route as it had a positive aspect in maintaining their security. However, the gendered dynamics in these groups often marginalize women. Yet, some Syrian women were able to negotiate these structures of oppression in these groups and enhance their protection and wellbeing.

3.3.5. Gendered Solidarity Practices

The findings of this study suggest a pattern of gendered solidarity practices among Syrian women during their clandestine asylum journeys to Germany. Most of the Syrian women interviewed revealed stories of forming women's communities and support networks. They also expressed instances of mutual and collective action at different points during the clandestine asylum journeys. They expressed that women used to sit together in hotel lobbies in Turkey with other women, as well as on various Greek islands, while waiting for registration. These gatherings provide emotional support and information sharing where women talk to each other along the journey to overcome their common insecurities. As these narratives illustrate:

> "We, the women, used to sit together, as psychological support, and we used to sit and talk together. There was a woman who communicated with her relatives in Germany, and they used to give her such directions... There was such help. I lost communication because my internet was down and my charging was over. I could no longer communicate with my brother in Germany". (Haya, divorced and mother of two, 60 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> "They were women meeting in the lobby of the hotel in the evening... I used to go and sit with them... I used to feel reassurance and familiarity with them." (Nirmeen, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "At the meeting point in Greece, I encountered a woman who came alone and formed a friendship with another woman who came alone. They became two. They met a woman who came alone. I saw a group of three women going alone. And since I am a woman, I went and talked to them. They didn't know each other. They met in Greece like, "Are you going? Yes. On your own? Yes, on my own. What do you think if you and I stayed

> together? ok, we will be together and we share the tent together and stand on the line together and walk together". This was a wonderful thing. I felt the place was like… a feminist or women's solidarity...or the ability of women to join hands with women in our country, doubled... when they felt they were in a strange environment, alone... this kind of grouping or solidarity and support intensified even more through the migration route." (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Moreover, gendered vulnerability and the fear of possible sexual attacks are common struggles among women on the move, as was mentioned in the previous section. However, the narratives of the majority of Syrian women demonstrate that Syrian women employed practices of solidarity and collective action by going to toilets and hygiene facilities as groups. This provides women with a sense of safety and security and reduces the risk of harassment and assault. As these narratives illustrate:

> "The toilet [in the prison in Samos] also does not have a door or a curtain. The two girls who were with me were guarding me, for example, and I was also guarding them." (Amal, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "On the road, if you need a toilet, you go with a woman; there is a woman who is always present, even if she is a stranger. You go to a faraway place together; the most important thing was that I tried during the day to find a place; a toilet. If there was no toilet, then I would not go." (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

> "There was a woman who came with us from Turkey in front of the beach from Izmir. She is an English teacher, and her husband is with her... We were at night when I went to the bathroom, and she went with me and vice versa [smile]... this is necessary... You see all the women together... For example, every country, every group together, for example, women together coming and going, especially those who go out without a man. There are many women who go out without men or women and girls and children." (Farah, married and mother of five, 49 years old, Germany).

The previous finding suggests the active role of Syrian women in supporting each other, maintaining their collective security, and challenging systems of oppression during their journeys. This finding supports the work of Freedman (2019), who highlighted the active role of refugee women in Athens and France and their collective solidarity practices of forming women's communities and support networks in transit and destination.

3.3.6. Strategies For Protecting Money During Border Crossing

There are challenges during the clandestine journeys across various borders. These challenges include being exposed to theft, gangs, security checks, and the confiscation

of money. Most of the interviewed women expressed that their husbands were the main ones responsible for funding their journeys. However, almost all the interviewed Syrian women expressed diverse strategies to protect their money and financial resources. They expressed the necessity of taking some money to cover the payments for food, water, transport, smuggling services, and other expenses. Syrian women employed many various strategies, such as concealment, relying on trusted intermediaries for transferring money, and distributing the money among family members. Regarding the concealment strategy, some Syrian women like Tulay and Ghada used creative methods like sewing hidden pockets in their clothes where they kept their money protected from theft. Moreover, Rama's personal experience indicates that concealment is influenced by cultural factors. For instance, she expressed that she bought a specific type of pilgrims' underwear that was sold in the local markets in Syria to protect her money from theft. As these narratives illustrate:

