

Crossing the EU's Frontline Borders
The Case Study of Syrian Asylum Seekers

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Abstract

In an attempt to promote anti-immigration attitudes and policies, Right-wing groups in the EU frequently vilify refugees and prevent them from securing asylum there, under the prevalence of us versus them rhetoric. This thesis is thus an exploration of the extent to which migrants can defy practices and barriers that may seem impossible to get crossed with human bodies. It is also an effort to clarify that asylum-seekers' quest for safety is stronger than any obstacles and barriers. To prove this claim, this thesis has traced the paths taken by a group of Syrian asylum-seekers, 'group 45', starting from Turkey through the European Union states and eventually to Germany and the Netherlands. In addition to monitoring the Facebook group "Adventurers without Borders," which helped the focus group during their asylum journey and cross borders without smugglers accurately on the route between Greece and Hungary. My finding challenges the notion that immigrants are always subject to the exploitation of smugglers; immigrants struggle against the "subjection" of the power of EU border states. The significance of the thesis implies shedding light on the contradictions happening among EU member states regarding the current EU asylum system, showing that EU member states are dealing with the issue of asylum separately in line with their local migration policies.

Key words: Syrian refugees, asylum destination, Syria, Turkey, undocumented immigrants, Turkey-Greece borders, Greek authorities, Frontex, EU's external borders, Germany, EU migration policy, EU member states, Hungary, Human rights violations, Denmark.

Introduction

"Please be aware of some smugglers when crossing the river, who assist immigrants to cut across it without neither humanity nor mercy. Human beings for them are just a number. They gather more than fifty people at the same point and forcibly send them to the Greek side with the help of the Turkish commandos. Even though, they are fully aware that once you

cross into Greece, you will be arrested because of the lights on and the sounds that they make. Some of them deliberately do so to make you arrested, so that trying again with them and paying much money. If you object to them, they put all the reasons on you and your non-compliance. We recommend that you be very careful when crossing the river to the Greek side, not complacent but patient, and accurately observe the river. As you crossed the main road (highway) and entered the dense forests, you would have passed the greatest danger. on “adventurers without borders” (Adventures without borders).

After ten years of war, over half of the Syrian population 22 million is living in exile (Mercy Corps, 2018). Tragic images of Syrian asylum seekers crossing borders are etched in minds. Since the outbreak of the Arab spring in 2010, the Greece-Turkey border has been functioning as the main entry to Europe for forced immigrants. In search of protection and stability, hundreds of undocumented immigrants are crossing the European borders leaving behind their homes and everything they own. A journey of an undocumented immigrant is high-priced, which would require risking one's life. However, in the eye of policymakers, it is immigrants' responsibility and decision to take a risky trip across Europe's Schengen area. Neglecting the fact that there is no other 'legal' way for asylum seekers, particularly Syrian nationals, to take. Asylum seekers seem to have the freedom to choose the way of traveling and their asylum destinations, but ironically they are forced to leave their home country and travel 'illegally' in order to make sure that their asylum application can be approved in one of EU member states. The Geneva Convention on the protection of refugees has outlined the basis on which asylum seekers can legitimately apply for asylum in one of the Schengen countries. Knowing that all EU nations have closed their embassies in Damascus since the beginning of the Syrian war except the Czech Republic (Hutt, 2021), and have also cut all the diplomatic relations with the Al-Assad regime and repeatedly called Al-Assad to step down (Turkmani & Haid, 2016). As a result, issuing Schengen visas is inaccessible for Syrian nationals, who find themselves forced to choose ‘irregular’ ways to reach EU countries.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) reported respectively in 2018, 2019, and 2020 that the number of alleged fundamental rights violations has been recently increasing in association with border surveillance practices. Human rights violations at EU borders are a huge topic to investigate. My research examines claims and allegations of push-back operations and other “ill” treatment of immigrants particularly on the Balkan routes and the Turkish-Greek borders. Following the Turkey-EU agreement in March 2016, The Greek police either jail or send back the refugees who crossed Greek borders coming from Turkey. Turkey has been accused of using refugees as pawns to put diplomatic pressure on the EU.

According to the Turkish Government, there are more than three and a half million registered Syrian refugees in Turkey (UNHCR, 2020). Erdoğan repeatedly announced that close to 4 million Syrian refugees in Turkey would be returned to Syria as his plan of creating a safe zone in northern Syria comes into practice (Reuters, 2019). Insecurity and the threat of deportation are what Syrian refugees are experiencing there.

25-year-old Mazen, one of my Syrian refugee informants who recently arrived in the Netherlands, spent 8 years in Turkey coping with his constant feeling of insecurity and fear of the Turkish authority. He stated, “being a Kurdish Syrian, I witnessed several incidents. For instance, when one of my relatives died in Turkey, we avoided offering memorial services for the fear of attracting the attention of the Turkish authorities to a gathering of unregistered refugees. He added I worked hard in Turkey to afford the cost of living, but the Turkish employers multiple times exploited my vulnerability and did not give me my wages. I was not treated fairly and equally there.”

Unfortunately, anti-immigrant sentiment, rising nationalism, and racism have sharpened in Turkey during the last few years (Çiğdem Nas). The social exclusion of Syrian refugees is most evident on social media. The hashtags #gohomeSyrians and #ÜlkemdeSuriyeliİstemiyorum (#I don't want Syrian in my country) have been among the most trending topics on Twitter. According to a recent poll, 72% of the Turk consider the Syrian presence in Turkey as the second major problem in Turkey (Makovsky, 2019). Terror and danger in Syria and the unbearable conditions in the neighboring countries compel Syrian refugees to seek asylum in the EU. In addition, the refugee camps in the neighboring countries are overcrowded and underfunded (UNHCR, 2020). Thus, in search of an enduring refuge, thousands of Syrians pay smugglers to flee those countries.

No wonder, therefore, that Syrians' undocumented crossing of Europe's frontline borders are a result of regulating the EU's external borders and restricting undocumented entry. several EU countries have implemented measures to restrict the migration of refugees over their borders, and the movements of refugees groups mirror these migration policies. Syrian nationals' chances of crossing on the Western Balkans route or the Turkish-Greek border are severely limited. These people hence turn to smugglers to facilitate their unauthorized entry to EU countries. International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) has conducted research on the impacts of the Syrian war on human trafficking and found out that various forms of human trafficking are prevalent.

Overall, this research investigates the EU's migration policy and its capability in managing its external borders. The main question of this thesis is: to what extent does the EU

migration policy hinder Syrian asylum seekers' movements to EU member states and potentially contribute to human rights violations at its external borders? Furthermore, this thesis answers other sub-questions in each chapter, respectively. Thus, such questions are: what are the push and pull factors driving Syrian nationals to leave Syria? How does Turkey's changing policies towards Syrian refugees destabilize the border region with the EU?

Societal relevance of the research:

Since I come from an immigrant background and have passed through stages of displacement myself, I know exactly what it means to sacrifice your life and leave everything behind for the sake of freedom and safety. Research in the areas of immigration and border crossing are very important to me because I believe that that research can result in the formation of better immigration policies that would limit the loss of lives at the EU's external borders. I have always wondered why human societies have set boundaries between themselves. Unfortunately, these boundaries include not only physical constructions but also structures consisting of deeply-rooted ideologies.

Despite the considerable decline in the number of unauthorized migrants arriving at the EU's external borders due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions (Frontex, 2021), anti-immigration and populist leaders still oppose the migration of refugees to the European Union or otherwise foment xenophobic sentiments against those seeking asylum. Though all of the actions of these populist leaders is an objective discussion based on events and statistics, to what extent can such data be generalized to entire groups of people? Are all the Syrian people vulnerable to displacement, or are there groups within the Syrian diaspora that are more vulnerable than others? Is crossing the Union's external borders always done with the help of smugglers or beneficiary groups, and are the displaced motivated to seek out solutions that are commensurate with their varying situations? All evidence indicates that the will to achieve the end is stronger than any system or policy. In this thesis, I discuss these questions by means of the personal experiences of a small group of Syrian immigrants.

The significance of this project lies in its presentation of a new perspective on border crossing that details how undocumented migrants can and do cross borders without resorting to smugglers or other illegitimate methods. It also charts the path that the group followed to reach their final destination and presents the hardships they encountered along the way, serving as a simulated image of what they witnessed while also stressing that no one should have to go through such an experience.

Human rights activists and NGOs are increasingly urging the international community to take immediate action to stop human rights violations against the immigrants trapped at the Turkish and Greek border (Council of Europe, 2020). According to research published by Amnesty International, “violent pushbacks have become the de facto Greek border control policy in the Evros region” (Tidona, 2021). Through interviews with a group of six asylum-seekers who have made unauthorized crossings, this thesis sheds light on the events surrounding these pushbacks.

Migration and borders studies are part of social science that demonstrate how borders can be symbolically and physically exploited to reproduce xenophobia and biased cultural stereotypes (Gallardo, 2008; Kolossov & Scott, 2013). Borders are construction that is responsible for implementing the process of inclusion and exclusion of people and objects according to the local policies. In fact, this process of border control functions as an apparatus to restrict asylum claims and 'unwanted' mobilities (Walters, 2015).

Studying human migration, borders, and constructions of “otherness” is academically vital and an essential part of international politics. A border is not just a physical barrier, but "a means of saying, representing, glorifying, or resisting a here, a we and a them" (Van Houtum, 2020, p. 36). Vladimir Kolossov and James Scott argue border secularization is not merely a set of protection fences or walls to secure spaces, but to refine transnational movements of immigrants and to classify them between welcome and unwanted (Kolossov & Scott, 2013). This mechanism of dividing and criminalizing immigrants symbolizes the power of subjection (Kubal, 2014). Another means to sort out people on basis of their nationality or ethnicity is Border Externalization'. It is a complicated concept related to the use of force by the state authority to enforce security in the border zone and a front line boundary designed to prevent the entrance of undesirable individuals (Kolossov, 2005).

There has been much academic and social debate regarding borders and the undocumented migration of refugees into the EU, and migrants have recounted many painful stories regarding the challenges of seeking asylum. However, real change requires even more research regarding borders and immigration.

Methodology

I have used a set of structured interview questions for my qualitative research, and I use several methods to analyze the interviewees' answers to them. I use a narrative approach to convey how these groups of asylum-seekers have experienced the act of border crossing and to understand how they chose their trajectories to reach their asylum destination. The case study in this thesis is built on the life history approach and the method of social network analysis. Interviews with eight Syrian refugees served as the primary method of data collection. Two sets of interview questions were developed. The first set was used with two Syrian men from Damascus. They were asked about the situation in Damascus and the potential demographic change happening there. The second set was used with a group of six Syrian refugees. Online desk research was performed through telephonic and online contact with interviewees. In every chapter, I include a number of the interviewees' answers to support an ongoing discussion and draw a hypothetical conclusion about their land journey. Moreover, my conceptualization of the Syrian war is built on academic and news articles as well as reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Human Rights Watch, and other reliable sources. I also collected oral histories from the interviewees. The thesis also draws on material published through social media platforms.

The findings in this thesis are based on interviews with a focus group of six Syrian refugees and two other interviews with two Syrian nationals. The findings were also informed by content posted to the Facebook page "Adventurers without Borders."

Overview of group '45' and the interviews:

In April 2020, Young Syrians established the Facebook group "Adventurers without Borders" to help immigrants reach the EU without smugglers' exploitation. The founder of this group, Imad, narrates his story, starting with this compelling statement: "the journey will never be harsher than what I have witnessed inside Syria, I am not afraid of the potential death on the route to EU countries, but returning to where I came from is what I am afraid of." Another admin in the group called Hala, stated, "we send immigrants checkpoints with directions on Google and stay in touch with them until they safely arrive. If they have problems, we try to send them the necessary information" (Adventurers without borders, 2020).

The story started when I accidentally met Mohanad, one of the people I interviewed later. In early October 2020, Mohanad arrived with 5 other asylum-seekers in Germany in Dortmund, where two of the group chose to apply for asylum in Germany while the rest four decided to continue to the Netherlands for asylum. Mohanad narrated to me the story of their refugee journey on foot from the Greek-Turkish border to their last destination in the

Netherlands. He told me about the hardships and dangers they had faced. Here, a question came into my mind: if he had gone back in time, would he have repeated the same experience again? And his answer was yes! I began to wonder whether his peers would have the same answer to that question!

Then Mohanad commented that he was somewhat lucky because he was not beaten, detained, or even defrauded by smugglers, unlike other asylum-seekers who suffered a lot or lost their lives in their search for a haven. Of course, my curiosity demanded me to know much more details about his asylum journey and what made it different from other immigrants, and I asked him this question whether he thought that the group members might have a similar answer. Later, he replied to that question, “not necessarily! Indeed, we came together, but we were also exposed to different circumstances and unlike health conditions as well.” He resumed saying that Eyad, his friend, almost lost his leg because of the continuous walk. Eyad got injured in an unclean environment. Here, I decided to delve more into details and explore the incentives behind risking lives in an arduous journey. I started gathering contacts’ information and reaching out to the group members.

Mohanad advised me to join an Arabic-speaking Facebook group called: "مغامرون بلا حدود" or “Adventures without Borders,” whereby taking a realistic picture of what is happening at EU external borders and how immigrants communicate with the admins in this group. It is worth noting that this group is confidential, so its admins do not accept the membership of 'fake accounts.' Besides, they would request a copy of someone's ID card to confirm that they are not joining for smuggling purposes. I therefore joined this Facebook group, using my personal Facebook account to observe and sometimes examine without actively engaging.

This project moreover incorporates two artworks by Rabiea Alshikkador, a young Syrian refugee who came to the Netherlands in 2017. Rabiea is a friend of mine, we grew up in the same neighborhood in Syria. Seeing him safe and a rising artist at Newest Art Organization (NAO) in the Netherlands made me feel proud. Rabiea’s asylum trip to the Netherlands was not devoid of hardships. He however described it as a “very basic refuge trip” in the sense that his journey was relatively less dangerous than others. Rabiea’s paintings visualize his story of refuge seeking. These artworks are attached to places, asylum-seekers usually go through. These works of art are indeed an embellishment of painful experiences, but at the same time, they reflect asylum-seekers suffering and embody the difficulties they went through. Rabiea stated, “I got a very strong feeling that I was not alone. And that my pain was so big that there are millions holding it inside. Now, this pain motivates me to paint

about the reality in Syria and the common traumas that most refugees have been through” (NAO, 2020).

When I saw Rabiea's artworks, I automatically associated them with the experiences I heard from the participants in this research. Rabiea's artworks reflect stories and experiences, and sharing these artworks helps make them visible to others and thus change a painful reality. I relate Rabiea's artworks to group 45's asylum journey, in the sense of perceiving their stories reflected in his art. Chapter 3 of the thesis “Land Routes of Immigrants into EU Countries” displays two paintings: “Refugee compass” and “De Vluchteling.” Through these representations, the chapter goes into deeper details about the dynamism of group 45's journey. Driven by the belief that the quietness of these paintings sometimes is more powerful than any loud voice calling for change.

