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The Gender of Migration: A Study on Syrian Refugee Women in Turkey

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"no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark."
Home, by Warsan Shire[1]

Abstract

This paper aims to adopt a feminist perspective on International Relations and security studies by focusing on Syrian women's experiences of migration. Turkey hosts around 1.6 million Syrian women who fled the country with the start of the civil war. While Syrian refugees altogether face problems related to adjusting to, living and working in a different society, women may face gendered insecurities that are related to the reconstruction of patriarchy within the refugee community in the host country. As the feminist International Relations studies argue, gender is a useful instrument in analysing the insecurities of human beings. Based on data collected through interviews with Syrian women living in Kocaeli city, this study aims to reveal how gender shapes Syrian refugee women's perceptions of insecurity. The article analyses women's decisions to leave the conflict zone, to settle in a different country, and their perceptions of security in their new social environment.

Keywords: *Syrian migration, refugee women, feminist IR, gender, security*

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Göçün Cinsiyeti: Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mülteci Kadınlar Üzerine Bir Çalışma

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Öz

Bu makale, feminist Uluslararası İlişkiler yaklaşımları ve güvenlik çalışmaları bakış açısından Suriyeli kadınların göç deneyimlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Türkiye, Suriye iç savaşından kaçan yaklaşık 1.6 milyon Suriyeli kadına ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. Suriyeli göçmenler genel olarak farklı bir ülkeye uyum sağlama, bu ülkede yaşama ve çalışma ile ilgili sıkıntılar yaşarken, kadınlar ayrıca ataerkinin ev sahibi ülkede yeniden kurulması sürecinde toplumsal cinsiyet kaynaklı güvensizlikler deneyimlemektedir. Feminist Uluslararası İlişkiler çalışmalarının da öne sürdüğü gibi, toplumsal cinsiyet, bireylerin güvensizliklerini incelemek için oldukça kullanışlı bir araçtır. Çalışmada, Kocaeli'de yaşayan Suriyeli mülteci kadınlarla yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda elde edilen veriler ışığında toplumsal cinsiyetin mülteci kadınların güvensizlik algılarını nasıl şekillendirdiği araştırılmaktadır. Makale, kadınların çatışma bölgesinden ayrılma kararları, farklı bir ülkeye yerleşme deneyimleri ve yeni toplumsal çevrelerindeki güvenlik algıları üzerinde toplumsal cinsiyetin etkisini analiz etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Suriye'den göç, mülteci kadınlar, toplumsal cinsiyet, feminist Uluslararası İlişkiler, güvenlik*

Introduction

The United Nations Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018* report reveals that the number of people fleeing violence, conflict, persecution and human rights violations is at its highest since the Second World War, with 70.8 million people forcibly displaced from their homes. As the world witness persons trying to cross borders or seas, sometimes dying or becoming victims of human traffickers while doing so, international policies on migration prefer to deal with the issue of migration by focusing on state security. Nation states attempt to 'secure' themselves and their population by adopting new laws and regulations to control the influx of migrants while refugees are trying to secure themselves.

The discipline of International Relations (IR) rarely studies international migration, and when it does, it adopts a security perspective that perceives migration as a threat to internal security. With the challenge of critical and feminist approaches to IR and security studies, humanitarian aspects of international migration were brought into light, focusing on not only the state but the individual as well. Feminist critiques of traditional theories of IR and security studies have revealed that women face various types of insecurities in their daily lives and that these insecurities are linked to unequal relations of gender (Youngs, 2004). They shifted the focus of security from state-centric understandings of national security to the security of human beings and pointed out that gender is a useful instrument in analysing the insecurities of human beings. By putting gender at the centre of their analysis, feminist approaches enabled the theorization of everyday insecurities faced by women. This perspective "allows us to make links between the various forms of violence and persecution faced by women and to link these to gendered relations and structures of power" (Freedman, 2007:19-20).