> "There are bandits in some places. I made like a pocket in my underwear and put the money in it. I didn't carry much with me except what is enough for us." (Tulay, married and mother of two, 45 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "The first thing we went to the market. You must bring the underwear of the pilgrims. You are not a pilgrim and young, and you ask them in the Hamidiya market... The pilgrims' underwear has secret places to hide things, because when the pilgrim comes out, he does not find a trusted place to hide his stuff. It is a custom inherited among the Damascenes. Pilgrim caravans make secret hideouts so that if the convoy is robbed, they can protect their stuff. Search for it... It is very funny... It is very, very popular." (Rama, married and mother of three, 36 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Relying on trusted intermediaries such as family members and friends in transit and destination countries to transfer money is a common practice that adds an extra layer of security. Ghada, who was unaccompanied during her journey, expressed relying on her relatives to access money. Those women who were accompanied by their families expressed that the practice of distributing money among family members was a strategy to minimize the risk of losing money. In this regard, Wardah illustrated that money was distributed among her family members as a precaution in case of drowning in the Aegean Sea. As these narratives illustrate:

> "We distributed the money between us so that if something bad happened in the sea, the other person would have money with him also." (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

> “Of course, I never carried money with me. I planned that in every area, my relatives would send me money because you were afraid that thieves would come to you on this road. I had enough money for Serbia, and in Hungary, money was transferred to me.” (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

The findings reveal that there is a gendered dimension to the concealment strategy. Roza, who was accompanied by her husband and children, expressed that her husband kept all the money with her, drawing on the general gendered assumptions that women’s bodies are more protected from detailed security checks from robbers and police because they are perceived as "passive victims" and "innocent" compared to men, who are perceived as "threats.". Thereby, they can prevent money from being taken from them by hiding it in women's bodies. In addition to Roza, Ghada also witnessed such practices among couples around her. This finding supports those of Krystalli et al. (2018), demonstrating that refugees have strategically used the hegemonic gendered perception that femininity is associated with passivity and innocence, and women’s bodies have been used to protect money. The findings reveal that Syrian women supported this strategy to maintain the collective financial security of their families. As these narratives illustrate:

> “I had the money in my chest. I had two gold bracelets and a collar, all of them. I wrapped them and put them on my breast. My husband kept all the money with me saying that men are exposed to search and check and women do not approach them, based on this principle. But we did not know that this had changed. I met women who told me in Serbia and Hungary, so bad, they were deprived of their clothes by women police, and they put a stick in their ass to search. They were subjected to detailed security checks on their bodies.” (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> “We were walking to the Hungarian border by ourselves. As we were walking, a gang of masked Serbs came across with a stun gun. They told us: "Give us money or we will electrocute you," and so on. They took 150 euros from the young man from Salamiyah, and the man and his wife hid the money in her underpants. She had made a pocket like a pocket in her underpants to hide the money. Because the inspection in general may be on your waist, chest, and hands, but the underpants are impossible for anyone to approach. They searched her waist and shoulders to see if anything was hidden, but they could not reach the money that was with her.” (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

However, as Roza expressed, the growing securitization practices and security checks also impact women’s bodies, and this situation "had changed". Therefore, this gendered strategy of concealment, according to Roza, is not useful anymore. In

conclusion, these findings clearly demonstrate that Syrian women were aware of the risky nature of these clandestine journeys, and they were ready to take risks and adopt tactics to maintain the safety of their money and reduce the risk of theft in various ways.

3.3.7. Religious Coping Strategies

Drawing on psychological literature, religious coping strategies, like faith and prayer, are effective tools in reducing fear and anxiety rates (Denney & Aten, 2020, pp. 771-772). Most of the interviewed Syrian women expressed that they relied on a bigger power and their faith in Allah to cope with the feelings of helplessness, uncertainty, and fear during the clandestine journeys. They expressed being exposed to extremely dangerous situations in the overcrowded rubber boats and their need for protection in their critical moments, like being exposed to death and drowning when the boats stopped in the sea.