From November 2020 to March 2021, the interviews were carried out in Arabic because the interviewees' native language is Arabic so that making sure that the participants would express their answers effectively. In total, I interviewed eight Syrian males whose ages ranged from 25 to 35. Six immigrants came together in a group met via “Adventurers without Borders,” and two other men originally from the Damascus region. Interviewing them was important to add additional nuance to the first chapter dealing with the push and pull factors that drive Syrians to flee their homes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not possible, so I held the interviews via the Facebook messenger app. These interviews varied between video calls, audio records, taking notes, and messaging with interpretation.

Positionality/limitation:

At my respondents' request, real names of participants are anonymized, and their real names and personal contact information are under pseudonyms. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality have been clarified from the beginning of the interviews and respondents' consent has been taken. Few respondents often expected that I could be potentially working with Immigration and Naturalization Services (IND). Nonetheless, I clearly explained that I am a student who is working on her MA thesis and has no link whatsoever with any governmental institutes nor in the position to influence any migration policy. Due to the sensitivity of the discussed topics and the probability that similar questions might have been addressed before, during IND interviews that asylum-seekers have to make to process their asylum applications, I would therefore suggest that the interviews were credible.

Interview Question Set:

- When did you start your journey? Did you have a realistic view of what you would have encountered or what could have happened to you?
- How was your life in Turkey and did you experience any form of discrimination?
- Why did you choose this way of traveling? Is it related to your financial situation?
- Did you cross borders alone or with accompany? If yes, how did you meet them?
- How did you access social media while migrating?
- Why do immigrants choose to travel with a accompany or on their own?
- Did you use social media or join a Facebook group to find your routes and get any travel tips?
- How certain were you to travel by foot?
- Did you meet any activists, NGOs, or experience any type of racial discrimination during your journey? If yes, where and when?
- Why did you choose Western European countries as a destination?
- What has helped you to select the country you reside in now? For example, why the Netherlands?

The Structure of group 45's asylum journey:

As explained before, the Facebook group "Adventures without Borders" functions as guidance for its members and provides crucial information about the security and safety of various routes in Europe. One person of the group usually communicates with an admin from the Facebook page. Ten admins in total are ready to assist when needed. Usually, the engaged admin requests copies of the identity cards of immigrants, who are on the move. As claimed, this policy tends to detect smugglers and prevent fraud. In addition, Admins provide groups with a road plan containing specific checkpoints and assign someone to stay up for them. Admins of "Adventurers without Borders" organized groups by numbers, so they marked my respondents' group as the group '45.' Dividing immigrants into small groups and numbering them is part of a plan to facilitate the group's movements and make them more workable on the ground. It is worth noting that members of the group 45 have gone through similar experiences that will be exposed in the coming chapters of the thesis, but since the group 45 has set out together from the Turkish borders to the end of their journey, their experience of undocumented border crossing is somewhat similar.

This thesis discusses migration routes to EU countries taken by group 45 in two stages: the first stage (figure 1) is the route taken to cross the land border between Turkey and Greek.

This route starts from Edirne, the closest point to the Greek border. From this point, the group had to cross the Evros river, which forms a natural border between Turkey and Greece and the only gate to enter the Greek territories. All respondents noted that the Turkish border guards turned a blind eye to their undocumented crossing into the Greek territories. As the group encountered the Turkish authorities, they were ordered to show their passports. Sultan, one of my respondents, insisted that the Turkish border guards allowed Syrian nationals to cross into Greece if they have had passports that verified their identity. Then the group prepared an inflatable boat with other 6 people then they entered the Greek territories. Lavara is the first Greek village they reached.

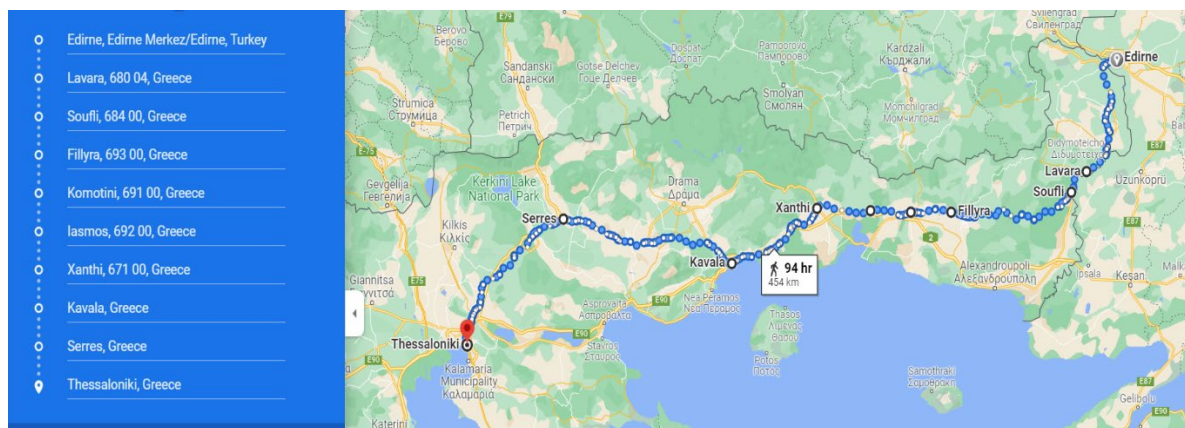


Figure 1. displays an overview of the routes taken by group 45 entering the Greek territories.

They walked about 17 days to reach Thessaloniki, which is relatively a safe area for undocumented migrants. There they would not expect the Greek authorities to return them to Turkey in case they are caught, but they would be transferred to a camp.

In the second stage (figure 2), group 45 took a bus from Thessaloniki to Kastoria in northern Greece. Group 45 proceeded from Kastoria to Albania, where they spent the afternoon that day hiding in an abandoned church at the Greek-Albanian border. My informants noted that there were a lot of Frontex vehicles that usually “hunt illegal migrants” and return them to Greece. Later, they concealed in apple orchards before heading to Tirana. Sultan said that Albanian farmers ignored their presence. After arriving in Tirana, group 45 took a car to Kosovo. Crossing the Kosovo border with Serbia was at night to conceal from border guards.

As group 45 arrived in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, they reached a café called Istanbul, where the refugees informed admins of “Adventurers without Borders” of their safe arrival. It is conventional among the members of this Facebook group to do this by taking pictures or making a video call upon arrival. The group members expressed that they had chosen this

way of traveling “to save money and souls”. Eyad, a member of Group 45, believed that this Facebook group helps immigrants out of a moral principle to protect them from smugglers’ exploitation. For example, my informants noted that numerous smugglers in Belgrade ask refugees for money of 4000,4500 euro to help them cross because refugees are often afraid of Hungary's restricted migration policy.

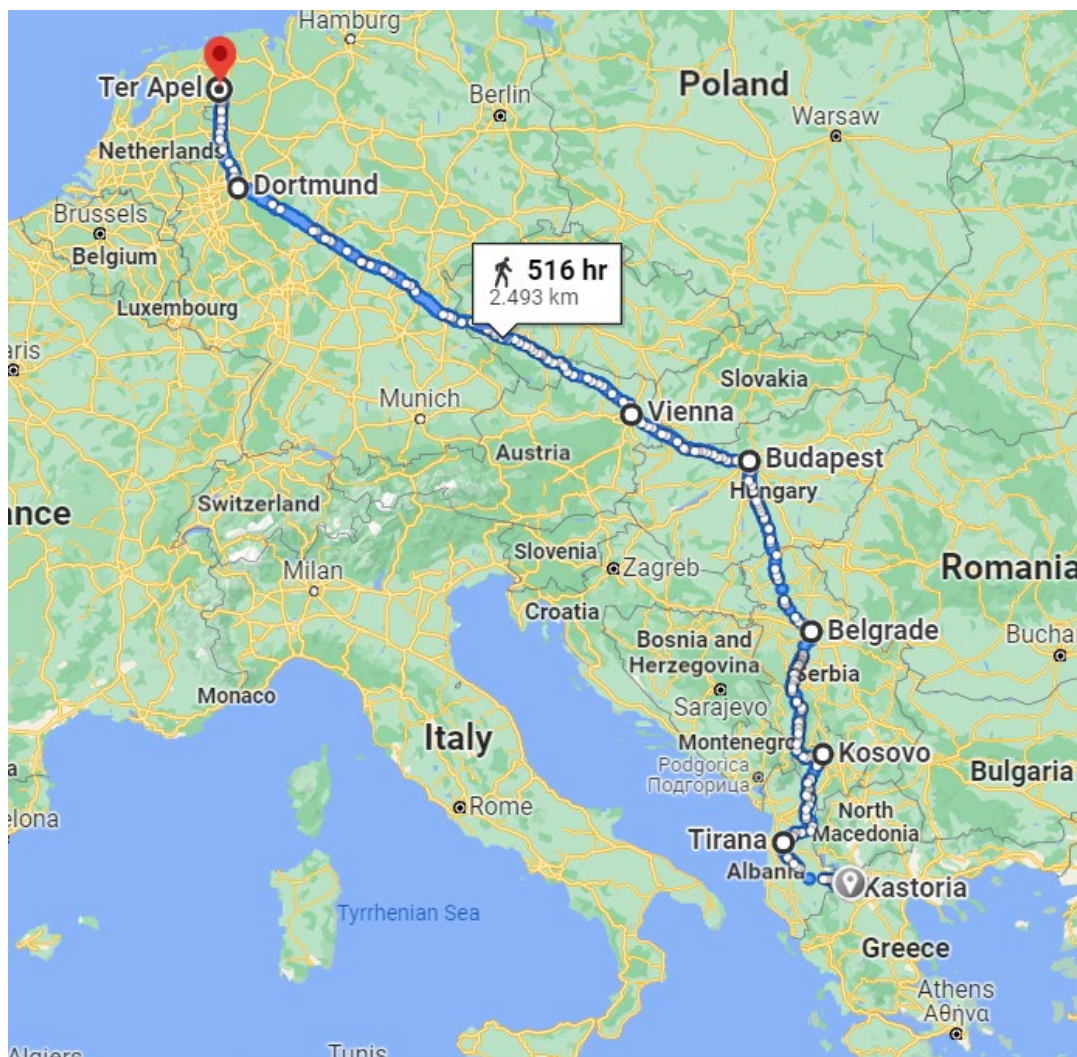


Figure 2. The second stage from Kastoria, Greece to the Netherlands.

The border between Hungary and Serbia is provided with speakers warning migrants to cross and with a height of approximately 4 meters. The group sneakily carried four ladders at night and managed to climb over the border. Thanks to the supervision of "Adventurers without Borders" admins, group 45 made it safely to Hungary. Five days later, group 45 traveled to Vienna, Austria. Then group 45 arrived in Dortmund, Germany, and eventually in the Netherlands, Ter Apple, where 4 immigrants applied for asylum. The entire journey took about two months of traveling.

Literature Review and conceptual framework:

Europe's border is a concept constructed by employing the deep-rooted antagonism between the West and the Orient (Said, 1979) and between Western and Eastern Europe (Wolff, 1994; Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Neumann, 1999; Grzymski, 2018). The thesis uses a framework that focuses on power relations and their effects on individuals (Foucault, 1982) and draws on Michel Foucault's theory of power and Edward Said's Orientalism.

Foucault argues in his book *The Birth of Biopolitics* that in the past, the sovereign had the "right of life" and the "right of death" over people. In the 17th century, a new mechanism of power emerged: the sovereign power exercises a form of authority; this power is no more to "take life" or "to let live," but to foster life (biopower; Foucault, 1978, p. 138). Biopolitics is a form of government that uses biopower to govern individuals. The aim of biopolitics thus is "to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order" (Foucault, 1978, p. 138).

Biopolitics can be perceived as political rationality that optimizes the lives of people.

In the Foucauldian sense of power, the border has become a tool of biopower because of its "systematic regulation of national and transnational populations, their movement, health, and security" (Walters, 2002, p. 571). Moreover, Foucault describes biopower as "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species" (Foucault, 1978). Biopower is different from the traditional understanding of power. It is the power to create subjects and produce a series of power relations.

Governmentality is another construction determined by relations of power that produces various and changing practices of government, described as governmental rationality (Neumann & Sending, 2007). Governmentality is a concept coined by Michel Foucault in a lecture series titled "Security, Territories, and Population" in 1977. It is an "ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power..." (Foucault, 1991, p. 102). All the existing nation-states are a result of a new project of governmentality.

The governmentality of postmodern societies manifests in the form of surveillance technologies used to sort people and decide who is under surveillance and who is not on the basis of their profiles (Bigo, 2002, p. 82). In terms of governmentality and safeguarding the EU's external borders, the Schengen Information System (SIS) that came into existence with the Schengen Agreement is intended to facilitate "information exchange" between national

governments (Walters, 2002, p.569). When individuals, in this case the Syrian asylum-seekers, meet the power of European states at the EU's external borders, the governmentality perspective can be applied to analyze how undocumented immigrants would respond to the sovereignty of states.

EU member states use biopower to justify death in new logic. With respect to undocumented border crossing, immigrants who are not authorized with the "paper border" will be excluded or punished for deviating from the norm, and this act of the state is seen not as violence, but as a valid reaction against "intruders" who are not abiding by the norm.

For these reasons, border control can be considered a valid argument by the European Parliament, which granted the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) more executive power for regulating or "filtering" the entry of immigrants and guarding the EU's external borders (the European Union, 2011). Border Securitization is not simply meant to be a set of protective fences and walls, as Kolossov and Scott argue, but to refine the transnational movement of immigrants and to classify them as legal or illegal and as welcome or unwanted (2013). Testing the effectiveness of a border is sometimes measured by its capability of preventing "unwanted" entrance.

There are three different dimensions that play a considerable role in producing borders: bordering, ordering, and othering (van Houtum, 2010, p. 959). Bordering entails the act of demarcation and the activity of physically dividing space on the basis of sovereignty and identity claiming. The second dimension, ordering, is constructed symbolically and involves the socio-spatial elements of history, tradition, and the common sharing of space. This dimension also involves biopolitics and provincial surveillance of the inhabitants of a place. The third dimension, othering, involves the construction of others for the purpose of building borders. A pertinent example of this is the racial profiling that occurs at the EU's external borders; skin color and other features are the main criteria for selecting and suspecting people at these borders.