This study focuses on Syrian women's narratives in their migratory experience and it aims to reveal how gendered forms of insecurity are produced and reproduced. It adopts a feminist perspective to studying IR and security, with an objective of understanding the gendered insecurities of migration. It is essential to comprehend the gendered insecurities of migration because women are not only accompanying men in the journey, but they experience the whole migration process differently. Based on interviews with refugee[2] women who are settled in Kocaeli province, this research focuses on two main aspects of Syrian migration: the influence of gender firstly on making the decision to migrate to Turkey and on where to settle in Turkey, and secondly, on women's experiences in Turkey under the status of temporary protection. Women's narratives in this study shall be thought in line with Tickner's argument on "reconceptualization of security in multidimensional and multilevel terms" (1992:128). Focusing on individual narratives would not only widen the general IR perspective on security but it will also reveal different types of insecurities at different levels. The article starts with a brief look at how migration can be studied from a feminist

IR/security perspective and introduces the methodology of the study. The second part will present women's experiences of leaving Syria and making the decision to migrate. The last part will reveal women's perspectives of daily life in Turkey.

Feminist IR, Security and Forced Migration

The end of the Cold War challenged the supremacy of the military-state oriented analyses of security in international politics. Critical security studies and feminist IR, both of which gained ground in the last 10 years of the Cold War, adopted a more inclusive concept of security that encompasses the society, communities, groups and individuals rather than an exclusive one that was based on military supremacy. Feminists in IR adopted a widening security perspective, and asked a very simple preliminary question: "where are the women?" (Enloe, 2000[1989]:7). They scrutinized the theories, practices and state-based national security conceptualization of the IR discipline. The main assumptions of the IR discipline were challenged by the feminists claiming that these presumptions reflect a masculine attitude (Enloe,1989; Tickner,1991; Pettman, 1996; Sylvester, 2002).

In *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives in Achieving Global Security*, Tickner outlines a feminist, non-gendered idea of security as "the absence of violence whether it be military, economic or sexual" (1992:66). She criticizes our partial understanding of security: security means more than just the absence of armed conflict. In fact, security for most people is a concern in daily life; involving; protection from domestic, sexual, or physical violence; access to housing, food and water; the existence of basic human rights and prohibition of torture, slavery, forced labour. Fleeing of women from the war-zones due to the fear of sexual violence, seeking asylum in another country because of gender discrimination in one's own, or sex-trafficking are issues clearly related to gendered insecurities. Economic, cultural and legal discrimination within the boundaries of the state are also problems related to security, which are altogether called indirect or structural violence. Structural violence hurts women the most, since it is related to the "domestic and international structures of political and economic oppression" (Tickner, 1992:69). Structural violence is "normalized" violence; as Peterson argues, we do not tend to see how patriarchy is inherent in international political economy, sex tourism, female labour migration, and gendered division of labour or women's exclusion from decision making structures (Peterson, 1992: 49).

So, how do feminist IR and migration studies interact? IR feminists' insistence on a broader view of security - that armed conflicts, domestic violence, and gender structures, social structures of power and inequality are all interrelated and linked (Stokes, 2015: 52) - is a common denominator in both disciplines. Indra (1999) points out to two paradigms in forced migration studies that started taking women into consideration: the first was what she calls the 'Women in

Forced Migration' paradigm that gained importance in the mid-1980s and throughout 1990s. This was more like an 'add women and stir' approach. Feminists in this period criticized the 1951 Geneva Convention and pointed out to its male characteristics. They emphasized the need for;

> the refugee definition be rewritten to include gender as a basis (of fear) of persecution, and that 'persecution' itself be redefined in order to recognize the political nature of female resistance to systems of oppression and violence within both the public and private spheres" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014:398-399).

Starting with the 1990s, the UNHCR reports adopted a new approach highlighting 'special protection needs of women and girls' (UNHCR, 1991) implying that women were exceptions to the norm that required special guidelines distinct from the normal refugee. Special efforts to protect children (UNHCR 1994), and LGBTI asylum seekers (UNHCR 2012) were recognized, signifying that the "so-called 'gender neutral'. Convention was developed with adult, male, heterosexual asylum applicants in mind" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014:400)[3].