Their narratives indicated that they used their Islamic beliefs and practices, like praying, reading the Quran, and sending peace upon the Prophet Muhammad. Kanal and Rottmann's (2021) study indicate that the cultural context shaping refugees coping strategies and Syrian refugee women's coping strategies relied on faith and their Islamic understanding to cope with stress and anxiety. The findings of this research support Kanal and Rottmann's findings and further expand the domain of this religious coping strategy to include cases of border crossing during the clandestine sea journey and in the Balkans while hiding from Hungarian police and Dublin fingerprints. As these narratives illustrate:

> "You just wish you could live. You pray to survive the sea". (Wardah, married and mother of three, 35 years old, Germany, Frankfurt).

> "I was not afraid. We were constantly remembering God, praising him, and praying to him […] All the way, I prayed so they [the Hungarian police] don't catch us. We went out and walked to Hungary, and we knew if the police caught you in Hungary, you couldn't get out. I was praying all the way that they didn't catch us". (Roza, married and mother of four, 37 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "I don't remember if I was afraid or nervous... because in this situation in this place, there is no one other than God who can bring you out of it. He is the God who brought

> you safely. He is the one who protects you. There is nothing else; there is nothing; you can't hold on to anything else". (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "The thing I was most afraid of was the sea. And when I stepped onto the *Balm* [rubber boat], I started praying, [saying,] "Lord, I'm not afraid of the sea; I love the sea so much... don't scare me of it". The trip was easy, and it didn't take us a long time... Only an hour". (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

The gender factor may seem less relevant because Syrian men can develop this strategy and rely on religion and faith. Yet, including religious coping strategies into the analysis of Syrian women's strategies during their clandestine journeys can provide a more comprehensive and intersectional understanding of the sociocultural dimensions of asylum journeys to Europe. It provides insights about the complexities of women's experiences and their cultural identity formation. This strategy illustrates the cultural context and its impact on women's coping strategies and the interplay between gender and other dimensions of identity, like religion. In the conditions of fear and uncertainty that the securitization of migration produces, religious coping strategies gave the interviewed Syrian women a sense of control, power, and resilience to navigate their circumstances. Moreover, acknowledging the potential for resilience and self-empowering strategies in the context of challenges and hardships can shift the essentialist narratives on women from the global South and challenge the victimization discourse.

3.3.8. Meaning-Making Strategies

Meaning-making has been used as a cognitive coping mechanism among refugee communities (Frounfelker et al., 2020). The previous research indicated that Syrian refugees in Portugal used meaning-making in relation to their past experiences of war to cope with trauma (Matos et al., 2021). The findings of this study further expand the meaning-making strategy in the context of the traumatic clandestine asylum experiences of Syrian women. Ghada, Tasneem, and Huda used the strategy of making meaning of their journeys to cope with the anxiety of the asylum journey. Syrian refugee women constructed their own meanings and perceptions of the clandestine asylum journeys to Germany, like being on a honeymoon or doing tourism in both

Turkey and Greece during the period of crossing the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey to Greece in 2014 and 2015.

However, these meanings have been constructed by women who were accompanied by their husbands and often came from the upper middle class, like Huda and Tasneem, who expressed that they had the financial ability to access basic needs like renting hotels, buying food from restaurants, and drinking coffee. These types of activities are often affected by social class as well as the political context. Being in Turkey and Greece means having some sort of legal security during the refugee "crisis" with the growing visibility of asylum seekers in both states. As these narratives illustrate:

> "I was convinced that I was going on a honeymoon, because we were going to Greece illegally, but at the same time I was enjoying the weather and I was enjoying that I would go to Greece, and there is the sea, and when I have a failed smuggling attempt, I go back and swim in the sea and I sit drinking coffee." (Tasneem, divorced, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

> "I felt like I am going for tourism in Greece... and I ate seafood [...] We were trying to do nice things, for example, to go out... We were walking around the sea... We were trying to be relaxed." (Huda, married and mother of one, 33 years old, Germany, Berlin).