Analysis of the EU's external borders through the above framework shows that the EU is exercising stricter controls over passage through its external borders, as well as greater scrutiny in the process of granting Schengen visas, excluding certain nationalities from the possibility of obtaining a Schengen visa entirely. This is done under the pretext of the conflict situations and the EU's inactive embassies in these countries. The visa, which is an example of a "paper border," is used to separate Europeans from non-Europeans based on "arbitrary geographical discrimination" (van Houtum, & Bueno Lacy, 2020). The paper border constitutes the first border of the EU's border regime in the sense that it is a pre-requisite for

actual border crossing. As a result of this policy, the EU is paradoxically promoting illegal immigration across its borders, particularly of nationals from third-world countries such as Syria, who are deprived of the right to enter legally.

Migration policy involves the management of common interests. The migration policy of EU member states varies according to how migrants are screened and whether this is done on the basis of ethnicity. EU migration policy is centered around managing legal migration and excluding 'illegal' entry to EU member states. To achieve this policy, the apparatus of border control in these states restricts immigrants' claims and hinders those they consider "unwanted" (Walters, 2015). This apparatus can facilitate the process of border crossing for certain categories of asylum seekers while complicating it for others. In the case of Syrian asylum seekers, Germany allowed for the acceptance of more Syrian refugees in 2015 who had been fingerprinted elsewhere by suspending the Dublin Convention, which dictates that asylum seekers must apply for asylum in the first EU country they enter. The fact that any member state of the EU can simply change the method of selecting immigrants to serve its own political ideology, and that this is in accordance with the overarching immigration rules, shows that there is a discrepancy between the policy on paper and its actual implementation.

According to Lee's push and pull model (1966), there are push factors that force inhabitants to leave the area of origin and pull factors that attract migrants and immigrants to their destination. According to Lee, migration is selective because individuals react differently to the sets of plus and minus factors at their origin and destination. Besides, there is considerable variation in their capacity to overcome the barriers they encounter (Lee, 1966, p. 56).

This thesis uses this framework to investigate the push and pull factors for Syrian refugees. It furthermore considers the various sets of intervening obstacles that hinder the movements of immigrants. Drawing on Foucault's governmentality and the biopolitics of individuals (1991), I investigate the power connections and governmental practices at the EU's external borders, such as arbitrary detention, pushbacks, and other forms of ill-treatment of undocumented immigrants.

Thus, I combine different approaches in my analysis of refugee migration, namely the push and pull model, the trajectory method, and the border approach. Migrants' migration routes to EU countries are continuously shifting and changing. Their movements from place to place to an uncertain future are dynamic, and so are the borders they encounter, ranging from physical fences and natural barriers to detention centers and camps.

Chapter I

Displacement, forced migration, demographical change, historical and Regional Background

The Syrian war has brought a humanitarian and refugee crisis (UNHCR, 2021). Consequently, the EU embraced most of the humanitarian costs (Turkmani and Haid, 2016). However, Syria is often depicted as a source of refugees and violence. The media coverage presents asylum-seekers as victims of the authorities, fleeing their country, which is controlled by poverty and violence (Giró et al., 2006). So far after 10 years of the devastating war in Syria, it has become certain that the Syrian population has reached a “closed gate” if not a “dead end” in their uprising against the Syrian regime. They have to accept that there are multi-level external and internal forces that direct that conflict in Syria and face another form of occupation as Burhan Ghalioun, a French-Syrian professor of sociology at Sorbonne University and the first chairman of the Syrian opposition council, described the Syrian strive for freedom is an attempt to liberate themselves from internal colonialism (Ḥanaḥ and Yi 2020). This chapter will provide insights into the political and religious developments, and the effects of demographic trends in Syria. It will also define the displacement waves of migration inside Syria and spotlight the economic and social challenges that Syrian people encounter. In addition to answering the questions: whether are the Syrian population subjected to systematic displacement, and what are the most prominent areas that have demographically been changed? I will focus my field examination on the central region of Syria, specifically on Damascus. I will thus explore the reasons behind migrating from Syria and the **push factors** that force Syrians in specific governorates to flee their homes. These factors are the results of a systematic plan to evacuate larger spaces of four large cities and create a new demographic reality in Syria, aligning with Iran’s geopolitical project in the region. There is a common perception shared among Iranian leaders that Syria is part of the Iranian axis of resistance (International Crisis Group, p.15, 2018). The geostrategic struggle for power between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been an outcome of the alliance of all Sunni parties on the one hand and all Shi‘i groups on the other side. This rivalry has manifested itself on the regional stage in Syria, where Iran has been ceaselessly attempting to consolidate its military presence as well as its Shi‘i influence. Iran, under the presidency of Hassan Rouhani, considers what is against al-Assad’s authoritarianism is against Iran itself. Iran’s

clout in the region has considerably grown up specifically in what is called “useful Syria”. This chapter highlights the role of religion as a used ideology to create alliances and draw physical borders between places and conceptual barriers between the Syrian people. In the light of understanding the conceptualization of physical as well as mental borders that pose an implicitly push factor that drives to emigrate, I will present an analysis of the situation in Syria during the current war as an attempt to decipher the complex reality of forced migration from Syria.

The Syrian Revolution began on March 18, 2011, after a group of young schoolchildren were arrested and brutally tortured for writing slogans against the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on walls in Dar'a, a city in southern Syria. This incident was a spark for the Syrians to rebel against the repressive policy of the Syrian regime. This prompted dozens to protest against the Syrian regime. Soon, anti-Assad demonstrations expanded and spun out of control (Droz-Vincent, 2014, p.34). The Syrian authorities responded by force and followed the '*shoot-to-kill*' strategy, by which firing was not only meant to scatter and intimate peaceful demonstrators but also to kill as much as possible (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

The Syrian public protests were developed into a complex conflict marked by a significant division between various religious sects. As a matter of fact, al-Qaida affiliates also started to expand across Syria, the Syrian army was created, and Sectarian slogans began to appear during demonstrations specifically in areas with a Sunny-majority such as a slogan: “Alawites to the grave, and Christians to Beirut” (Glass, 2019, p.52). Therefore, a bloody civil war has spread across the country between pro-Assad and anti-Assad regime groups.

The situation in Syria grew ever more complicated, witnessing regional and international involvement from various actors. The EU and EU member States' role in the Syrian War was The EU issued several statements that condemned the brutal repression of protesters and urged the Syrian regime to stop violence against Syrian civilians and commence "urgent political and socio-economic reforms" (Turkmani and Haid, 2016).

Even though the Syrian conflicts impacted Europe directly in the increasing number of refugees, it did not take a considerable role in trying to solve or interfere in the Syrian conflict, but the EU role limits its involvement in imposing increasing sanctions on the Syrian government (Turkmani and Haid, 2016, p.3). In response to the continuing repression of the Syrian Civilians by the Al-Assad regime, the EU has introduced diverse sanctions against Syria in 2011. The EU has imposed a travel ban and assets freeze on 283 persons on the EU's blacklist, including Bashar Al-Assad and members of his family. In addition to a complete

ban of trading with Syria and providing loans. EU restrictive measures on Syria have been extended until 1 June 2022 (Council of the EU, 2021). The EU's purpose of the beforementioned sanctions is to put more pressure on the Syrian regime and drive it toward finding peaceful solutions away from military intervention. As the European Parliament has announced that a “sustainable solution cannot be achieved through military means” (News European Parliament, 2021).

Nonetheless, the EU's sanctions on Syria have left socio-economic impacts on Syrians especially on the poor because the Syrian government has raised the prices of basic goods such as bread, oil, and services. Sanctions in Syria have led to high inflation of the national currency and a breakdown of the Syrian economy (Turkmani and Haid, 2016, p.17). As a result of the sanctions, the Syrian people have to bear the consequences. 90% of the Syrians are now living under the poverty line in Syria (News European Parliament, 2021).

However, After 10 years of EU restrictive measures, the Syrian regime is still practicing the same policy and has not so far complied with the international laws and obligations. All of that leads to the question of the effectiveness of such a policy.

Figure.3 exhibits the push factors that stand behind fleeing Syria and seeking asylum in other countries. War, political instability, and oppression appear to be the crucial drive for fleeing the country. They are not the sole causes for migrating, but there are other interwoven drivers: economic poverty, the lack access to basic services, and social motives forcing people to leave Syria.

The increasing insurgency in Syria has been developed into a proxy war, in which, local, regional, and international players are fighting for different goals. The al-Assad regime along with its allies Iran and Russia are fighting against several rebel factions. The United States has combated the spread of extremism and the Islamic States (ISIS) alongside the Kurdish forces. On the other hand, Turkey has fought the Kurdish militias in north-eastern Syria. Turkey has practiced an open-border policy by allowing Syrian refugees to enter the Turkish territories. It has furthermore assisted what is called the factions of 'moderate Syrian opposition' and supported them to grow in Syria (Parlar Dal, 2016, p.1407). Iran has built a solid alliance with the al-Assad regime that is proved through Iran's subsidization of Hezbollah, the Syrian National Army, and other pro-Shia militias in Syria. Iran furthermore links its influence and interest in the region to the continuity of the Syrian regime (Malmvig, 2017, p. 71). Iran's constructed ideology aims to balance the power of different fighting parties under one religious affiliation, namely Shi'ism, through alliances and partners. In an attempt to change the religious identity of Syria, Iran has put different cultural and religious

strategies into practice so that exporting the revolutionary of Shi'ism (1979) to Syria, mainly of the Twelver branch.

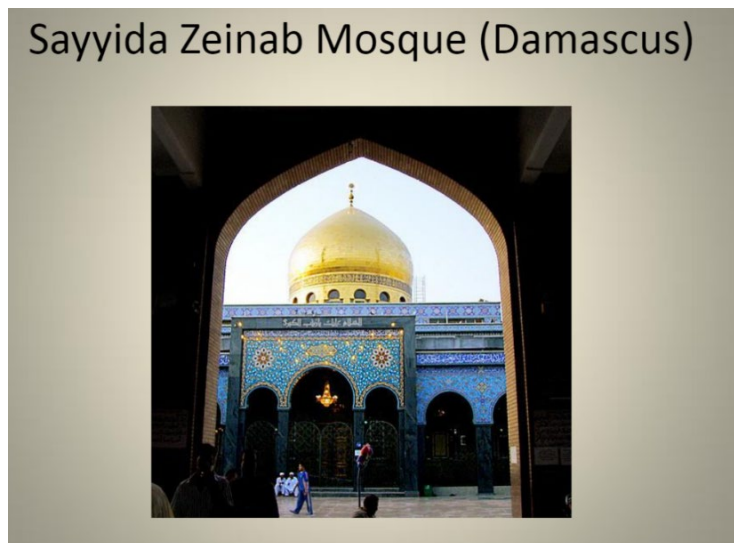


Figure 3. The push factors for Syrian refugees to EU member states.

Iran is developing a remarkable process of demographic change in Damascus and extensively in the region leading to Lebanon so that securing a contiguous route for Hezbollah (Sinjab, 2017). Iran furthermore takes advantage of the Shia shrines in Syria and tries to convert Syrians to Shiism. Syria is home to three alleged Shia shrines in Damascus and other 46 Shia sites holy to Shias of Iran. Under the pretext of protecting these sites from the “sectarian war” and the danger of ISIS, Iran has justified the presence of its Shia militias there. Moreover, Iran has intensified the number of Shia pilgrims to Syria as if Syria was one of the other Iranian provinces. The number of Iranian pilgrims grew considerably: from 27,000 in 1987 to 290,000 in 2003 (Souria Houria, 2014). For instance, hundreds of

thousands of Iranian pilgrims annually visit the shrine of Sayyida Zeinab bint Ali bin Abi Talib (figure 4), one of the most sacred sites for the Shiites.

Figure 4. A pilgrimage site for Shia Muslims



In parts of Syria, where the Iranian militia took over the power, Iran established religious shrines in historical and religious spots and opened schools in the Persian language. Of course, this Iranian strategy of winning over Shiism is facilitated by Iran's allies in Syria, the al-Assad regime, and Hezbollah. According to a report published by Wallstreet Journal, Iran provides Syrians, who are badly affected by the war, with money, food, public services, and even free education. All of this is to serve the Iranian plan to spread Shiism in Syria and control the country (Abdulrahim & Faucon, 2019).

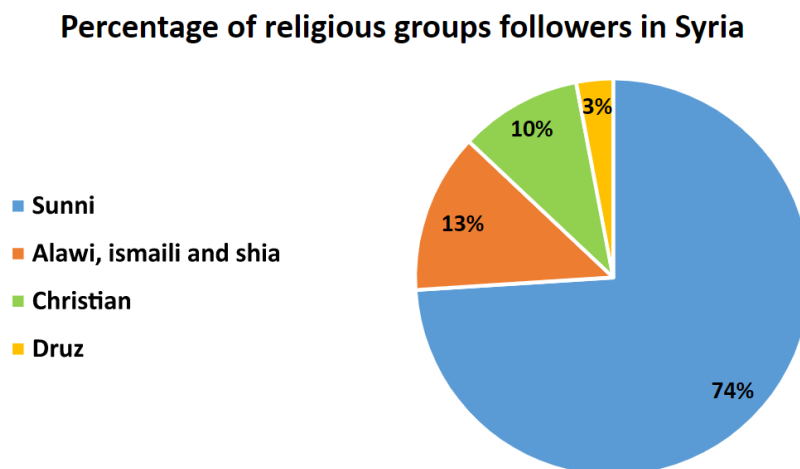
As the national resistance in Syria moved from peaceful action to military one in 2011, and the situation was escalated by commencing a proxy war in the country, the al-Assad regime started its war in accordance with the strategy of spatial clearance that took first place in Homs governorate by displacing neighborhoods and forcing people to leave their properties. Moreover, the Syrian security forces as well as the Shiite militias have often arrested residents of these areas on security grounds and restricted their movements, which push these areas' inhabitants to flee from the tightening grip of the regime.

Bashar al-Assad delivered a speech on July 26th, 2015, addressing the Syrian population on public television. He emphasized that "[t]he fatherland is not for those who live in it or hold its nationality, but for those who defend and protect it," indicating that "the army, in order to be able to perform its duties and counter-terrorism, must be supported by the human element" (Aldoughli, 2020). Meaning, thus, that those who do not defend their country, do not deserve it. Iran and Hezbollah, which fight along with the Syrian army, play a pivotal role in the ongoing Syrian war. From al-Assad's perspective, they defend the Syrian sovereignty and,

therefore, fight for the Syrian land. As a result of such religious, political, and ideological motivations, loyal locals, as well as foreign fighters, continue to support and fight for the al-Assad regime and his Shia allies.

Before the arrival of Hafez al-Assad to power in 1971, over 10,000 Alawites lived in Damascus. Throughout these years, they disguised their real identities, pretending that they are part of the Sunni majority or to be, as often described, lost Christians. However, as soon as Hafez al-Assad gained power and influence, he paved the way for the Alawite sect to gain dominance and religious recognition as Twelver Shi'is, a branch of Shia Islam. Alawites quickly declared, afterward, their religious affiliation and became fervent Alawites (Pipes, 1989, p.434). The ethnic cleansing of Sunnis has begun in Syria since the 1980s. In this endeavour, Hafez al-Assad aroused sectarian violence against Sunni Muslims in 1984 in Hama when the entire city was bombed, whereby hundreds of people got killed by the Syrian regime. This forced removal of a specific ethnic group has already been initiated. It is not thus a novel result of the current Syrian War but is stationed on an ideology that tends to distribute the Syrian population according to their ethnic and religious affiliation.