It soon became clear that studying the gender of migration means not only talking about women's experiences and vulnerabilities, but it also requires focusing on the power relations between men and women, how these relations shape the migratory experience, and how they are re-constructed with migration. This newer paradigm; labelled as Gender and Forced Migration by Indra (1999) insists on seeing that gender is socially constructed and opportunities and expectations attributed to its characteristics can change over time and depending on social change, including conflict and displacement. A gender analysis explores "not only the experiences of women, but how women and men, girls and boys, are differentially involved in, and affected by, conflict situations which lead to mass displacement." (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014:401). Studies adopting this perspective do not focus merely on women but they also highlight gender-specific violence and persecution committed against men, boys and the LGBTI.

The incorporation of gender to the study of migration would reveal two important factors: First, rests on how patriarchy affects women's decisions to migrate, the timing of the migration and its destination; while the second factor explores how patriarchy is "altered or reconstituted after migration" (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). This second question is related to changes in power relations after migration; if and how men's and women's roles change in their new environment with migration. In this study, both factors are questioned; women are asked about their decisions to migrate, their experiences throughout the journey, and their experiences (both in the society and in the family) of their new environment.

Migrant women in Kocaeli city constitute the main study group of this research. 49.726 registered Syrian migrants are living in Kocaeli (DGMM, 2018), and they make up 2,64% of the total population (below Turkey average of

4,39%). They are mostly settled in Çayırova and Darıca districts, both of which are located at Kocaeli's border with Istanbul. The research was firstly announced in June 2018 through an EU-funded NGO that specifically works with Syrians. Snowballing technique was used to reach out more participants. 8 face-to-face interviews conducted in July-August 2018 in the NGO building in Darıca. 3 of the interviewees were employed by the NGO as translators, who also translated the interviews. A group interview was conducted in İzmit (central district of Kocaeli) with 5 other women who were reached through a civil society initiative. An activist woman of Syrian-Turkish origin –Rabia– translated this interview and she was interviewed afterwards. As the snowballing technique was leading to participants with similar characteristics and biasing the research, it was useful to talk to Hatip, who is the chairperson of a Turkey-wide operating charity in Kocaeli.

All participants were above 18, most of them came to Turkey with their families; all except one was married. The average number of children they have is 3.83, with one of them having 12 children. Some of their children were killed in the war, but the rest are living with their parents in Kocaeli. Most of the women have an average familial income of 2000 TL per month, all live with their families at rented flats and the men in the household (father, husband, elder brother) are working.

The participants were asked questions related to why they decided to leave Syria, how they decided to come to Turkey, their experiences in the camps, why they settled in Kocaeli city, how they provided their basic needs, and if they knew about their rights under temporary protection. They were specifically asked about their feelings of security and encouraged to elaborate on its reasons. It was expected that the questions would reveal their perceptions of security and insecurity.

The Decision to Migrate to Turkey

The war in Syria led to the displacement of over 5.6 million Syrians, and more than 3.6 million fled to Turkey for safety. Women constitute half of this number, and around 800.000 of them are under age 18 (data of Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM)).

The Legal Framework

Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees worldwide while Syrians in Turkey do not have refugee status: even though Turkey is a drafter and an early signatory of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, it ratified the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees by limiting the refugee status only to 'persons who have become refugees as a result of events occurring in Europe'. Turkey grants 'temporary protection status' to the asylum seekers coming from other regions until a decision is reached in cooperation with the UNHCR.

Turkey's insistence on geographical limitation means that Syrians coming into Turkey cannot be recognised as refugees. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (adopted in 2013) and its Regulation on Temporary Protection (RTP, 2014) solidified the unclear status of Syrian migrants as being under 'temporary protection'. Article 91.1 of the Law defines temporary protection as a protection status granted to foreigners who, having been forced to leave their country and unable to return to it, have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in masses seeking emergency and temporary protection. The Regulation on Temporary Protection specifies the terms of protection, including its scope; the rights and obligations of persons under this protection; criteria for their stay in the country; and the possible limitations on their rights. The Regulation maintains the previously guaranteed rights and approaches: "(i) An open border policy; (ii) No forcible returns (non-refoulment); (iii) Registration with the Turkish authorities and support inside the borders of the camps." (RTP, 2014).