Ghada, on the other hand, constructed a different meaning. She was unaccompanied during her journey. She constructed the meaning of her asylum journey as building a new future rather than merely fleeing the war in Syria. Asylum journeys are often characterised by experiences of trauma, loss, and insecurity, and they are usually not "suitable time" for enjoying and having fun, yet this positive meaning helped her to motivate the group of guys around her to cope with anxiety during the long waiting periods in Macedonia. As this narrative illustrates:

> "In Salamiyah, we love fun, and Iraqis are known for their beautiful voices. I told them the road is boring; whose voice is beautiful? They told me this was not a suitable time. I told them, "Let us have fun. We are traveling for something new. We are not just running away. Why don't we have a goal? We want to build a new future." We met an Iraqi guy who started singing". (Ghada, single, 47 years old, Germany, Dresden).

The clandestine journey's conditions across the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route create mental harm, anxiety, and trauma for those on the move. The findings suggest that Syrian women on the move can stay resilient and cope with the difficult conditions imposed by the securitization of the migration paradigm.

Constructing different meanings and interpretations from the clandestine asylum journeys helped Syrian women find hope and stay resilient while navigating their asylum journeys. Although the previously constructed meanings seem to be less relevant to gender, such as tourism, positivity, and humour, males can construct these meanings as well. However, these "gendered neutral" meanings have implications for women's lives, gendered experiences, and wellbeing. Therefore, they often serve as a source of self-empowerment, particularly for women who are experiencing gendered discrimination, specific vulnerabilities, and forced migration. Furthermore, as was mentioned earlier, acknowledging self-empowering strategies in the context of the inequal power hierarchies of the asylum journeys to the EU can challenge the essentialist victimization narrative of women from the global South.

CONCLUSION

This research tried to bring the voices of Syrian women who experienced clandestine border crossings and dangerous journeys to Europe into the centre of the debate on securitization, gender, and migration. It aims to answer the following question: How did Syrian women experience the clandestine asylum journeys from Syria to Germany between 2014 and 2016? To answer this question, field work has been conducted and sub-questions have been developed. These sub-questions are: What are the drivers for Syrian clandestine journeys to Germany? How do the Syrian women experience the clandestine journey along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route? How do the Syrian women experience the clandestine journey on the Western Balkan route? What challenges, insecurities, and violence do Syrian women face in their journeys? How do Syrian women negotiate the challenges and cope with their insecurities? This section will synthesise the research findings that answer the research questions, discuss the contributions, provide policy recommendations, acknowledge research limitations, and suggest future research.

The ongoing conflict in Syria caused an extraordinary displacement in the region and beyond. However, asylum journeys to the EU are characterised by insecurity and violence. Drawing on critical security studies, the securitization of the migration concept, and gender theory in IR, this study contributes to moving the debate on security and migration from a state-centric perspective and from abstract analysis to the lived experiences of women seeking asylum across the EU's external borders. It contributes to the understanding of the role of gender as a constructed social identity and as a system of power relations (Lorber, 1994, pp. 5-6) and the role of the EU security industry in shaping women's experiences of insecurities and discrimination. Further, to avoid essentializing women's experiences and to challenge the victimisation discourse on women from the global South, the strategies that these Syrian women have adopted will be addressed. Therefore, this thesis argues that, first, the securitization of migration is a dominant paradigm in the EU response to migration flows and the Syrian refugee crisis. Second, the security industry at the EU's external borders has a gendered impact that affects Syrian women's asylum journeys. Third,

Syrian women fleeing the war in Syria are not passive victims, yet they negotiate securitization along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route using various strategies based on their available resources to maintain their security and wellbeing.

This study is based on qualitative research design and accordingly in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 Syrian refugee women in Germany who survived the clandestine asylum journey across the EU's external borders between 2014 and 2016. This method gives a space for Syrian women to express their experiences. This research does not aim at generalising the findings; rather, it aims at offering an in-depth and nuanced gendered analysis of the asylum experiences of Syrian women in the context of EU securitization of migration. The study sought to bring the voices of the Syrian refugee into light while being attentive to issues of power and voice, to the researcher's positionality as an insider, and to the refugee women's language and vocabulary.