Figure 5. source: Bakni, CIA Factbook (2018).



Throughout the first years of the Syrian war, Iran has determinedly worked to consolidate its influence and intensified its military presence in Syria. The Syrian regime heavily depends on Shia Muslim networks and Iranians recruited Shia-militias in its sectarian war against the opposition. The emergence of the tripartite alliance (al-Assad, Iran, and Hezbollah) has pushed the influence of Shi'ism into its peak in the regions of "useful Syria". The Syrian regime has furthermore supported the religious activities of Shiism and abolished visa requirements for Iranian citizens to enter the country. To achieve this goal, the repopulation of Shia Muslims in specific areas have been intensively taking place in line with Iran's

expansionist plan in the region. Hence, it is no wonders that Shia communities have concentrated in zones, particularly in the provinces of “useful Syria,” where the ruling minority Alawite government controls. The advent of the al-Assad government and its affinities with Shiism have boosted the rate of conversion to Shiism. Furthermore, according to Khaled Sandawi, a researcher in Islamic studies, many groups have converted to Shiism due to poverty and the financial temptation that the al-Assad regime and the Iranian mourners have offered in return. All of this is to naturalize the Shiite presence and divide the country into multiple statelets.

However, the disinformation is rejected by some ethnic and religious minorities such as the Ismailis in Salamiyah, a city located in the center of Syria and inhabited by the Ismailis majority along with other groups. The sectarian diversity in Salamiyah elevates the city to a level that is seen as a model for coexistence and interactions between different sects and ethnicities. Salamiyah had been involved in early peaceful protests against the al-Assad regime in 2011. The emergence of “Islamic militant factions among the Syrian opposition and the Islamic State in Syria have contributed to change the peaceful opposition in Salamiyah into a neutral one that considers both the Syrian regime and the Islamic opposition as two bad options. Therefore, the opposition there has separated itself from other forces and been against any armed formation.

Useful Syria:

Bashar al-Assad acknowledged in his candidate speech in 2015 that the Syrian army could not defend the entire Syrian soil. Because of the current war situation, there is a necessity to protect more strategically vital regions (Sulz, 2018). He used the term “useful Syria” for the first time in early 2016 to refer to specific governorates, namely Latakia, Tartus, parts of Homs, Hama, and Damascus. The Syrian regime, with the help of its allies, has often-times confirmed that it will defend and control these strategic areas by force. “Useful Syria” constitutes 40% of Syria’s total size and is considered vital to the Syrian regime’s allies, Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah (Qutrib, 2016). Protecting the territories of the minority Alawite sect, to which the al-Assad family belongs, is a part of a greater plan to divide the country into areas with a monolithic character based on sectarian division. al-Assad's "useful Syria" strategy entails support from its allies, specifically from Iran, its proxy militias, and Hezbollah. Thus, al-Assad’s regime has successfully connected the regions that fall under its control. It has conducted an abhorrent policy of ethnic cleansing in these areas to guarantee inhabitants’ loyalty and control over passageways connecting Syria's coastal region with

Hezbollah's strongholds in Lebanon (Ghaddar, 2016). Several "war or surrender" tactics have been put into practice in order to achieve the desirable demographic engineering. The province of Damascus and Rif Dimashq, particularly Eastern Ghouta, have been the scene of chemical attacks, repeatedly under siege, and underwent awful airstrikes and barrel bombings.

Areas and Governorates in “Useful Syria”

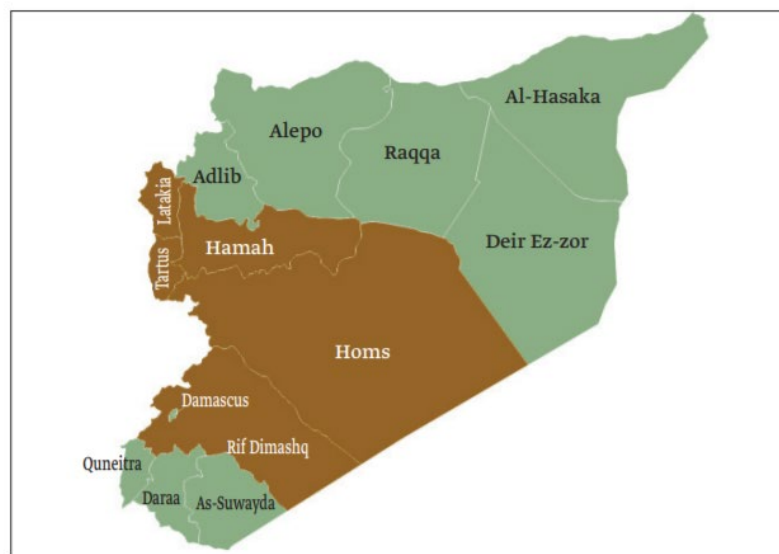


Figure 6. The map of “useful Syria”. Source: Qutrib (2016).

Forced displacement is a systematic practice carried out by paramilitary or fanatic forces against ethnic, religious, or sectarian groups, aiming to evacuate certain areas from its people and replace them with other groups. Resulting from the policy of displacement and wars, throughout the past nine years, more than 13.4 million people at the end of 2019, meaning thus that more than half of the entire population, were forced to leave their homes as a result of the ongoing Syrian war. according to UNHCR, because the Syrian war shows no sign of ending, and the conditions are getting worse, people continue to flee while Syrian refugees in the neighboring countries have almost lost the hope to return back to Syria. Filippo Grandi, UNHCR High Commissioner, revealed the terrifying impacts of the Syrian war affirming that “Syria is the biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis of our time, a continuing cause of suffering for millions which should be garnering a groundswell of support around the world.” However, in a repeated message to the western countries, the current Syrian regime has been promoting the idea that it is the “the gradian of minorities” in Syria, and if it is fallen or replaced by another regime, the result would be catastrophic for those minorities. Thus, the

Syrian regime openly suggests that without its protection, minorities' foreseen future is to be ruled by radicalism so that it frightens those groups and ruins their optimism for political freedom.

New Demographic re-engineering and rehabilitation of communities:

"Demographic engineering" is a technique to direct a conflict. It involves "manipulation of fertility, mortality, or migration to alter the demographic balance among groups" (Morland, 2014, p. 365). It furthermore includes ethnic cleansing by using power to promote an ethnic group over the other. Demographic engineering has means that could range differently according to the desired goal. However, it can be very extreme by committing genocide aiming to eliminate a certain group of people and reshape accordingly the distribution of the population. Paul Morland describes "demographic engineering" as measures practiced by nations or ethnic groups to manipulate demography for the advantage of a certain group and "promote their presence, persistence, and proliferation" (2014, p. 36). Demographic transition is a social scientific concept that deals with population issues, their qualitative and quantitative balance, growth factors, problems, and changes in human society. This concept is basically subject to political, social, and economic changes that human society witnesses. It furthermore includes certain measurements such as the size of the population and their distribution and their political, religious, and national affiliation. The main objective of demographic "war" is to strike and endanger certain communities while strengthening and enlarging others for the benefit of the dominant powers seeking hegemony and expansion in certain areas (Alsayyad, 2017, p.105).

The ongoing war in Syria has brought considerable changes in the demographical map of Syria. The claim that a demographical transition in the predominantly Sunni areas in Syria has been taking place is a questionable topic. Nonetheless, a sectarian game and tools of demographical changes have been greatly practiced in civilians' areas of Sunni majority inhabitants such as Al-Ghouta and Al-Zabadani. The Syrian regime has been practicing sectarian cleansing in this area specifically by enforcing various tactics of displacements such as forcing male youth to military service and extensive demolition of huge areas. However, bombing populated areas with sectarian undertones is the most evident method of displacement. Eastern Ghouta, a Sunni majority area, was under siege for five years. Beyond

civilian casualties, Pro-Government forces, are often called the Shabiha, and the Syrian Army caused a huge internal displacement of persons. The siege of Eastern Ghouta has been marked by war crimes, including the use of prohibited weapons, cutting off basic life necessities, acute malnutrition, regular refusal of medical evacuations, and airstrikes and military attacks against civilians (UNHRC, 2018, p.15).

After numerous international mediation attempts, the evacuation of over 390,000 civilians carried out under an agreement in 2017. Furthermore, according to reports by the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), approximately 70,000 Syrian forced immigrants have been displaced from Eastern Ghouta and Qalamoun in Damascus. The depopulation of these areas and the redistribution of its inhabitants display the considerable role of 'demographic engineering' played by the Syrian regime and its Shia militias. The Syrian regime is aiming, hence, to reduce the number of Syrian Sunnis, who may pose a potential threat to al-Assad's rule, and replace them with other religious groups, whether these groups are locals or foreigners coming from Lebanon or Iran. Before the start of the war, the vast majority of Syrian Muslims belonged to the Sunni sect, posing more than 70% of the entire population. al-Assad's rise to power has benefited the Alawites in general while this regime has repeatedly side-lined Sunni Muslims as well as non-Alawite groups. The Syrian regime has furthermore brutally suppressed all radical Muslim coalitions during the ruling of the al-Assad family. No surprise though that this policy has left a great crack in the Syrian social fabric and a hotspot for uprising even among secular-minded Sunnis and other religious sects.

Protecting the Alawite sect from the most powerful majority and creating an intrinsic link between the Syrian regime and the Alawites has made Syria far from being monoclinic and closer to be divided.

Pre-war Syria, Damascus:

Damascus, the oldest inhabitant city in the world, has been a refugee for many displaced migrants for centuries. Pre-war Damascus is Sunni-majority with significant diverse minorities has been witnessing a sharp demographical change in the composition of its inhabitants. The perception of the sectarian divide between Shia and Sunni was alien to the Syrian culture. When I asked P.S., an informant who recently was for a short visit to Damascus, about the sectarian division among the Syrian population before the war in

Damascus, he insisted that Syrians looked the same: religious and cultural backgrounds were not something people ask about. People were not aware of the sectarian divide and ethnic differences within the Syrian society. After the Syrian war, the sectarian mindset has been exposed, and people began to form groups according to their religious, political, or sectarian connection.

Maya Abyad, a Syrian journalist and researcher, hypothesized a social theory called it then the “demographic barcode”. In this theory, Maya decodes the demographic classifications of Syria and defines different types of categories: “financial (poverty and wealth); nationalistic (Kurds, Arabs both indigenous and assimilated, Armenian, Circassian, Syriac or Turkmen); ethnic (light or dark, and their diverging shades); tribal (and its urban equivalent of the extended family); sectarian; cultural (related to the degree of education and its legacy throughout the family’s history); colonial (associated with the foreign bloc that the family leans towards in terms of a second language, culture, travel, and nationality; [...]) occupational (public employees, merchants, white collars, farmers and artisans); regional (whether rural or urban), political (in terms of the presence or absence of a political heritage in the family, and its type); class (a regional, tribal, cultural and economic compound)” (Abyad, 2018). These demographic codes have been explicitly revealed and become the parameter of the al-Assad militias' treatment of citizens. They manifest themselves, for instance, at security checkpoints when citizens passing are asked to present their identity cards.

Openly, Shi’ism influences can be noticed: the Syrian young started to adapt and reflect these influences in the way they dress and behave. For instance, growing beard and playing Shia Muslim songs have become accepted social norms even among young Christian men. J.D., a young Christian man from Damascus, has revealed that you sometimes see the Christian youth imitating the Shia dress code in order to gain influence or at least unfair advantages. These alien influences have gradually become embedded in Syrian society.

I demonstrated how Iran, in the attempt to dominate the region, has established recruitment centers and revived Shia rituals and traditions for military or ideological goals. On the other hand, the Syrian regime has only bombed areas with a Sunni majority population and intensified Iranian influence by increasing Iran's political, cultural, and military presence in Syria at the costs of the Syrian people. The Syrian regime is the greatest reason behind the external as well as internal immigration in Syria. Iran has worked to

impose its control through the demographical change in Syria by transforming Shia families from Iran and Iraq to Syria.

Having presented a historical and regional background of Syria, several reasons for migration, and different means of forced displacement, a conclusion can be drawn that internal as well as external displacements have taken place on a large scale, and a process of demographic transition has shaped the new distribution of the Syrian population. The main reason for migration without discussion is the current Syrian war. However, religious and strategic reasons are intensely overlapping. I demonstrated how the demographic composition in Damascus particularly has been planned, changed, and implemented by the Syrian regime and its ally, Iran. Demographic engineering is hence a means used to implement a pre-planned conspiracy to change the demographics of the Syrian people and a process of liquidation to ensure the survival of loyalists of the al-Assad regime. The push factors for Syrian migrations are general and straightforward with the current Syrian war. All in all, political unrest, oppression, and poverty are push factors. However, I tried to bring to the surface the implicit determinants and political ideologies that have played a significant role in splitting the Syrian communities apart and framing the Syrian revolution as a civil war.

Chapter II

Routes into the European Union

Dynamics of Syrian Refugee Migrations

Outside the frame of the current global migratory system, migration took place before the existence of today's world borders. It has sometimes intensified according to climate change, the political, or economic stability of countries. Assumingly, humans are in their nature migratory. Our ancestors have migrated from place to another as geographical barriers did not exist. The human quest for a safe and better life is a legitimate right for every person. Migration is a shared story between humans and was a normal process of humans' life cycle. In our w In fact, not everyone migrates by choice, but people are sometimes forced to flee

and leave their father countries. In our digital world, prejudice is promoted to affect our physical space and exclude those who are not part of the larger social network. However, stories of individuals have considerable impacts in our digital space, where similar stories and deeper connections exist so that linking all human generations together. The current immigration system is a new creation of power. From a human right perspective, every human has the right to move freely. However, people's movements are restricted because of political geography. Since the eruption of the Arab spring in Syria in 2011, thousands of Syrian civilians were forced to leave their country and use various ways to flee the war. In this chapter, I will explore what makes immigrants 'unauthorized'? I aim to explore Syrians' mobility after leaving their father country. In doing so, I will analyze the stages of migration, immigrant social networks, and dynamics of the forced Syrian immigrants' asylum journey. In light of the sharp increase of forced migration, what makes migrants forced with all complexities surrounding this issue? The idea of fleeing to survive should be the determinant of the type of immigration aside from and the situation in Syria. During the first phase of the Syrian conflict, the Turkish policy aimed to contain the Syrian crisis and adopt a leadership strategy by leading the Syrian opposition towards democracy and providing political and military support. However, its attempt did not lead to tangible results as the conflict was escalated and a proxy war has been started in the region.