Upon their arrival in Turkey, Syrian refugees are registered with the DGMM and are provided with registration cards. The registration card owners are entitled to health, education, access to labour force and social services. The refugee camps are run by the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) together with Türk Kızılay (Turkish Red Crescent), and the basic survival needs of the Syrians are met in these camps. Although accommodation is free, only about 6% of Syrians live in camps (216,588 out of 3,576,377; AFAD statistics, 2018). A systematic welfare programme targeting Syrian refugees does not exist; hence, Syrian refugees in cities need to find accommodation on their own, usually by paying high rents and working illegally. Even though they only have freedom of movement in the cities that they are registered, Syrians move all around Turkey and settle in different cities (Hoffmann & Samuk, 2016). Media news from time to time report that migrants in the cities live in precarious conditions, face human trafficking and economic exploitation, and some women and children are forced into prostitution and begging (Güçtürk, 2014: 82).

With respect to access to the labour market, the Regulation on Work Permit for Refugees under Temporary Protection has been accepted in January 2016, granting work permit to migrants under certain conditions and restrictions. The Regulation asserts that foreigners under temporary protection cannot be employed or work independently without a legally issued work permit. Foreigners under temporary protection can apply to Ministry of Labour and Social Security for work permit after 6 months from the date they registered as *under temporary protection status*. Work permit applications will be made by the employer who wants to employ Syrians, and the Regulation sees that at the workplace for which work permit is requested, number of working refugees under temporary protection cannot be more than 10% of the employed Turkish citizens. Foreigners under temporary protection cannot be paid under the minimum wage.

For those living outside the camps and who are not engaged in formal employment, the Emergency Social Safety Net Programme (funded by the EU and implemented by Türk Kızılay, United Nations World Food Program, and Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services) delivers cash assistance through Kızılay Card. The Card provides 120 TL per person per month for single females, single parents with at least one child under 18, elderly people above 60, families with 4 or more children, families with one or more disabled people, and families with high number of dependents. For registered Syrian migrants in Kocaeli, Metropolitan Municipality delivers 41 Kart, which provides food packets worth 100-150 TL per month and clothing aids once a year. All participants of this research were registered, had their ID cards and hence, held temporary protection status. All but one of them was eligible for Kızılay Card. None had 41 Kart, saying that they were not aware of the programme.

The Decision to Leave Syria

In her study on Somalian women refugees in Malta, Alice Gerard finds that the decision to leave the country is "gendered and different for each woman" (2016: 97). She points out those perceptions of insecurity and gender-based violence are crucial reasons to leave a war-torn country. Previous research indicates that the actions of ISIS, the fighting groups in Syria, and fear of sexual violence are the main reasons for fleeing the war zone (Fitzpatrick, 2016: 33). In 2012, the UN declared that rape was being used as a weapon of war in Syria. However, due to the shame and stigmatisation attached to it, women do not reveal their experiences or seek medical help, and even if they do, the mechanisms for medical care and trauma counselling are limited (Harvey, 2015)[4].

The answers of the participants in this study reveal that general insecurity and concerns for the safety of children are the main reasons for leaving Syria. Meryem (43) says she and her husband decided to leave Syria for the safety of their children. Sheza (25) claims that they decided to run away for the safety of children and fear of ISIS (when asked about sexual violence, she admits that it was an unspeakable reason). Meryem asserts that when ISIS came to Aleppo, daily life in the city became harder. When ISIS wanted to recruit her 10-year-old son to its ranks, she says she had no choice but to get out. Emine (36) left Aleppo before it was captured by ISIS. They travelled within Syria for a while, but then decided to move to Turkey because her son's chronic illness required better treatment. Holut (43) also claims that they decided to leave Syria for better health services. Two of her daughters were in bad health, and when the war made it impossible to access health care, she and her husband decided to come to Turkey hoping for better care for their daughters.

Rana (23) says it was her family's decision to get out of Latakia. Every fighting group wanted to recruit the male members of their family, so the family wanted to protect the boys. When asked about the fear of sexual violence, she admits that it was a factor, too. Holut (43) claims that his son

was killed in the war and when his second son's age was suitable to be recruited for the army, they decided to leave Syria to protect him.