The findings reveal that the reasons behind Syrian women's clandestine asylum journeys to Germany are varied and intertwined. These reasons include: first, push factors from Syria, like war and gender-based violence, such as forced marriage, domestic violence, and sexual violence by Syrian authorities. Second, push factors from the region surrounding Syria, like inadequate regional asylum policies and practices, socio-economic conditions, inadequate social support, and inadequate protection from gender-based violence. Third, pull factors to Germany such as the presence of social capital and the open-door policy for Syrian refugees in Germany. In wider terms, some women only wanted to go to "Europe" and "as far as possible" to flee societal control and gender-based violence in the region. Fourth, factors behind the clandestine border crossings and the reliance on smuggling hubs like the lack of other alternatives for safe and legal entry into the EU as well as restrictive family reunification policies.

The gendered impact of the EU securitization of migration on Syrian refugee women was demonstrated in the section addressing "Syrian Women's Struggles and Challenges at the European Borders". In this section, the transit experiences of Syrian

women on the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route from Turkey to Greece and the Western Balkan route from Greece to Germany were examined. The findings suggest that Syrian women were disproportionally affected by the EU's securitization of migration. The growing border controls necessitate clandestine and hidden ways of crossing borders along the migratory routes to the EU. Syrian women's experiences demonstrated common themes of violence and discrimination at the EU's external borders in various ways.

On the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route from Turkey to Greece, the findings reveal that gender plays a role in shaping inequal access to the smuggling market, as it was considered a "men's issue". Being on a clandestine journey in the Aegean Sea requires full dependency on smugglers to determine the time, the method, and the location of departure. This dependency creates a sense of insecurity and uncertainty among Syrian women as they feel the "atmosphere of mafias" in different ways. First, Syrian women were exposed to various gendered insecurities. Being an unaccompanied woman with limited financial resources is a risk factor that contributes to women's exposure to sexual exploitation while negotiating money with smugglers and locals. The journey conditions required avoiding state surveillance and being in isolated areas with smugglers and facilitators on the western shores of Turkey; thereby, there were stories about sexual assaults against women in these faraway and isolated areas. Second, the lived experiences of the interviewed women demonstrated that there are social hierarchies of drowning and suffering at sea. Syrian women often have fewer swimming skills compared to men, and those with limited financial resources have limited access to safety equipment. Women's traumatic experiences at sea are associated with the presence of children on such deadly voyages in overcrowded boats. Women's position in the family and their primary role as caregivers for children pose a psychological burden on these women on the move. Moreover, they expressed fear because of their limited swimming skills and fear of family separation during these journeys. The securitization of migration along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route played a role in exacerbating women's insecurities and pushing them into death during the clandestine border crossings. The interviewed women expressed being exposed to

pushbacks by the Greek coast guard, refusal to help, and limited search and rescue operations.

On the Western Balkan route and after surviving the Aegean Sea journey, Syrian women continue to experience various kinds of gendered insecurities and vulnerabilities. They expressed their sense of insecurity while being in overcrowded reception and transit centres with a lot of men in Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary. They also expressed limited access to sanitary facilities and a fear of possible sexual attacks. During the European refugee "crisis" and the atmosphere of "panic politics" (Buzan, 1997), there was a gap between policy and practice. The implementation of many aspects of the Common European Asylum System, such as the 2013/33/EU directive on minimum standards of reception and gender-sensitive measures, was limited in various reception facilities in Greece and Hungary. Thereby Syrian women's insecurities and vulnerabilities were exacerbated. In their interactions with various authorities, Syrian women have been exposed to several punitive practices like administrative detention, forced registration, and physical violence from border guards in Greece, Hungary, and Macedonia. Although they expressed being exposed less to beatings and physical violence compared to men, they revealed that being in overcrowded detention facilities on Greek islands and in Hungary creates a sense of fear for them, especially at sleeping time in such conditions.