In this chapter, I argue that because of the EU's reluctance toward the Syrian refugees' crisis in Turkey, Syrian refugees continue to bear the burden and put their lives at risk at the EU external borders. As I follow the trajectories of my informants, I focus on the routes they took to Europe, Specifically, the land border between Greece and Turkey which is discussed as a case study. The spread of divisive ideologies and the rise of right-wing nationalist parties in Hungary, Denmark, and other European countries, framed an anti-immigration policy to restrict the massive numbers of refugees arriving in the EU. Thus, the EU proposed a deal to solve the refugee crisis, which was characterized by arriving the highest number of refugees to Europe in 2015. In this chapter, the question: What measures do EU member states take to guard their external borders and deter undocumented entry into its territories? It is in the center to answer, besides giving a particular space to discuss the case of Syrian asylum seekers, and Turkey's changing policies towards Syrian refugees, who are facing discrimination, inhumane conditions, insecurity, and the lack of human rights and resources.



Figure 7. Source: European Commission, Reuter, BBC, (2015).

The map (fig.7) shows a large-scale of Syrian refugees' displacement. Most notable point is that the largest number of Syrian refugees is not in EU member states but the neighboring countries, Lebanon, and Turkey. "The concentration of large numbers of refugees in one place is a result of the increasing attempts of the EU and nation-states to regulate and reduce the number of refugees arriving" (Kreichauf, 2018, p.1). The Syrian crisis is considered the worst crisis of all time with 6 million internally displaced immigrants. The greatest number of displaced Syrian refugees is in Turkey, where more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees are registered (UNHCR, 2021). For the population density, the highest level of Syrians' forced displacement is in Lebanon, where is a Syrian refugee among every 5 Lebanese citizens.

As the Syrian war intensified, more refugees fled Syria to neighbouring countries intensively in Turkey, where refugees are geographically dispersed. Turkey shares the longest land border (899 km) with Syria (CIA, 2021). Geographically speaking, it is thus easy for the displaced Syrian immigrants to reach Turkey. In addition to the social and family ties, many Syrians have now family members and relatives in Turkey due to a large number of Syrian refugees in Turkey (UNHCR, 2021). Turkey is a Sunni majority country (CIA, 2021), and Turkish President Erdogan advocated a "compassionate Islamist" narrative to support their fellow Syrian Muslims. He moreover called for Sunni Muslim solidarity against

“Alawite Shiite” oppression performed by the Assad regime (Tol, 2019). Most importantly is Turkey’s open border policy: as the conflict in Syria began, President Erdogan opened Turkey’s borders to a large number of Syrian refugees (Tol, 2019).

However, Syrian asylum seekers have been exposed to the turbulent policy of Turkey. Because of the growing number of Syrian refugees, the government of Turkey has enacted laws and put new asylum policies in an attempt to cope with the current circumstance and invent different methods of dealing with the new segment of people. In Turkey, Syrian forced immigrants do not obtain the legal rights of "refugees" as defined in the 1951 Geneva Convention, which stresses a number of fundamental principles for refugees to acquire. Notably, Article 22 of the convention states that "the contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education". In fact, Syrian refugees in Turkey are not treated fairly as they are not allowed to work and consequently cannot make a living. Unfortunately, anti-immigrant sentiment, rising nationalism, and racism have sharpened in Turkey in the last few years (Çiğdem Nas). The social exclusion of Syrian refugees is most evident on social media. The hashtags #gohomeSyrians and #ÜlkemdeSuriyeliİstemiyorum (#I don't want Syrian in my country) have been among the most trending topics on Twitter. According to a recent poll, 72% of the Turk consider the Syrian presence in Turkey as the second major problem in Turkey (Makovsky, 2019).

Furthermore, the Turkish economy is struggling, and blaming Syrian refugees for the recession has become a trend. This method pushes most Syrian workers into the underground or 'shadow' economy and leaves them prey to exploitation (Makovsky, 2019). Syrians form cheap labor in Turkey and do not foster an imbalance in the Turkish economy, according to Çiğdem Nas, a professor specialized in Turkey and EU relations. Del Carpio and Wagner (2015) examined the impacts of Syrian refugees on Turkey's formal labor market and concluded that three or four jobs were produced in the formal labor market for every ten Syrian workers in the informal labor market (Esen, and Binatlı, 2017, p.8). Moreover, several studies have found that Syrian refugees play significant roles in the Turkish economy, not only in supplying labor but also in their entrepreneurial skills. In fact, the number of Syrian companies rose to around 4,793 firms in 2016 (Mahia, de Arce, Koç, Ali, & Gülden, 2020, p. 668).

Turkey signed the Geneva convention in 1951, which defines who is eligible for refugee status, outlines refugees’ rights and the obligations of states that grant shelter (UN General Assembly, 1950). However, it had a reservation on the obligation relating to refugees’ status:

Turkey does not provide refugees with legal status, but rather with temporary protection: Syrian refugees are granted temporary protection documents that contain foreign identity number and give its holders the right to stay in Turkey for a short term, but they cannot apply for the Turkish citizenship, according to the Article 25 of the Turkish executive regulations (UNHCR Turkey, 2015). However, this type of document is not for all Syrians. Another group of Syrians in Turkey holds a “short-term touristic residence” by which they are allowed to move between Turkish provinces, travel abroad, and re-enter Turkey without problems. Only those who hold expired tourist residency can apply for “humanitarian residency”. On the contrary, ‘Kilmik’ holders are restricted by place and cannot travel officially.

Human rights watch has documented several cases of forced deportation of Syrian refugees in Turkey, who have been forced to return to Syria. In a report published in mid-2019, Amnesty International accused the Turkish authorities of coercively deporting Syrians back to their home country. Furthermore, “it is likely that hundreds of people across Turkey were swept up, detained and transported against their will to one of the world's most dangerous countries” (Amnesty International, 2019). Even though, returning forced immigrants to a war zone is a huge violation of human rights. Resettling Syrian refugees in a so-called “safe zone” in the north of Syria, which is predominately inhabited by Kurds and controlled by Kurdish forces, is an attempt to manipulate the sociological and demographic nature of this area. Turkey’s president, Tayyip Erdogan, made repeated promises to his people that three million Syrian refugees could go back to Syria. He furthermore threatened the EU that Turkey would open its borders for undocumented immigrants to enter the EU in case the European states continue labeling Turkey’s intervention in Syria as an ‘occupation’ (Reuters, 2019).

Under the policy that Syrian refugees will return home as the Syrian war is over, Syrian refugees in Turkey acquire a temporary protection status and are only allowed to be registered in particular provinces and cities. The Turkish government has prohibited registering Syrians in Istanbul and several other provinces. After this legislation in 2015, Syrians must relocate in accordance with their province of registration or move to other regions to register (Amnesty International, 2019). Under what is so-called “voluntary returns,” the Turkish authorities claim that over 315,000 Syrians have returned of their own free will to north-western Syria (either Idlib or Aleppo provinces). Syrian deportees, on the contrary, consistently state that they are being deceived by Gendarmerie and sometimes

beaten, intimidated, and forced to leave Turkey (Amnesty International). Ammar, one of my informants, spent about two months in Istanbul, Turkey, until he eventually, after three unsuccessful attempts of undocumented entry, managed to cross the Greek Turkish land border. When I asked him about the reasons behind his unceasing attempts to leave Turkey, he claimed, “Syrians feel endangered and insecure in Turkey, there is no future, no hope to get settled! I witnessed how my Syrian friend got arrested, put in prison for six months, and forcefully returned to Syria”. He added, “the Turkish police hit brutally young undocumented immigrants”. Syrians with a temporary residence permit are easily recognized by the registration plates of their vehicles. “If a fight has happened, it is always the fault of the Syrian involved party!”. Only 31,185 Syrian nationals are with valid work permits in Turkey, Trade Minister Ruhsar Pekcan stated in March 31, 2019 (CNN Türk).

The fear of detention and deportation by the Turkish police drives a great number of Syrians to stay at home, not going to work, and hiding themselves from the public. This state of desperation and the futile attempts to settle in Turkey put thousands of Syrians’ lives in the hands of smugglers or traffickers. The Syrian community in Turkey is gripped by insecurity and fear, leading them to desperately seek another shelter that would provide stability, safety, long-term residency, and more importantly social equality. EU nations has been historically a recipient of immigrants from all over the world and a pioneer in promoting human rights. The General Assembly of the United Nations declared the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10th December 1948. By this declaration, the member states have agreed on protocols and principles to protect human rights and free will (Council of Europe, 1950). Thus, the European Union is committed to defending human rights and promoting justice.

As I follow the trajectories of my informants, I focus on the routes they took the EU, Specifically the land border between Greece–Turkey border examined as a case study. Sadly, this commitment contradicts what is occurring on the ground. Syria and other turbulent Middle Eastern countries have been regarded as a cause of frustration to many European officials as these countries are marked as the main source of unauthorized immigration. Undocumented Syrian migrants are the most common nationality detected on the Eastern Mediterranean route, particularly at the EU’s external border with Turkey, at both land and maritime borders (Frontex, 2021).

Turkey has shown a lot of responsibility and hospitality in receiving millions of Syrian refugees, but the conditions for refugees now, after years of the Syrian war the constant threat of deportation, are dehumanizing and difficult to coexist. Unsurprisingly though that asylum seekers have strong incentives for a secondary movement and leaving Turkey. Lee (1966)

developed what is called a push-pull model (Castles, De Haas & Miller, 2014), in which he distinguished four sets of factors determining migration – (push) factors in the home country, (pull) factors in the destination area, and intervening obstructions and personal determinants (Lee, 1966, p. 50). This model does not isolate certain push and pull factors, each location has specific aspects of positive, negative, and neutral factors. I demonstrated in the previous chapter several push factors that basically force people to leave their country of origin. However, pull factors attract immigrants into a destination. I will demonstrate the motivation for migration by examining the relationship between immigrants and the receiving areas. Different types of intervening obstacles, namely financial status, distance, transportation, typography, and restrictive immigration laws, play a huge role in determining the destination. These different obstacles could confine immigrants in specific geographical spaces and draw undesirable future for many.

A.H., along with a group of migrants, was arrested several times by the Greek police while trying to cross the Evros River between Turkey and Greece on an inflatable boat. The Greek police captured them for few hours and then confiscated everything they had: belonging, backpacks, mobile telephones, and even their shoes. Then they were turned back to Turkey in a group of 20 persons by a van. Perhaps, A.B. was among the fortunate ones who ‘safely’ pushed back to Turkey. Unlike, other migrants who have been trapped at the borders between Greece and Turkey, robbed, and beaten up. Frontex leads operations at the Evros border, which forms an official land barrier between Turkey and Greece and part of the external border of the European Union. There, a number of human rights violations have been reported. Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN), an independent NGO located in the Balkan regions and Greece, observes human rights violations at EU external borders and struggles to cease the violence exercised against migrants on the move (BVMN, 2020). After pushback from the Greek authorities, a group of 70 persons, including children and a pregnant woman, were stuck on the Evros border. As the water level of Evros was low enough, this group of people tried to cross by foot to the Turkish side; however, the Turkish authorities fired warning shots at them and spread panic. As a result, those asylum seekers were not allowed to cross either into Greece or Turkey. They were abandoned for 4 days without food or water (Gruber, 2021).

This incident is advocated by several NGOs and specifically by BVMN. Since Evros is a Frontex operational area, BVMN urged Frontex for an instant interference to rescue those people. On behalf of BVMN, Natalie Gruber, President of Josoor, pointed out a letter to the Executive director of Frontex, Fabrice Leggeri. In this letter, a clear description of the

incident was provided, insisting that the lives of those people were at risk. The response of Frontex only came after two letters from BVMN and after two days on 13th November 2020. Leggeri's response was: "Frontex Team Members are deployed 32 kilometres away, and hence were not patrolling in the vicinity of this area. However, given the urgency and importance of the information provided, we have immediately transmitted your message to the competent local Greek authorities".

However, BVMN assures that several different Frontex teams presented there and were provided with vehicles to easily move in the vicinity. These teams have also been witnessed guarding the border along the Evros River (BVMN, 2020). Taking into account this evidence, there is no doubt that human rights violations are taking place at EU external borders.

Whether the responsibility lies upon the Greek authorities or Frontex, they are both two sides of one policy, and such practices are against EU law and international laws.

In a detailed report entitled, "The New Normality: Continuous Push-backs of Third Country Nationals on the Evros River", three Greek INGOs confronted the continuous denial of the Greek authorities of committing any violations of human rights. Their report is well supported by 39 testimonies of individuals who entered Greece from the Evros border with Turkey and had experienced different forms of pushbacks and violence. The provided testimonies show how immigrants have been ill-treated and subject to police baton blows and inhuman treatment. Of course, pushbacks are illegal practices that violate the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the Dublin regulation, which determines asylum application on the first entry. The EU state where migrants first enter is the state responsible for determining their asylum application.

The Common European Asylum System ensures duties to implement among EU member States. First and foremost, "Asylum must not be a lottery. EU member states have a shared responsibility to welcome asylum seekers in a dignified manner, ensuring they are treated fairly and that their case is examined to uniform standards so that, no matter where an applicant applies, the outcome will be similar" (European Commission, 2014). Frontline member states are 'overwhelmed' with migrants where notably there is deficient in asylum systems. That is, the registration and figure prints of incoming migrants are lacking, more specifically in Greece. In fact, Greek officials estimated that approximately a third of migrants arriving on Lesbos, Kos, and other islands were not fingerprinted in August 2015, which led to unregister those coming migrants (European Union, 2021). The EURODAC database is hence dysfunctional in Greece. Identification of applicants (Eurodac) is a computer database that includes all the asylum seekers' fingerprints, names, and their country

of origin, who arrived in EU member states. This control allows EU member States' law enforcement authorities and Europol to examine fingerprints associated with crimes and detect whether an asylum seeker has entered one of EU member states unofficially and applied for asylum beforehand (European Union).

Moreover, the reception arrangements and facilities are below the need in Greece (Amnesty International, 2016). The majority of the migrants and asylum-seekers in Greece believed that the Dublin System only meant to send asylum-seekers back to the member state, where their fingerprints were first taken (Amnesty International, 2016). Refraining from the Dublin regulation and not returning Dublin transfers have been carried out by Germany when Angela Merkel decided in August 2015 to temporarily suspend Dublin regulation and not sending back Syrian asylum seekers, who were already fingerprinted in Greece or somewhere else in the EU (DW, 2015). In response to the EU migration policy and calling for more coherent and consistent migration policy, François Crépeau, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, called for facilitating smart visas for immigrants and reforming the current EU migration system, stating, "Let's not pretend that what the EU and its member states are doing is working". He insisted that "building fences, using tear gas and other forms of violence against migrants and asylum seekers [...] will not stop migrants from coming or trying to come to Europe" (OHCHR, 2015).