Aylin (27) left Syria with her two brothers. Her father is a Turkish citizen; hence, they have Turkish citizenship. Her parents feared for their children and sent them to Turkey, to safety. She insists that it was not her decision to come; her family feared both sexual violence and the recruital of their sons by the fighting groups. Amina (24) was also sent out by her family; even though she did not want to leave, she left Syria with her elder sister and mother. Her father was left behind to take care of the family home and lands. Muna (58) sent the children first, she and her 60-year-old husband followed later. Siham's (37) husband and son were about to be recruited by the army, therefore, they fled as soon as possible.

It seems that prevailing insecurity, protecting children/men from being recruited by the army/ISIS/fighting groups, and the threat of sexual violence are the most important factors in leaving the conflict zone. As Gerard suggests, women have varying degrees of control over the decision to migrate; while some are active in making the decision to leave, others accept decisions that are made especially by family members (2016: 97).

Why Turkey?

Scholars point out that in forced migration, people choose their county of destination for reasons such as the providing of basic rights for work, shelter, health and education; the historical relationship between the country of origin and country of destination; the political and economic conditions of the country of destination; geographical proximity, border controls; and the existence of kin, relatives and an acceptable social network in the country of destination (Şimşek, 2017; Havinga & Böcker, 1999). It is not surprising to see that refugees who fled Syria sought refuge in neighbouring countries; Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

Turkey and Syria share a common history; many families live on both sides of the border. Hence, the first reason for deciding to come to Turkey is related to familial ties and geographical proximity. Another obvious reason for choosing Turkey as a destination is the open-border-policy that Turkey followed since the beginning of the war until January 2016. More than 2,8 million Syrians fled to Turkey until the border is closed (DGMM, 2018).

The third reason is religion related. When the participants were asked if they wanted to continue their journey to Europe, the US or Canada, most claimed that they wanted to stay in Turkey since they could practice Islam freely in Turkey. Rabia told the story of two women who moved to Canada but could not adopt life in a Christian society. Siham and Hüsra claim that as women, it is easier to blend in and become invisible in Turkish society; they do not attract attention as foreigners unless they speak Arabic. This is a clear concern of security. Hüsra says that Islam is a factor that keeps her in Turkey. She adds that, if she moves further away to Europe, she will forever lose

contact with her family members who were left behind in Syria. When the participants were asked why they did not prefer to migrate to Jordan or Lebanon, they mention the bad conditions of refugee camps and stricter regulations in both countries.
A fourth reason seems to be the job opportunities for men. Most participants stated that they had relatives who migrated to Turkey before, so they followed their lead. Families prefer to settle in cities in which they have acquaintances. Hence, it is possible to witness very crowded homes, in which several families live together. This might lead to increased instances of domestic violence or sexual abuse. However, the answers of the participants did not lead into such results. It would not be possible to conclude that abuse or violence is not taking place at households though, as small talk with NGO workers reveal many instances of physical, sexual and psychological violence within refugee families.

Settling and Living in Kocaeli

The feminist perspectives on security claim that women identify themselves, their needs, and their relations with others and the state through their personal experiences of insecurity (Jacoby, 2006). In studying insecurities of refugee women, a major goal must be to 'understand' how insecurity is experienced by women. A definition of security that is not derived from men's experiences but more meaningful to women would certainly require comprehending women's experiences of insecurity.

Even though women flee the conflict area because of insecurity and fear of sexual violence, they may not be safe in the country of arrival. The UNCHR *Note on Certain Aspects of Sexual Violence Against Refugee Women* (1993) shows that being in a different country and different culture, refugee women are left without the usual protection of their communities; thus, they face the risk of sexual violence at the hands of other refugees, bandits, soldiers, people smugglers, camp officials, may be forced into prostitution, the difficulty of meeting basic subsistence needs may induce them to exchange sex for basic subsistence needs for themselves and their children. In refugee camps, women and girls may be forced into *protection marriages* in order to avoid sexual assault.