Moreover, Syrian women were forced to walk through long and risky routes through forests and mountains, and many of them expressed being exposed to thefts and gangs, abduction, and sexual attacks, especially on the route from Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, and Croatia. Not only in the isolated areas, but gangs also appeared in the form of taxi and private car drivers offering a car drive to the borders. In physical terms, the long walks across mountains and forests were a common challenge for women seeking asylum on the Western Balkan route. Women expressed being in disadvantageous situations and being "always behind". They expressed being pressured to maintain a walking pace with men and the specific needs of women's bodies, as women may experience menstrual cycles and pregnancy. The gendered social roles of women play a role in this disadvantageous situation, as women are

responsible for taking care of children and walk at a slow pace, which raises the chances of being isolated from the group. At the private level, some women experienced intimate partner violence during their clandestine asylum journeys, and they expressed their feelings of insecurity in transit as well as their plans to arrive first, then file a divorce. They expressed that there is "no one to help" and a lack of socio-legal protection.

However, despite these challenges during the clandestine journeys to Germany, the findings revealed that many of the interviewed Syrian women employed strategies and practices to maintain their security and well-being in the context of unequal gendered hierarchies and the EU's securitization of migration. Syrian women who were unaccompanied or accompanied with children, played an active role in navigating clandestine journeys and collecting information to facilitate their border crossings. Those who have internet access, mobile phones, and laptops were able to access information through the online solidarity groups on social media as a safe avenue for accessing the accumulated knowledge about the conditions and the lived experiences of former asylum seekers who were outside of their personal social capital in destination countries. All the Syrian women were aware of the gendered insecurities and sexual vulnerabilities along the clandestine journey to the EU, and they employed safety strategies by approaching borders with men, kinship families, and relatives as well as by forming and maintaining social capital for unaccompanied women, who blend in groups to avoid being alone. However, these strategies often imply maintaining women's discrimination during their journeys. The findings demonstrate that some Syrian women played an active role in negotiating the insecurity in the smuggling market through peaceful human interaction with some facilitators and smugglers. They employed various strategies to keep their money protected from theft, such as concealment and relying on intermediaries. Finally, Syrian women, to a great extent, were able to stay resilient and negotiate various forms of violence and insecurity depending on their religious beliefs, imagination, and cognitive constructions of positive meanings. In the context of gendered discrimination and inequalities, addressing women's strategies contributes to challenging the mainstream

literature that constructs refugee women from the global South as passive victims as well as deepening the understanding of gendered power relations.

The domination of the securitization of the migration paradigm in the EU and the growing border industry create an irregular form of human mobility. Furthermore, it is maintaining the migrants' need for smuggling services along the EU's external borders, therefore making the asylum journeys more dangerous and expensive. The securitization of migration has a direct and indirect impact on women's lives and wellbeing during clandestine journeys, and it is limiting women's accessibility to asylum and international protection in the EU. Women fleeing conflicts, and in our case, Syrian women, have been disproportionally impacted by the EU security industry. This situation makes it impossible for the securitization paradigm to offer adequate protection for women fleeing war and violence.

This study contributes to literature by deepening the understanding of Syrian women's asylum experiences along the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route and the Western Balkan route between 2014 and 2016. It offers empirical evidence on the gendered dimensions of the EU securitization of migration, of women's insecurities and power relations, as well as on Syrian women's strategies during clandestine border crossings. The qualitative nature of this study, which is focused on a small sample of Syrian women, makes it valuable. Through its bottom-up approach, it brings to light the voices of Syrian women, who expressed the EU's external borders as spaces of violence against women and as terrifying, harsh, forest-like spaces. The voices of women seeking asylum should be heard in the security debate on migration and borders. Bringing women's voices into the light is valuable to move beyond the short-term, superficial solutions that barely respond to the violence against women and overcome preventing it in the first place.