European solidarity with migrants and refugees is one of the most politically sensitive issues. In the middle of the debate about solidarity and sharing responsibilities between EU member states, the EU signed a milestone agreement with Turkey in 2016 to stop the flow of migrants seeking shelter in the EU for financial support in return. Following the Turkey-EU agreement in 2016, all migrants and asylum-seekers, who unofficially crossed Europe through the Western Balkan route, including Greek islands, would be returned to Turkey. The EU allocated 6 billion euros to Turkey, so in return Turkey implements stricter border controls and improves the living conditions of Syrian refugees (European Council, 2016). This agreement is based on "the untrue but wilfully ignored, premise that Turkey is a safe country for refugees and asylum-seekers (Amnesty International, 2017). This agreement hence is The Turkish government grants Syrian nationals temporary protection (TP) within the following circumstances:

"Clean acceptance to Turkey within the open border policy

Implementation of the non-refoulment principle without exceptions. Meeting basic needs of newly-arrived Syrians in Turkey" (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2019).

Even though the Turkish government's obligation towards the Syrian refugees is clearly prescribed in Turkish law, in several cases, Syrian refugees have faced forced repatriation to Syria. Although the principle of nonrefoulement is clearly enshrined in Article 33 of the 1951 Convention (UNHCR) as well as in Article 91 of the Turkish Law on Foreigners and International Protection, Syrian asylum seekers, as several cases are discussed in this chapter, are subjected to forcible return regardless of the international law and its conventions.

In the domain of border checks, asylum, and immigration, EU member states adopted Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), as an attempt to guarantee a fair sharing of responsibilities and effective solidarity. However, due to rational reasons, EU members states cannot take responsibility for the concept of 'burden-sharing': most of the burden falls on the frontline states such as Greece and Hungary. The EU has received an increasing barb about its migration policy in handling the crisis. Solidarity does not only convey receiving asylum seekers but also providing various supplies. Therefore, under the framework of joint action to solve the refugee crisis, the European Commission proposed on 23 September 2020 another plan "compulsory solidarity mechanism" for the member states. This plan offers a pragmatic approach: EU member states will provide help according to their capacity, migrants who have no right to stay in the EU will be deported, and this includes mandatory relocation of asylum applicants. Another compromise in this proposal is that solidarity can be practiced by not just receiving migrants, but also, for example, providing medical equipment or financial support (DW, 2020). This pact thus shows that the EU is getting stricter on migration.

However, Syrian refugees have to survive a deadly journey and eventually arrive at one of the EU member states to apply for asylum. Regardless of the incentives that led Syrian refugees to leave their country, they are entitled to obtain refugee if they meet certain conditions and rules. As it is clearly stipulated in the Dublin Regulation, one of the most important conditions that grant access to the asylum procedures is that asylum seekers do not have any fingerprints in any EU member states other than the one in which they are applying for asylum. The Dublin Regulation is constructed to prevent asylum seekers from applying for asylum in multiple EU member states. This regulation is moreover to ensure solidarity and protect refugees.

“BVMN has observed the disproportionate and excessive use of force. This alarming number shows that the use of force in an abusive, and therefore illicit way has become a normality [...]”. All this criticism harms the reputation and credibility of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX). Safeguarding and preventing inhumane practices at the EU’s frontline borders are joint responsibilities of EU states. Nadia Hardman, a researcher in the Refugee and Migrants Rights Division of Human Rights Watch that observes and advocates human rights abuses, wrote “the European Union is hiding behind a shield of Greek security force abuse instead of helping Greece protect asylum-seekers and relocate them safely throughout the EU [...] the EU should protect people in need rather than support forces who beat, rob, strip and dump asylum-seekers and migrants back across the river” (Human Rights Watch, 2020). A coalition of human rights groups, Oxfam and We Move Europe, filed a legal complaint to the European Commission to investigate their well-documented allegations against Greek ‘systematic’ violations of human rights, assisting on the necessity to reform the current Greek asylum law due to its failure to comply with EU Law. Marissa Ryan, head of Oxfam’s EU office, said: “The European Commission is the guardian of EU law, and it should uphold and protect the fundamental rights of all people across Europe” (Oxfam, 2020). In the attempt to adequately address what is called the refugee crisis, the EU subsidizes Greek authorities: the EU has allocated €613.5 million to Greece under the national programs for 2014-2020. Under EU financial support, Greece is responsible to manage EU external borders and ensure that its migration policy is aligned with Union standards (European Commission, 2019). Therefore, urging the European Commission to take considerable actions and transparent investigation to hold accountable control over the Greek borders and stop illegal pushbacks are vital.

Furthermore, EU external border management has been addressed with different tools. One of these tools used to deter a large number of potential asylum seekers is visa restriction. Visas are used as biopolitical tools and a bordering strategy to selectively regulate the passage of people (Minca, Rijke, Pallister-Wilkins, Tazzioli, Vigneswaran, van Houtum & Uden, 2021). Henk van Houtum & Rodrigo Bueno Lacy proposed the term, “the paper border” that embodies the state’s first line technique to control its borders. EU member states manage the circulation of people at their borders within the frame of biopolitics. This system creates mobile bodies whose obedience and choices are constructed by the power of rulers (Salter, 2006, p. 173). Individuals must undergo a process of

identification: border crossers are required to identify themselves at EU external borders by showing their identity cards or passports. They are subject to biometrics information methods and state surveillance technologies. This management of international border crossers is a criterion of governmentality. In this regard, due to the ongoing Syrian war, Syrian nationals are deprived of free movement in the Schengen area because they cannot enter any members of the Schengen Area without Schengen visas, which have become impossible to acquire in Syria since all Schengen visa applications have been suspended and most European states have closed their embassies and consulates in Syria (SchenegnVisas, 2021).

In the efforts to safeguarding the EU's external borders, Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, was officially launched in 2016. The agency's key goals are to provide security and manage cross-border activities at the EU's external borders. With regard to human rights, Frontex has been repeatedly criticized by human rights activists and migrant rights advocates (Esperti, Antoine & Giannetto, 2020). Frontex is one of the tools used to limit unauthorized entry into EU member states. Frontex activities have considerably contributed to the securitization of migration (Leonard, & Kaunert, 2020). The securitization of migration is a discourse found upon cultural differences through which relations of power are exercised (Ibrahim, 2005, p.164). The exclusion of undocumented migrants is a practice that manifests the biological superiority of EU member countries. Security discourse depicts migrants as threats to the security and identity of European states (Karamanidou, 2015). Under the pretext of the public-security reservation, Frontex oftentimes rejected access to documents and built an aura of confidentiality around its practices (Rijpma, 2010). By labeling migration, a security issue by securitizing actors, an 'us and them' construction is created, and using extraordinary measures are legitimized. Securitization theory, developed by Professor Ole Waever together with other researchers from the University of Copenhagen, is basically built upon the idea of convincing a specific group, who poses a particular issue, an inevitable threat that has urgently to be addressed. It is all about finding a rhetorical justification for acting or intervention. Clara Eroukhmanoff points out that securitization is a political rather than neutral tool that is deployed by states. A matter such as securing borders is not truly menacing in itself; however, it becomes a security problem by identifying it as a security issue (Eroukhmanoff, 2018).

In the refugee context, the notion of ‘safe country’ denotes countries that are classified as non-refugee-producing countries or countries in which refugees can live without any danger (UNHCR). The Supreme Administrative Court of Greece qualified Turkey as a safe third country. In this regard, returning Syrian asylum seekers to Turkey would not violate international and European law (Tsiliou, 2018). In the Greek law, the unauthorized passage of migrants is a criminal violation and an official felony. Thus, the Hellenic Coastguards penalize undocumented entry to Greece. However, this does not justify the way they humiliate and arrest migrants and asylum seekers. In this context, all unauthorized border-crossers foster danger; therefore, it must be combated. Abuses and violent pushbacks against migrants are considerably reported at Greece’s border with Turkey. The notion of a ‘safe country’ for refugees has been modified in the case of Turkey.

What I demonstrated in this chapter are the increasing restrictive EU migration policies that are manifested in the EU-Turkey agreement, the establishment of Frontex, and other EU external measures. I shed light on the border control mechanism of pushbacks implemented by the Greek border authorities and other units of fortifications, the policy of “safe third country”, and illegal practices considerably happening at the land border between Greece and Turkey. Furthermore, I discussed notable non-arrival policies embodied in the EU-Turkey Agreement, and restricted return possibilities (suspension of the Dublin regulation). Furthermore, a conclusion can be built upon the interviews made that EU migration policy has become more restrictive. That is because of the increasing restrictions on movements of certain groups of people on basis of the origin country. All of this, the Common European Asylum System, regulations, and agreements are meant to control migration. Unauthorized access to EU countries is literary for the fittest. From a humanitarian perspective, providing protection and ‘legal’ passage to Europe is an obligation to protect migrants risking their lives asking for protection that EU member states should respond in a more efficient way to provide a safer and more “controlled” entry to EU member states. The Greek asylum system has proven its inefficiency in handling the refugee crisis. The discussion here has shown that addressing the crisis is more about the political will of the policymakers in sharing responsibilities among EU member states and creating a more common system.

Chapter III

The Dynamics of Migration from Greece,

Land Routes of Immigrants into EU Countries

Tawfiq Zureik, a young Syrian man, had been trying to reach Greece by land from Turkey. Tawfiq left Turkey with a group of immigrants of different nationalities on December 7, 2020. Because of the extreme weather conditions, his poor health, and slow movements, he was left alone in a forest to face his fate. According to Tawfiq's relatives, who did not hear from him for 14 days after he had entered the Greek territories. Eventually, unconfirmed news arrived that the Greek police had arrested him in an area near Thessaloniki, northern Greece. In an attempt to find him, his family and the group of immigrants he traveled with started calling organizations for help, relaying the location where they abandoned him. The consequent search resulted in Tawfiq being found dead in a forest in Thessaloniki (Dawa, 2021). Sadly, Tawfiq's quest for a "normal life" has ended in his death, and his story is similar to many unheard stories of immigrants.

In the previous chapter, I elaborated on the question: why Syrian refugees choose western European countries as a destination? However, a great part of the answer is still missing seeing incentives for choosing an asylum country are in part personal, as well as related to what types of assistance Syrian forced immigrants would receive from migrant networks. To what extent do social networks and close-kinship impact immigrants' decisions to choose the targeted asylum country?

This chapter's case study, the group of six Syrian refugees or 'Group 45', travelled on and eventually left Kastoria in Greece to cross through Albania during the night. The next phase of their journey, which took them into Serbia, proved expensive since they had to stay two weeks longer than planned in a hotel there (bribery made that possible). It was necessary to wait this long because they needed the weather to become foggy. The border between Hungary and Serbia is equipped with thermal surveillance and security cameras that detect movement both during the day and throughout the night. As a result, crossing during foggy weather gives a greater chance to pass over without being caught. Asking the members of Group 45 about their experience crossing the Serbian and Hungarian borders, they stated that they had to use a ladder to get over the fence. They were very careful not to get arrested by the Hungarian police for if they had been they would have been immediately deported to Serbia.

Thanks to the support of the admins of the Facebook group 'Travellers without Borders', group 45 managed to safely reach Hungary. From there, the group members were no longer reliant on the Facebook group's guidance. According to the circulating news about the harsh

treatment that undocumented immigrants would get from Hungarian authorities, the group intended to cross Hungarian territories as soon as they could, and they, in fact, managed it in one day. After that, the group crossed Austria in a similar time span. Arriving in Germany, the group members split up, two of them decided to apply for asylum there while the other three continued to the Netherlands, where their journey for asylum successfully ended.

Syrian refugee stories in artworks:



Figure 8. “Refugee Compass”, (R. Alshikkador, 2020).

“We needed to breathe so we went out looking. It was dark and scary. We left to find somewhere safe. We followed the tracks of others. It is dark and scary, but we keep going...” (R. Alshikkador, 2020).

Rabiea Alshikkador, a young talented Syrian refugee in the Netherlands, narrates short stories in his paintings and sketches that form parts of a larger novel about the lost nation of Syria. He stated that in his artworks, he tried to reflect on his inner psychological status and traumas during his journey to asylum (NAO, 2020). It is intriguing to note that the title of (figure 8) “Refugee Compass” echoes the suffering of -Syrian refugees, who are lost and seeking shelter. The compass is the only device that helps them find a passage to safety while

the state of fear and panic they are experiencing is reflected on their faces and vulnerable bodies. The compass dangling from the refugee's hand can be represented by Facebook groups like 'Travellers without Borders' and, in a broader sense, other social media platforms or devices like smartphones and GPS Navigations features which refugees rely on in their arduous journeys. This painting touches many refugees who have walked in the footsteps of those before them.

Figure 9. "De Vluchteling," (R. Alshikkador, 2020).



"I am watching others living a life, wondering where mine has left." (R. Alshikkador, 2020)

Referring back to Tawfiq's story, the Syrian refugee who lost his life while he sought to obtain a better and safer future, "Vluchteling" (figure 9) perfectly represents the injustice of a world that asserts survival of the fittest. This assertion obtains a rather cynical edge in Europe's case, the refugees' destination, where the Copenhagen criteria, known as "the Rule of Law", is a pillar on which the European Union is built (Nicolaïdis & Kleinfeld, 2012). In a broad sense, 'the Rule of Law' means that the government is subject to the law. The European Commission declared that "while member states have different national identities, legal systems and traditions, the core meaning of the rule of law is the same across the EU." However, Nicolaïdis and Kleinfeld (2012) argue that the EU until this day has failed to provide an explicit definition of the "Rule of Law" and so what may be considered human

rights violations where it concerns refugee treatment within its borders cannot be verified nor prevented.

The lack of an enforceable definition of this ‘Rule of Law’ is not made up for by the fact that the EU is a democracy in its political structure which should, supposedly, prevent its members from mistreating their citizens or the refugees within their borders. In addition, there are also non-democratic countries who claim to obey the same or a similar ‘Rule of Law’. Literature often mentions Singapore as an example of a non-democratic country which claims to uphold ‘the Rule of law’ while, in fact, its authoritarian regime does not comply with this rule which supposedly protects human rights. Clearly, then, there is a gap between theory and practice, between defining and implementing ‘the Rule of law.’

As a result of this gap, migrants are not protected by the rule of law. This needs to be addressed through actions rather than words. This is what happened in the case of Hungary when that country was criticized for violating the Rule of law. The Court of Justice of the European Union ruled against Hungary for breaking the EU migration law by blocking asylum seekers from applying for international protection and forcibly deporting them to Serbia, a fate which Group 45 of our case study feared. Hungary’s argument was that because of the refugee crisis, it had to override the immigration law. The EU’s highest court rejected this argument and judged that Hungary abandoned its obligation to ensure access to the procedure for granting refugee status (Emmott & Dunai, 2020).