More women are exposed to the refugee camp conditions than men due to the gendered nature of refugee populations. However, refugee camps are places of "continued insecurity" (Gerard, 2016:114). Three of the respondents - Emine, Rana and Amina - stayed in refugee camps. Emine says that when she and her family crossed the border and reached the camp, they felt secure. Camp conditions were not easy, though. Difficulties arise for women in camp life mainly because of the physical organization of the camps and the organization of the camp routine (Freedman, 2007:36). All participants indicate that the camps were overcrowded and tents were very hot, water and electricity system often failed. But the pressing problem was with the

privacy of women, bathrooms were far away and they had to walk a long way to go to the bathroom or take a shower. They felt unsecure while going to the bathroom especially at night, so women usually walked in groups to protect themselves. Amina highlights the crowdedness of the camps. She says that she and her mother had to live for 4 years in the same tent with her sister and sister's husband who got married in the camp. There was no privacy. She mentions hearing about and witnessing frequent events of sexual abuse and domestic violence but says that people preferred not to talk about it. She also talked about a Turkish male camp official who stalked her for a while as she was going to school, but later she complained about him and he was transferred to another facility. Her words reinforce the general conclusion in migration studies that refugee camps add to gendered insecurities. As Freedman suggests, these insecurities arise from "the disruption of family and community structures during forced migration, and from the continuation and reproduction of previously experienced violence whilst in exile" (2007:38)

The participants claimed that they mostly chose to settle in Kocaeli city for men's (husbands and sons) job opportunities. Kocaeli is an industrial city and the family members or acquaintances who came before them settled in Kocaeli for work opportunities. All participants point out that Kocaeli is close to Istanbul but not as expensive, therefore, a better place to dwell. It turns out that, all male members of the participants' families are working as unqualified workers, doing bodily work in construction, textile or agriculture. Some of the interviewed women also report having worked at textile industry. They worked illegally without being registered in the social security system and for cheaper wages. Even though they could apply for work permits, none of them did so mainly because the workshop itself was illegal, or because women did not know about their right to apply for a work permit. Some women also stated that work permits would force their employer to provide minimal wage at least, but employers would prefer laying workers off instead of providing minimal wage. Aylin complains about the impossibility of finding skilled job. Even though she is a university graduate and a radiology technician, her qualifications are not accepted in Turkey. Until she started her job as a translator at the NGO, she had to work in supermarkets and in textile industry.

In providing basic needs, Syrian refugees depend on donations and assistance from local NGOs or ordinary citizens. Meryem does the shopping from a supermarket that is run by a Syrian, who provides better prices and accepts late payments. Zeinab (40) complains about her landlord and says that he increases the rent continuously, knowing that nobody else would rent a flat to a family with 11 children. Her husband has health problems so he cannot work and the household depends on the work of her eldest son. They survive on contributions by the neighbours, who donate their used clothes to Zeinab's family. All participants claim that even though men work for longer hours compared to how they worked in Syria, they were economically better off before the war than they are in Turkey now. Zeinab's eldest son is the only one working to take care of the 13-member family, but he cannot find a

permanent job and does not get paid regularly. He is under constant pressure to take care of the family, which depresses Zeinab. She says she feels like she is going mad, and her words are worth quoting: "I expected something different. In Turkey, I feel like I do not exist."
Holut says the most pressing problem she faces is providing basic food to her children and reaching health services. Her children are ill, they require special nourishment. Whenever her husband is unemployed, it is the worst; even though they do their best, there are times that the family cannot provide food for the children.

Economic problems and inability to provide basic needs as food is a clear factor of insecurity. Still, it seems that women take on the responsibility for finding ways to cope with it, and in some cases even without leaving their private sphere. Hatip says it is usually women who contact him for economic assistance. When he donates to a family, women hear from their neighbours and call him for help. They usually ask for basic foodstuff and subsistence needs. He delivers them cleaning material, diapers, sanitary pads, baby food and milk, sometimes coal, food packs, second hand household electronics such as refrigerators, washing machines, stoves, etc. It is also interesting to notice that in some cases women express the feeling of empowerment in their new life. It seems that women who are in the legal workforce are more adjusted to daily life in Kocaeli. They are economically better off compared to other participants and express a feeling of security. Aylin says she will not marry until she meets someone she really likes. She has a job and that makes her feel secure. Others who did not have a profession and were housewives back in Syria claim that life in Kocaeli (or Turkey) had impacts on the traditional family roles. Back in Syria, husbands working hours were shorter, and men had time to take care of the household. Here, husbands are away all day long, hence, women have to take on more responsibility, need to be more active in the public sphere. They do the shopping, send and pick up children from school, pay the bills and take children to hospital on their own. As they take on more responsibility, they need to leave the domestic household more and without asking the permission of the husband. Apparently, neither do the husbands make a fuss about women's being out of the house for long hours. This could have never been the case in Syria, Hüsra claims. In her own words, they act "as if they are the head of the household".