The securitization of migration affects the asylum process of Syrian women, as well as their strategies and the way they negotiate their asylum journeys. Based on the findings of this study, there are several policy recommendations:

- There is a need for re-examining the utility of the securitization paradigm in providing sustainable solutions to the migration issue. There is a need to reconsider the role of securitization in creating direct and indirect insecurities and maintaining discrimination against women seeking asylum in the EU.
- Policymakers should develop a long-term solution like facilitating safe and legal pathways and providing options for women seeking asylum rather than making clandestine journeys across the EU's external borders. This includes, for instance, establishing sustainable solutions like developing new, EU-wide humanitarian admission programmes, expanding family reunification options, and facilitating accessible, secure routes for women fleeing violence and conflicts.
- Enhancing the application of gender-sensitive policies, such as providing adequate reception, transit, and sanitary facilities for women on the move, as well as ensuring women's access to psychosocial and legal support.
- Strengthening search and rescue operations and ensuring timely assistance to save lives at sea.
- Strengthening accountability to address violent border practices and human rights violations, like pushbacks by the Greek coast guard. This includes developing avenues for reporting and documenting such incidents, conducting investigations, and holding perpetrators accountable.
- There is a need to advocate for a right-based approach to migration policies rather than merely producing data on women's vulnerabilities to support "fighting against smuggling" projects. Human-rights-informed advocacy is needed to challenge the current policy priorities and address the root causes of clandestine journeys.

There are several limitations that should be acknowledged in this study. This study relied on online interviews with Syrian refugee women in Germany and their self-reported information about their past experiences of clandestine asylum journeys between 2014 and 2016; therefore, there is a potential for memory bias. Moreover, the limited number of Syrian women in this study makes the sample less diverse. However, there has been a difficulty in recruiting women for this study as many

refugee women avoid talking about their previous experiences due to many reasons, such as their limited time, its retraumatizing impact, and their fear of political consequences for their refugee status. Finally, the interviews have been conducted online; therefore, this study is limited to Syrian women who have access to the internet and mobile devices. Thus, future research could include more diverse groups of Syrian women.

The gender theory in IR and its subfield, feminist security studies, is a productive framework that brings gender analysis into the security discussion as well as women's voices into international relations studies. There is a need for further studies addressing Syrian women's lived experiences of clandestine asylum journeys to the EU. There are several suggested areas for future research:

- Conducting comparative and longitudinal studies across different migratory routes, countries, and extended periods of time would offer a comprehensive understanding of the impact of securitization on Syrian women on the move. The continuity and change in securitization across time and geographies can be captured, for instance, by tracking Syrian women's clandestine experiences, strategies, and trajectories after the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Ukrainian crisis.
- More research is needed to move beyond the successful asylum journeys of Syrian women; there is a need to address Syrian women's experiences of failed journeys and return experiences, as well as to document human trafficking experiences among Syrian women.
- Incorporating innovative data collection methods and critical approaches into the qualitative research on Syrian women's clandestine experiences seems fruitful, such as using digital mediums to access Syrian women's online communities.
- Investigating the diversity of experiences within Syrian women by employing an intersectional approach that considers the intersection of gender with other dimensions of identity like class, ethnicity, age, and religion and how this

intersection impacts Syrian women’s clandestine experiences, challenges, and strategies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

1- How old are you?

2- Are you married?

3- Do you have children?

4- What is your level of education?

5- Do you have any previous working experience?

6- Do you live with your family, both before migration and after migration?

7- When did you leave Syria?

8- When did you arrive?

9- What was your travel route?

10- Did you travel alone or were you accompanied?

11- How did you learn and decide where to go, how to go, and when to go? Why?

12- How did you find the courage to leave Syria?

13- Why did you choose secondary movement from neighbouring countries to Syria?

14- Why did you choose this destination?

15- Why did you travel in that way? Why did you approach the borders in that way?

16- How did you access resources, including money and information?

17- What kind of problems did you face during the journey?

18- Do you know how to swim?

19- Did you have life jackets?

20- How did you solve or cope with those problems?

21- What is your worst and best memory of crossing from one state to another? Why?

22- What was your biggest fear? And what was your dream while travelling?

23- Who or which institutions supported you and how?

24- Whom would you call, or were you planning to call, in case of a problem during travel?

25- What are the main lessons you learned from her travel experience?

26- Do you think it is easy for women to travel and cross borders alone?

27- How do you perceive the smugglers?

28- If borders are dangerous places, why do Syrians travel and cross borders?