Moreover, to restrict the movements of refugees, Hungary has built a barbed-wire fence along its border with Serbia and Croatia. This fence is supplied with heat sensors, and cameras and capable of giving electric shocks to unauthorized immigrants (Dunai, 2017). Hungary’s border enforcement measures are in the interest of Hungary, as Hungarian Premier Victor Orbán claimed. Hungary also passed a new legislation in 2018 named ‘Stop Soros law’, which criminalizes anyone who facilitates undocumented immigration. With this anti-refugee law, anyone could be detained for being involved directly or indirectly with non-governmental organizations helping asylum seekers (BBC, 2018).

Rhetoric in Hungary against migration, particularly against Muslim immigrants, is shocking. Orbán’s otherness narrative creates a boundary between “us” Christians, Christianity as a dominant religion in Hungary, and “they” Muslims (Mendelski, 2019). He thus separates cultures and defines the Hungarian identity as being Christian, far from other cultures and languages foreign to the Hungarian people. In a chapter called "The Rhetoric of Hungarian Premier Victor Orbán: Inside X Outside in the Context of Immigration Crisis", Bruno Mendels investigated the impact of Orbán’s rhetoric in the year 2015 on the refugee

"crisis" in Hungary. Mendels concluded that the common point in all Orbán discourses lies in the efforts to present the Hungarian government as protectors of the inside (the Hungarian identity) by opposing the threat of two outsiders: immigrants and the EU left-liberal elite. In his speech of October 22, 2015, Orbán stated, "[w]e cannot hide the fact that the European left has a clear agenda. They are supportive of migration. They actually import future leftist voters to Europe hiding behind humanism". In another speech on September 05, 2015, Orbán uses the recurring strategy of separating identities and focusing on differences. He said, "Hungary – and now I do not want to speak for other countries, but I would like to think that most of Europe think as we do – must protect its ethnic and cultural composition. [...] Allow me to mention a conversation I had with a talented, experienced, but not very hopeful European politician, who was no longer in frontline politics, and who asked me to explain what I meant when I said that we do not want a significant Muslim community in Hungary. [...] Why can we not talk about the right of every state and every nation to decide on whom they want to live on their territory?"

The discourse of the Hungarian Prime Minister, the inside (Orbán's government in the name of the Hungarian people) versus the outside (those who are pro-immigration and immigrants themselves), is alarming not only to Muslim migrants but also to any segment of people who are different from "the Hungarian state identity" and as such are seen as invaders of Christian identity and values. In Populist Orbán's view, since the EU left-liberal elite supports multiculturalism and the entry of immigration, they are a second outsider who jeopardizes the Hungarian identity by promoting their pro-immigrant agenda in the EU. Orbán's binary rhetoric is an approach to legitimize xenophobic policies towards "others" (Mendelski, 2019, p.1830). By this isolationist policy of separation and excluding immigrants, Hungary moves away from the EU principles and regulations.

After all, the narrative that Hungarian culture is incompatible with other cultures, delivering persuasive speeches over the possibility of overrunning Hungary by immigrants, and speaking about preserving the cultural heritage tempt many Hungarian to believe in Orbán's rhetoric. Concerning the estimation of the impacts of migration on the EU, Hungarians are the most pessimistic among other EU member states and not satisfied with the poor management of immigration (Krekó et al., 2019).

The EU's conventions and initiatives are part of a collective method of dealing with refugee matters and migration. Under the framework of joint action to solve the refugee crisis, the European Commission proposed on 23 September 2020 another plan for the member states called the "compulsory solidarity mechanism". This plan offers a pragmatic

approach: EU member states will provide help according to their capacity and migrants who have no right to stay in the EU will be deported which includes mandatory relocation of asylum applicants. A compromise in this proposal is that solidarity can be practiced by not just receiving migrants, but also, for example, by providing medical equipment or financial support (DW, 2020). Prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, opposed the mandatory solidarity. The division over migration has expanded and become more controversial: Poland, Austria, Slovenia, and others, like Hungary, objected to the proposal, as well (Baczynska, 2020), and subsequently announced their refusal to share responsibilities and host refugees in exchange for financial support from the EU.

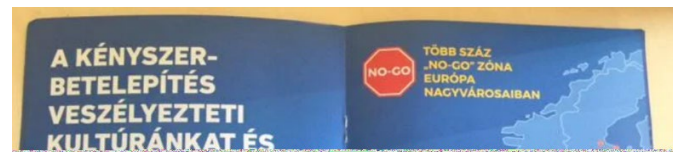
The racial stereotypes of Syrian refugees and implementing laws of criminalizing migration are a trigger for conceiving immigrants as a security threat. To manage the movements of people, policymakers manipulate borders not only dynamically but also symbolically. Thus, they propagate xenophobia and biased cultural stereotypes (Gallardo, 2008; Kolossov & Scott, 2013). Being part of the Syrian community, I notice the extent to which Syrian refugees are racialized and stereotyped. There is a common misconception that all Syrian refugees are Muslim. Syrians are fantastically diverse: there are different regional dialects, religions, cultures, traditions of dress, and history. Thinking of Syrians as one group of extremists who have come to invade Europe with their religion and culture is an erroneous cliché. However, the stories and pictures that are being presented in literature and the media often rely on a “us” versus “them” narrative.

In an essay called “Clashes between Civilizations”, Samuel Huntington hypothesized that “the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics” (Huntington, 1993, p.22). Huntington’s core idea is that there is an unceasing clash between civilizations which has mapped the current world, and this clash is basically historical and cultural. Inherently, the western intellectuals used to depict the Orient, including the Arab world, as a backward place that is very peculiar to their own culture. Edward Said, in his book “Orientalism” (1978), explained how this dubious conception came into existence. He also asserts that the Orient is a merely European invention and a former European colony. Said states, “the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away. I myself believe that

Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient” (1978, p.14). Failing to understand the nature of the Orient and its extraordinary diversity, has led to drawing an inaccurate picture of it as an exotic place full of threatening people. Not surprisingly, therefore, the representation of the Syrian refugees in the media and political discourse is based upon an inherited tradition of conceiving them as one group of people with indistinguishable beliefs.

Remarkably, Syrian refugees are associated with terms such as “flow”, influx”, or “wave”.

Figure 10. “A page from an anti-migrant booklet passed out by the Hungarian



government”, *Human rights watch*, 2016.

Attention-grabbing headlines, for instance, often go like this: “Hungary Deploys Police to Stem the Influx of Refugees and Other Migrants” (DW, 2015) and are quite prevalent on news sites and social media. With all the populist policies against hosting refugees in Hungary, anti-refugee campaigns have created thousands of billboards across Hungary, carrying hostile messages such as “[d]id you know? Brussels wants to forcibly resettle numbers of illegal migrants the size of a city into Hungary,” and “Did you know? From the beginning of the migration crisis, abuses against women in Europe have skyrocketed” (Gall, October 3, 2016).

In response to the EU migrant quota for Hungary, which was 1294 refugees (European Commission, 2015), the Hungarian government distributed an 18-page booklet (figure 10) to 4.1 million out of a total population of 10 million. Hungarian families, encouraging them to vote no in an imminent national referendum (Gall, September 13, 2016). The first page of the booklet has a title on the left side that states, “[t]he forcible relocation endangers our culture and traditions”. The booklet contains racist and xenophobic claims built upon fallacious claims, linking migration to terrorism. It furthermore refers to “no-go” areas which are the red spots on the map (figure 10). In these areas, European authorities supposedly have lost

their control, for instance, in cities such as Paris and London due to the high number of migrant populations. All in all, this is to serve a Populist policy of migrants exclusion.

Images of Syrian asylum seekers shown in the media are systematically distorted by extensively showing one segment of the Syrian people who would be conceived as Muslims thanks to the mostly veiled women who appeared in the media coverage. This serves as an instant reminder of the Islamic identity of those newcomers. The media may significantly contribute to generating support or accusation of the immigration and asylum policy (van Gorp, 2005, p.504). Hence, it can be argued that media representation of refugees influences public opinion and, consequently, political resolutions. Therefore, “[t]he knowledge gap between host populations and displaced persons is key to understanding the significance of media coverage in formulating public attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees.” (Hanyes, Devereux, & Breen, 2004). Even the word Syrian has become linguistically linked to the status of refugee.

EU’s b/ordering policy:

To secure EU external borders, the EU border force, Frontex, has duties of maintaining secured and well-functioning EU borders. Oftentimes, the Frontex map, which displays the migratory situation in Europe, depicts the movements of undocumented immigrants as menacing arrows arriving in the EU (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2019), which could raise public dispute and security concerns. Consequently, the Frontex map “creates regimes of political control over foreign bodies – following the anxious rational that their infiltration across the state’s boundaries may destabilize its imagined community” (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2019, p. 200). Undocumented immigrants are perceived as a threat to the European communities’ stability, security, and culture. Consequently, unauthorized entry to the EU is rejected by European authorities. Ironically, undocumented immigrants are only eligible for refugee status when they arrive ‘illegally.’

EU member states are seen by these refugees as a place of safety, where they can have a “normal life” without worrying about bombs, lack of rights, or institutionalized discrimination based on sectarian division. One member of Group 45, Ammar, responded to the question of what has brought him to Germany, saying “I wanted a country where law is above all and everyone is equal.” This links back to the idea that the west is versus the east (the orient versus the occident). Syrian refugees’ vision of Europe is also being skewed simply as Europe’s vision of the Middle East is not accurate. This quote sheds light on the misconception of Europe as an opposite version of the Middle East. Syrian refugees’

incentives and the pull factors for choosing Western European countries as a destination will be discussed in the coming chapter.

However, undocumented immigrants first arrive in peripheral countries such as Greece and Hungary in far greater numbers than in other EU countries, which perhaps are more equipped to take responsibilities for asylum seekers. For those vulnerable migrants, there is no legal way to enter the EU. EU Frontline member states try to abide by the EU law, however, these countries receive the largest number of undocumented immigrants disproportionately to other western states. These peripheral countries bear most of the responsibility for securing the EU external borders and making sure that the “Rule of law” is enacted. But, as we have seen in this chapter in the case of Hungary, this isn’t always the case. The fact that Hungary has suspended the Dublin convention under the pretext of what is called the “refugee crisis” mainly indicates poor management and a defect in the EU immigration system.

Thus, the following conclusion for this chapter can be drawn that building fences and increasing the control on the EU external borders can never solve the root causes of migration. Those who need protection must seek ‘illegal’ access to enter. The EU must be responsible for this manner of border crossing because there are no alternatives. Reality has shown that even with very high well-controlled fences, undocumented migrants manage to cross borders, nonetheless. The documented human rights abuses and pushbacks that have been taking place on European Union soil are evidence of the need to change immigration policy in line with European values. Investing more money on border security and establishing agreements with countries outside the European Union such as Turkey, which is, as demonstrated in chapter two, an unsafe country for asylum seekers, is in effect no more than a way to relieve responsibility from EU member states’ shoulders.

Chapter IV

“I don’t fear death, I fear returning to Syria”:

On “migrants/adventurers without borders”

After confronting regional authorities and crossing ‘green borders’ as well as ‘actual fences’, ‘group 45’ eventually made it to the EU. In early November 2020, two members of group ‘45’ reached Germany while the remaining three arrived in the Netherlands after walking through non-EU territories (e.g., Albania, Kosovo, Serbia), followed by Hungary and Austria. According to the Dublin Agreement, the first EU country that, asylum-seekers arrive in is, responsible for considering their asylum procedure. However, since the members of group ‘45’ did not leave a trace at any EU authorities except in the countries of Germany and the Netherlands where, they applied for asylum, they were eligible for asylum there .

In the framework of the push and pull model (Lee, 1966), social networks and close-kinship influence immigrants’ decisions to choose the targeted asylum country as part of a phenomenon called “comfort-seeking.” The characteristics of potential host countries and migrants’ social networks significantly influence migrants’ choice of destination. The characteristics of the western European countries are considered a positive pull factor for Syrian asylum seekers, as claimed by my informants that in EU countries, they can reunite with their families and enjoy freedom. This chapter is an investigation of Syrian refugees are independent decision makers or in other words rational actors.

Edward Said discussed the term “orientalism” and elaborated on the reasons why this term is vague, in addition to the roles of literature, media, and heritage. The opacity of the term “orientalism” is related to the issue of Syrian refugees, in the sense that Syrian refugees are misrepresented by policy-makers. From a populist misconception, Syrian refugees are seen as Muslims intruders, who are willing to invade the European culture. This is politically manifested into not taking part in the EU proposal of the resettlement of refugees, but promoting other migrant exclusion policies.

Migrant/social network theory (Massey, 1988) especially corroborates the role of social relations in contributing to comfort; according to this theory, relationships reduce ambivalence and expedite rational decisions. After migrating, knowledge about the host country is shared among family members, friends, and acquaintances. This mechanism of social relationships gives rise to chain migration.

Family reunification, integration, and the labor market in host countries are often deciding factors for Syrian nationals in determining their asylum destination. Under EU migration law, refugees are eligible for family reunification if they prove their family ties to people already residing in the EU and submit the required documents. The purpose of this directive is to preserve the family unit, facilitate the integration of non-EU nationals, and eventually contribute to the production of socio-cultural cohesion in EU countries (European

Commission, 2016). Family reunification is thus acknowledged as vital for a stable and healthy life for refugees. The application process and decision period vary among EU member states. However, Germany is the main destination country for asylum-seekers, accounting for 24.6 % of all first-time applicants in EU member states (European Union, 2021). Statistics indicate that most Syrian refugees prefer to stay in Germany rather than other EU countries for reasons ranging from family reunification to lower, waiting times and, the potential for joining the German workforce. The interviews revealed that the motivation for choosing Germany as a country of asylum are joining a family member already there, Germany's reputation among Syrian refugees as an economically prosperous country with many job opportunities, and the German government's support and welcoming attitudes toward refugees. Indeed, hashtags and slogans such as "Flüchtlinge willkommen!" "(Welcome, refugees!)" and, "Schaffen wir das!" ("We can do it!") have seen widespread adoption in Germany.

While decisions to migrate to one of EU member states are frequently influenced by economic factors, all my interviewees noted that the first and foremost pull factor for them is family reunification. Their desire to reunite with family is an even more influential driver for relocating. Thus, what immigrants culturally value represents an important factor in their decision-making. The first and foremost pull factor is family reunification.

EU countries' differing local policies for dealing with refugees and their rights as well as their geographically different location leads to unequal distribution of refugees, placing a greater burden on some countries than others. Implementing the new EU pact on migration and the proposed sharing of responsibilities among EU member states has proven to be infeasible, with countries such as Hungary refusing to take part in it.