The most pressing problem women face in daily life seems to be the language barrier. Language is a huge problem in benefiting from health services. As men are absent all day, women need to get out of the house themselves and go to the hospitals/take their children to doctors. Holut and Emine, who have ill children, complain about the impossibility of communication with the health workers. Neither medical personnel nor the workers in the hospitals speak Arabic, therefore, the patients are told to find translators. Finding translators or communicating through people who can speak Arabic is not really possible most of the time. Rabia is the one who is usually called in such instances. She says that despite the high numbers of

Syrian migrants in cities, hospitals do not have translators. Both Rabia and Hatip had to go to hospitals various times and even nights to help Syrian patients. They also mention the difficulties pregnant women face. Without being able to communicate with the medical personnel (and also due to gendered cultural reservations), most women prefer not to go to the hospitals for prenatal or postnatal care. Hence, even though temporary protection provides health care, women cannot benefit from it as planned.

In terms of blending in with the society, the participants point out that they prefer socializing with Syrians. The main reason for not communicating with the host community seems to be a feeling of social insecurity. It becomes easier for Syrian women to face discrimination or be targets of hate speech out in the open, when they speak Arabic. Sheza claims that hate speech peaked with Turkey's military intervention to the Syrian war. She says she was harassed for putting on make-up and going to a wedding; she was supposed to mourn for the war at home and not have fun. Aylin claims the same, she says listening to music, shopping or seeming to be enjoying life is not suitable for the 'guests', they are supposed to be reserved and unhappy and thankful to the 'hosts' for protecting them. Siham says her 16-year-old daughter, who is a high school student came home crying, because some of her friends and teachers claimed that Turkish soldiers were dying as she was studying comfortably in Turkey. Women perceive a high degree of insecurity that is sustained with hate speech.

Women reveal that younger children are adapting to their new environment better. They go to school, learn Turkish and plan their future in Turkey. Older children, on the other hand, have to leave school for work. Most of the participant's sons who are older than 14 years were not studying, they are working. Even though interviewees did not reveal such intentions, similar studies indicate that girls would also leave school and be forced into marriage at an early age due to economic reasons. Families believe that marriage is a way for protecting their daughters from sexual violence; it is also a way of protecting family honour and a way of ensuring that their daughter will be taken care of even after the death of the parents (Charles & Denman, 2013:105-106). While legal marriage provides legal status for Syrian women in Turkey, there are unknown numbers of unregistered marriages of Syrian women and Turkish men. Even though polygamy is illegal in Turkey, male opportunism is prevalent especially in the border towns, and religious ceremonies are conducted so that Turkish men take Syrian women as second wives. However, these marriages add to the insecurities of women, since neither the marriage nor the babies born in it can be registered with the official authorities. Rana and Amina married Syrian men in Turkey, and their marriages are officially registered. They have the right to initiate divorce, and in that case, they are entitled to an equal sharing of the family property and alimony for themselves and their children. Amina claims that she feels secure as she has legal marriage. She says "I am strong. I am here on my own,

without my father, mother, sister and brother. I can accomplish anything. I am a strong woman."

Another problem regarding marriages is specific to Syrian couples. Marriages among Syrian couples are usually only religious ones; however, religious marriage does not have an official status in Turkey unless Syrian couples register with the official authorities. It is very easy to dissolve religious marriages; divorce rests on the will of men, and reasons such as the stress of adaptation can easily dissolve marriages and leaves women and children out in the cold. The 'men-less' women need to find ways of survival, who, again, usually depend on the good will of the neighbours, charities, or other men.