Appendix 2. Ethics Committee Approval Document

Tarih ve Sayı: 11/05/2018-174093

BE6LC75LD

T.C.
İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜ
Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başkanlığı

Sayı :35980450-663.05-
Konu :Doç. Dr. Nurcan ÖZGÜR BAKLACIOĞLU

Sayın Doç. Dr. Nurcan ÖZGÜR BAKLACIOĞLU

Sorumlu araştırıcılığını üstlendiğiniz 30.04.2018 tarih ve 49115 sayılı "Akdeniz ve Balkan Göç Hatlarında Sınır ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet" konu başlıklı çalışma kurulumuzun 07.05.2018 tarih 05 sayılı toplantısında görüşülerek etik yönden uygun bulunmuş olup, karar ekte sunulmuştur.

Bilgilerinizi rica ederim.

e-İmzalı
Prof. Dr. N. Tolga SARUÇ
Başkan

11/05/2018 Sağ.Teknr. : G.ÇELİK

Doğrulamak için:http://194.27.128.66/envision.Sorgula/belgedogrulama.aspx?V=BE6LC75LD
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İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL VE BEŞERİ BİLİMLER
ARAŞTIRMALARI ETİK KURULU BAŞKANLIĞI

İlgili makama,

İ.Ü. Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü Öğretim Üyesi **Doç. Dr. Nurcan ÖZGÜR BAKLACIOĞLU**'nun "Akdeniz ve Balkan Göç Hatlarında Sınır ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet" başlıklı, **2018/111** dosya numaralı 30.04.2018 tarih ve **49115** sayılı başvurusu ile İ.Ü. Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu'na başvurmuştur. 07.05.2018 tarihinde gerçekleşen inceleme sonucunda, adı geçen çalışmada etik açıdan bir sorun olmadığına oybirliği ile karar verilmiştir. Gereğini bilgilerinize saygılarımızla sunarız.

Unvanı / Adı / Soyadı	Kurumu	Araştırma ile ilişki	Karar	İmza
Prof. Dr. Naci Tolga SARUÇ (Başkan)	İktisat Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Doç. Dr. Eray YURTSEVEN (Başkan Yardımcısı)	Sağlık Bilimleri Enstitüsü	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Doç. Dr. Çiğdem Börke TUNALI (Başkan Yardımcısı)	İktisat Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Prof. Dr. Aydın TOPALOĞLU	İlahiyat Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Prof. Dr. Melek Nihal ESİN	Florence Nightingale Hemşirelik Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Prof. Dr. Yasemin IŞIKTAÇ	Hukuk Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Prof. Dr. Suat GEZGİN	İletişim Fakültesi	E☐ H☐	☐ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☑ M.Katılmadı	
Prof. Dr. Selahattin KARABINAR	İktisat Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Prof. Dr. Seyhan NİŞEL	İşletme Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Prof. Dr. Mustafa Hamdi SAYAR	Edebiyat Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Prof. Dr. Selim YAZICI	Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi	E☐ H☐	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Doç. Dr. Hanife Özlem SERTEL BERK	Edebiyat Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Doç. Dr. İlkay DEMİR	Hasan Ali Yücel Eğitim Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Doç. Dr. Ayşe Esra İŞMEN GAZİOĞLU	Hasan Ali Yücel Eğitim Fakültesi	E☐ H☐	☐ Onay ☑ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Doç. Dr. Rasim İlker GÖKBULUT	Ulaştırma ve Lojistik Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Doç. Dr. Hüseyin Kurtuluş ÖZCAN	Mühendislik Fakültesi	E☐ H☐	☐ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☑ M.Katılmadı	
Doç. Dr. Haluk ZÜLFİKAR	İktisat Fakültesi	E☐ H☐	☐ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☑ M.Katılmadı	
Doç. Dr. Funda BÜYÜKYILMAZ	Florence Nightingale Hemşirelik Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Yrd. Doç. Dr. Çare SERTELİN MERCAN	Hasan Ali Yücel Eğitim Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	
Doç. Dr. Enes KABAKCI	Edebiyat Fakültesi	E☐ H☑	☑ Onay ☐ Katılmadı ☐ Ret ☐ M.Katılmadı	