Bulgarian political scientist Ivan Krastev sees this as an indication of a split in the EU. He states, "[n]ow, the refugee crisis is dividing Europe between East and West. We are not just experiencing a lack of solidarity, as we often hear it described in the EU, we are experiencing the clash of conflicting solidarities: between national, ethnic and religious solidarity and our duty as human beings" (Andreev, 2016). The refugee crisis revealed EU member states' attitudes toward refugees and showed that their positions vary considerably. For instance, what Hungary considers a threat to its national security, is seen as a moral obligation to embrace by Germany and other EU countries supporting migrants and multiculturalism when Angela Merkel opened the borders for more Syrian refugees in 2015. These attitudes greatly affect the destination choice of asylum-seekers.

More than one million Syrian asylum-seekers and refugees recently reside in Europe. Germany hosts 59% of the total number, followed by Sweden with 11% while the Netherlands hosts about 2% (UNHCR, 2020). Syrian refugees receive preferential treatment in the asylum process in the Netherlands, Germany, and other countries, where it is assumed that any Syrian fleeing Syria is in imminent danger because of the situation there. The tolerant cultural environment and political stability of these countries are significant factors attracting migrants.

Syrian refugees overwhelmingly choose Germany and the Netherlands over the other EU member states partly of the lower likelihood of deportation and a greater chance for securing long-term shelter. On the other hand, Denmark has adopted a deterrent policy regarding refugees and migration, passing legislation to deport asylum seekers outside of Europe to a processing center in Rwanda (TRT World, 2021). Moreover, it has adopted this policy despite it being incompatible with existing EU rules on migration and asylum-seekers. Denmark has also resorted to revoking residency permits in order to expel asylum-seekers. Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, claimed that refugees and asylum-seekers undermine Denmark's social cohesion, stating, "we need to be careful that not too many people come to our country, otherwise our social cohesion cannot exist" (MacGregor, 2021).

Denmark is a refuge for 35,000 Syrian immigrants (The Guardian, 2021). The Danish government recently rejected the renewal of temporary residency permits of around 189 Syrian refugees, alleging that parts of Syria are now safe for Syrians to return to (McKernan, 2021). Even though Denmark does not acknowledge the Al-Assad regime, it has decided to send Syrian refugees to areas that fall under it. If these Syrian refugees are forced to return to Syria, they are likely to get harassed if not immediately arrested at checkpoints. According to Human Rights Watch (2021), arbitrary detentions and mistreatment of Syrians, including returnees, are taking place in different parts of the country. Syrian returnees commonly need to check their security clearance, the so-called muwafaka amniya, before entering the country again. The Syrian authorities conduct these security checks on people entering Syria to ascertain whether they are on any wanted list (EASO, 2021) for leaving the country illegally or evading the compulsory military conscription, for instance. The United Nations also observed in several reports that the Syrian regime has repeatedly prevented some Syrian returnees from returning to their former homes in Rif Dimashq (Rural Damascus) Governorate for reasons such as their religious affiliation and opposing political orientation. Yet other reports have indicated that Hezbollah has blocked displaced inhabitants of Sunni origins from resettling in the governorate's Al-Zabadani District (EASO, 2021). As

mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, one of the major reasons for internal migration in Syria are the Al-Assad government's planned demographic changes for the purpose of making the Shiite a majority, particularly in the regions of Fine Syria and Damascus Governorate. Above all, the Syrian regime has clearly stated that they do not intend to resettle displaced Syrians in the newly planned urban areas (Batravi & Uzelac, 2018, p.6). Considering these adverse factors, it is negligent at best and intentionally malicious at worst to force Syrian refugees to return to Syria.

The news website Zaman Al-Wassal, leaked a list of 1.5 million Syrians wanted by Al-Assad regime's intelligence apparatus (Zaman Al-Wassal, 2018). It is worth noting that this number represents a considerable portion— almost 10%— the current Syrian population of 17.5 million (Worldometer, 2020). As a result, the ratio of wanted Syrians to the total number of Syrians is disproportionately high compared to similar statistics for most other countries. In addition, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has expressed concerns about Denmark's violation of the international obligation towards refugees and criticized the Danish government's reassessment of the protection of Syrian refugees; Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General of the UN, stated that the "UNHCR does not consider the recent improvements in security in parts of Syria to be sufficiently fundamental, stable or durable to justify ending international protection for any group of refugees. UNHCR continues to call for protection to be maintained for Syrian refugees and urge that they should not be returned forcibly to any part of Syria, regardless of who is in control of the area concerned" (United Nations, 2021).

Denmark was the first EU country to sign the U.N. Refugee Convention in 1951 (Reuters, 2015). Ironically, due to its plans to forcibly repatriate Syrian refugees, it is the first EU country to violate the core principle of this convention, that of the 'non-refoulment' of refugees. It is therefore not surprising that, this show of Danish unilateralism would tempt other European countries to take similar steps, as in the case Hungary, which has announced its support for Denmark's plan of deporting Syrian refugees, in addition to the Czech Republic and Poland, which seem to be improving their diplomatic ties with the Syrian regime (Marcus, 2019). The Danish proposal represents an outlier among EU countries and may risk fracturing the international law on migration and refugeehood.

Some Syrians have voluntarily returned to Syria due to the harsh reality of the overcrowded refugee camps, social segregation, and most importantly, the denial of applications for family reunification (al-Jablawi, 2018). According to Mehyar Badra, who operates a social networking group on WhatsApp called "Reverse Migration Garages," there

has been a considerable increase in reverse migration cases among Syrian refugees in Germany. Syrian refugees who have valid residence permits return to their country through Greece, and from there they “illegally” enter Turkey on foot after cutting through barbed-wire barriers (al-Jablawi, 2018). BBC News documented the story of a former Syrian refugee called Zakarya who attempted to go back to Syria after having spent two years in Germany. Zakarya claimed that it would be impossible for him to return to the EU in the future because he had spent two years in Germany trying and failing to cope with the German society. He stated, “just because we are Muslims, they say that we are terrorists and look at us as if we are monsters, not humans; they are afraid of us,” (BBC, 2018).

The prevalence of “us” versus “them” rhetoric is evident in Zakarya’s claim, and his statement thus sheds light on why some Syrian refugees would have a skewed image of Europe. On the one hand, the stories of Syrian refugees are sometimes heavily dramatized in the media for the sake of gathering support for a pro-migration policy. On the other, right-wing groups in the EU regularly vilify refugees in their attempts to promote anti-immigration sentiment and policies and prevent them from securing asylum there. Reality appears to reveal a potentially illusory cultural rift between European society and the “Islamic” peer. Perhaps, the refusal to accept “others”’ differences is a personal matter, a pretense for blaming those others for the failings of one’s own society.

There are hence several determinants of the choice of asylum country for Syrian refugees. There are several reasons for their choosing to migrate to Germany, the Netherlands, and other western EU member states as opposed to eastern ones, chief among them being that the most important determiner is reuniting with family. Ultimately, refugees are searching for a better life. The only option left, hence, for many Syrian refugees is to risk their lives to reach the European Union. Syrian embassies are closed as the country is still in a state of civil war and European countries do not recognize the Syrian regime. Several EU countries have implemented measures to curb the migration of refugees over their borders, and the movements of refugees groups mirror these migration policies.

General Conclusion

This thesis aimed to identify the push and pull factors of Syrian asylum-seekers and their uncommon strategies of crossing EU borders. Each chapter thus answered a specific research question adding to the main research question: to what extent does the EU migration policy

hinder Syrian asylum-seekers' movements to EU member states and potentially contribute to human rights violations at its external borders?

Of course, EU member states' policies stand against human rights violations and any racist practices. Yet, other EU member states, namely Hungary and Denmark, have promoted anti-refugees rhetoric. EU member states have the legitimacy to know who enters their countries and discover the motives behind migration in their countries.

For group 45, the hardest wall/border to cross was the border between Turkey and Greece. In the sense that it is not just an existent geographical boundary but also extends to include human barriers and defensive practices of individuals. Tracing the journey of group 45 revealed that those, who do not afford the money to pay smugglers, can also reach EU member states, but only after surviving a highly risky journey.

The findings display that no extensive human rights abuses are committed against group 45, except at the Greek-Turkish land borders on the Evros river when the group was mistreated and their belongings were confiscated by the Greek authorities. My informants noted that the only abuse they endured was at the Greek-Turkish land border and was based on individuals' human rights violations and not on local state policy.

Based on the quantitative research and the interviews done, it can be concluded that the reasons for traveling on foot through EU countries are: firstly, by this method of undocumented traveling, asylum-seekers are less likely to be fingerprinted; public transportation, especially buses in Hungary, for example, is unattended. Unless they are caught precisely at borders then they are returned to the neighboring country they had come from. Secondly, this method is inexpensive compared to other undocumented travel practices. Group 45's members claimed that they did not have the financial ability to cover smugglers' costs. This never indicates, however, that their path was not fraught with risks and full of obstacles.

Undocumented immigrants try to break the Greek-Turkish border on foot despite the arduous geographical space, where national borders guards are usually present. Asylum-seekers attempt to 'illegally' cross states' borders is a challenge of the border authorities. However, their attempts make their bodies invulnerable and resistible to the power of states. This accentuates Foucault's understanding of biopolitics and power relations: asylum seekers are no more subjected to border authorities unless they are arrested.

This research has furthermore contributed new knowledge on how social media, namely Facebook, can be helpful for asylum-seekers to cross states' borders, create a transnational network, and eventually arrive in EU countries without smugglers' exploitation. Based on the discussion presented in this thesis, EU restrictive migration policy is echoed in the tightening control of EU external borders, the EU's growing support of Frontex, and the EU-Turkey agreement in 2016 regarding the return of refugees to Turkey as a 'safe' third country. Most importantly—the negligence of the practices against refugees' rights—based on the per-mentioned data, is happening on European soil. It is especially worth noting that the Dublin regulation was suspended in two cases: first, when Germany decided in 2015 to carry most of the burden of what is called the refugee crisis and welcome a great number of Syrian refugees and not sending them back to where they had earlier fingerprinted in another EU member states. Second, Hungary blocked asylum seekers from applying for international protection and forcibly deported them to Serbia or other neighboring states.

Looking closely at the Danish claim that Damascus and its surrounding areas are safe now for Syrian refugees to return is a distortion of reality. Simply because this call ignores the fact that these regions are pro-Al-Assad and have now a completely different religious character. Thus, the majority of Sunni Syrian refugees, who are in EU countries, are less likely to be welcome in Syria, regardless of the possibility that they could be among the 1.5 million wanted Syrians, who are on a leaked list (Zaman Alwasl, 2018).

Summarizing and reflecting on the research

After tracing the path of a group of Syrian asylum-seekers to EU member states, it can be argued that these immigrants had the freedom to choose their asylum destination and the method of travel. At the same time, paradoxically, they had been forced to flee their country of origin as well as other neighboring countries such as Turkey because of push factors such as inequality and the rising racism against Syrians. These factors are addressed in Chapter one and two of the thesis, respectively. Chapter one investigated the Syrian regime's systematic deportation of the Sunni majority from Damascus and its countryside. Based on the data presented, demographic changes are taking place in Syria, aiming to strengthen the Shite side in 'Fine Syria', a term explained earlier. All of this severs the Syrian regime's strategy to change the religious identity and the political orientation of the dwellers of this region, thereby ensuring its control and continuity.

Chapter two discussed the case study of Syrian refugees in Turkey. In addition, it shed light on Turkey's reluctant policies towards Syrian nationals, who are recently experiencing

discrimination, insecurity, and the lack of human rights. This chapter furthermore explored the measures taken by the EU to secure EU external borders and deter undocumented entry into its territories? It also discussed allegations against Frontex. NGOs' joint investigation has revealed that illegal practices against immigrants have taken place at the Turkey-Greece land border where Frontex operates.

The following chapter, three, continued by highlighting the role of social media in facilitating asylum journeys. Therefore, it traced the path of five Syrian asylum-seekers, who traveled together from Greece to Germany and were in the same Facebook group: 'adventurers without borders,' which does not involve migrant smuggling networks. It furthermore exhibited several artworks by Syrian refugees. The significance of these artworks is that they embody similar experiences of Syrian refugees and show the role of technology in drawing relatively 'innocuous' routes to asylum destinations. The chapter moreover touched on EU policy of bordering, the blacklisting of migrants, and other practices embedded in the construction of fences and strengthening the control on EU's external borders.

Despite the existence of natural borders that mark the EU external borders and the human-made physical barriers, and the establishment of Frontex to ensure 'proper' control at these borders, building of internal borders between Hungary and other neighboring European countries is also part of the plan of protecting the EU from an undocumented entry under the pretext of protecting the national security and implementing of the international law.

Chapter three also pointed out that the Hungarian position has been frequently opposing and moving away from the EU migration policy. Prime Minister Orbán has criticized the European Union plan for redistributing asylum seekers, stating that such a proposal is "bordering on insanity" (Than, 2015). Moreover, a brief elaboration on the issue of "the Rule of law" in EU member states is illustrated. The Hungarian position on EU migration policy can be interpreted as disapproval. Several member states violate EU migration laws: violent, illegal push-backs of migrants, and arbitrary detention. In line with EU criteria and the Dublin Regulation, Hungary has thoroughly to admit all responsibilities regarding its obligations toward asylum-seekers.

Chapter four presented several pull factors for Syrian refugees to choose Germany or the Netherlands over other asylum destinations. It pointed out the role of migrant networks in determining asylum choice. It also demonstrated how Denmark passed xenophobic legislation to exclude Syrian refugees and noted how the EU's migration policy has become increasingly closed-door in recent years.

Depicting immigrants as a threat to national security is inaccurate as it legitimizes new racist anxieties. Part of understanding the Hungarian and Danish migration policies towards the exclusion of migrants is that these countries are not entirely globalist and less tolerant of migrants. Denmark nowadays is classified as a xenophobic European country along with Hungary (Laubjerg, 2021). Taking extreme measures of externalization and mass deportation of immigrants is all in all against the international collaboration on migration and the 1951 Refugee Convention.

After discussing the EU migration policies in this thesis, a clear division among EU member states on the common migration system because there are major disagreements between the migration policies of EU countries. The EU asylum system moreover appears to have many loopholes since EU member states have restricted all legal escape routes for third countries immigrants, who have to take irregular and life-threatening routes to access asylum in the EU.

Upon considering all the discussed facts in this thesis, the ongoing Syrian War is still a larger contributor to pushing Syrian outside the country. To access asylum, forced immigrants have sadly to rely on smugglers or on 'deliberate humanitarian support' from Social media groups such as the Facebook group, 'Adventurers without Borders,' since all EU governments have closed all the legal escape routes for Syrian asylum-seekers.

Last but not least, it would be an exaggeration to claim that all EU member states follow the same ideology. There are considerable divisions within the EU between the extreme right-wing on the one hand and other parties supporting migration and multiculturalism on the other. Further research is needed to examine the effectiveness of the current EU asylum system and investigate the question of whether EU member states are capable of implementing the proposed plan of redistributing migrants among EU countries 'equally' requires further research.

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