Migration may cause changes in relations of power within families and couples. Lack of privacy in the camps, socially isolated and overcrowded households in the cities and financial stress usually lead to perpetration of violence by the male head of the household (Women's Refugee Commission, 2014:12). When asked about domestic violence, all participants insist that they never faced violence back in Syria nor in Turkey. When informed about psychological violence, though, most participants admitted that 'the stress level at home' increased with migration. Zeinab, Holut and Rana admitted that the rise in the number of quarrels at home may amount to psychological violence. None of the women were aware of the protection mechanisms that they could utilize in case of facing domestic violence. Even though there is no official report on the prevalence of sexual abuse or domestic violence in Syrian households in Turkey, migrant and refugee women "suffer the insecurities of both their journey and their own husbands, who not only protected them, but also offered a threat" (Freedman, 2016:578). Due to the potential insecurities posed by the idea of continuing the journey alone or just with their children, women find it difficult to get out of this relationship and find themselves stuck in recurring insecurity.

Even though women are expected to behave in line with the gender norms that they used to have in their country of origin, sometimes there are possibilities of changing gender roles within the family due to being in a different country. Amina claimed that she was the victim of physical violence by her mother-in-law. As she is legally married in Turkey, she says violence stopped when she threatened to go to the police and divorce her husband. It seems that her husband was ready to make compromises and was receptive of new forms of gender relations. As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh indicates, migration may also provide an opportunity for positive change in gender relations "precisely because of the disruption of traditional social systems and the reconfiguration of the gendered division of labour arising from displacement" (2014: 403).

Conclusion

Feminist IR has pointed out to the different types of insecurity that might be inherent in the traditional understanding of international politics. By focusing

on the individual, the feminist approach to IR studies has opened up new avenues in studying International Relations. The incorporation of feminist approach to migration studies, alongside with the gendered perspectives on security, made it possible to see that migration is gendered. The fleeing of women from the war-zones due to a fear of sexual violence, women's migration to affluent Western markets as care givers or cheap labourers to work in labour-intensive sectors, mail-order brides, sex trafficking, or migration policies on family unions are obviously gender-related. Women are not simply vulnerable, they are agents in migration.

This study intended to allow refugee women to talk about their experiences of migration which have previously been ignored. It is found out that many types of gender related insecurities are associated with migration. Economic and social insecurity may lead to problems specific to women, such as vulnerability to early marriages, sexual assault or domestic violence. Language barriers may prevent them from health services while hate speech in the host community may further marginalize refugee women and confine them in the home.

Writing about insecurity using the voices of those who experience it is a challenge in itself and to the dominant masculine view of world politics. The stories of refugee women reveal a diversity of experience, demonstrating the impossibility of generalization. Even though their stories reflect multiple insecurities, it is interesting to see how, in many cases, these women came up with ways of coping with them. Even though they are usually constrained by gender norms, some of which are coming from the home-culture and some are reconstructed in their new environment, migration may also lead to the loosening of traditional gender roles. As indicated while talking about the power of legal marriages, migration may result in the empowerment of women. Future studies will reveal the balance between reconstructed power relations and the empowering aspect of migration.

Notes

[1] Bausells M. & Shearlaw M. (16 Sep 2015). Poets speak out for refugees: 'No one leaves home, unless home is the mouth of a shark'. *The Guardian Weekly*. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/16/poets-speak-out-for-refugees-

[2] Syrian refugees in Turkey are not accepted as the term 'refugee' as defined in the 1951 Geneva Convention. For practical purposes, the words 'migrant' and 'refugee' will be used interchangeably throughout this article.

[3] For a similar analysis, see Freedman (2007) 69-107.

[4] It is important to note that women are not the only victims of rape in war. A recent UNHCR report titled *Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in the Syria Crisis* (2017) revealed that rape and sexual violence targets men and boys in vast numbers in Syria. The report points out that even though the number of male victims of sexual violence is no less than females, male gender roles make it less possible for male victims of rape to report rape or seek counsel.

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