



Norges miljø- og  
biovitenskapelige  
universitet

**Master Thesis 2022 30 ECTS**

Faculty of Landscape and Society (LANDSAM)

# **The security of Muslim women in Western societies between the hammer of preserving the patriarchal values and the oaks of Islamophobia**

## **The case of Syrian Muslim women in Norway**

Marwa Alhassan

International Relations

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Marwa\_alhassan88@live.com  
Noragric Department of International Environment and Development Studies  
P.O. Box 5003 N-1432  
Ås Norway  
Tel.: +47 67 23 00 00  
Website: <https://www.nmbu.no/om/fakulteter/samvit/institutter/noragric>

**Declaration**

I, Marwa Alhassan, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

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## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not have been possible without the support, guidance and inspiration from those around me. First and foremost, I wish to thank my husband, Homam, who has supported me during this challenging journey and is always there for me, especially when I want to give up. I wish to thank my children, Tala and Dani, who would cheer me up in my downs with a hug that would take away all the trouble.

I also thank my dear friend Rasha, who encouraged me to apply for the master studies in international relations at NMBU and supported me throughout the whole study journey.

Thank you, Mahira, for reading through my paper and giving me invaluable feedback.

Thank you, my dear sisters, Safaa and Wafaa for your inspiring words and encouragement.

Finally, I wish to thank my supervisors, Ida Bary and Stig Jarle Hansen, for their support and understanding. This thesis would not have been possible without your generous guidance and feedback.

Last but not least, I want to thank God for giving me many opportunities in life and for making this dream come true.

## **Abstract**

Security of refugees is not achieved once states provide asylum to refugees, as these refugees need a secure environment to feel safe. In the case of Syrian refugees in Norway, Syrian refugees have met other types of threats that are embedded in the social structure of the communities that they are living in. Caroline Thomas (2004) notes the significance of social causes, citing the apparent lack of awareness of underlying social causes behind insecurity as a weakness of the current human security debates. Hence, it is noted that the security of refugee women has been approached by either feminist's approach, which investigates how women are oppressed under a patriarchal system that allows men to suppress women's rights, or humanitarian activists, who investigate how refugees' security is threatened by Islamophobic trends. Yet little work has focused on investigating these security threats in relation to each other.

The task of preserving the Syrian social norms that are embedded in patriarchy is dumped on Syrian women in Norway. Breaking norms and asking for equality has become a stigma of abandoning the community's traditions and norms to emulate Western women. On the other hand, Islamophobic discrimination pressure Syrian Muslim women to adjust their conduct to suit the Norwegian social norms. Thus, the thesis tries to explore the relation between these two types of threats and how it affects the security of Muslim Syrian women in Norway.

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## 1.0 Introduction and methodology:

### 1.1 Introduction

In 2015, thousands of Arab refugees fled their houses and countries to seek refuge in Europe due to the Arab Spring revolution that was met by the ruling regimes with oppression and destruction. Thus, UNHCR worked to ensure the safety of these refugees by sheltering them following the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, the security of refugees was not wholly achieved once states provided them asylum, as they needed more than a country to receive them. They need a secure environment to feel safe and live peacefully, where they would be welcomed and accepted as part of the new society. Unfortunately, this is not the case for Syrian refugees in Europe, as Islamophobic sentiments have long dwelled in the European perception of Arab countries. The rejection of having Muslims living within Western communities has erupted from the stereotypical image of Muslims as inherently and innately violent and primitive following the bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 (Jiwani, 2004). This perception has a significant impact on Muslim women as well. However, their experiences were ignored and marginalized for a long time. After September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, the focus was constantly shed on Muslim men and the experiences of racial discrimination they endured. Muslim men were the only representative of Muslims suffering from Islamophobic sentiments. According to Aziz (2012), Muslim women were objectified in the U.S.A among male decision-makers nationally and domestically. The national debate on "homegrown terrorism" has always focused on defending Muslim men and analyzing law and policy from a masculine perspective.

In contrast, the experiences of Muslim women were overlooked in these debates. Muslim women were objectified by their community as the American Muslim community was mainly represented by male Muslims, lacking a feminist approach that would highlight the Muslim women's experiences and needs, as Muslim women suffered to the same degree the repercussions of the government's counterterrorism legislation and policies. Similarly, Alimahomed-Wilson (2017) uncovered the institutionalized private violence directed at Muslim women in the U.S public sphere following the rapid securitization of the United States after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. Thus, after all, the security of Muslim women gained the attention of some scholars in the U.S, discussing the effect of the gendered experiences of Islamophobia on Muslim women's security. However, in the Norwegian context, even though Muslim women refugees were able to guarantee their physical security from the war violence by seeking shelter in Norway, they met other kinds of security threats



that were embedded in both the European social structure and in the patriarchal social structure of their own community (the Syrian community). In patriarchal societies that define themselves primarily in religious terms, women play a unique role as they are seen to be central to the construction of the community's moral image. The righteous community's women should look and behave in ways that project the collective righteousness of the community. Thus, men's first goal is to ensure carrying their culture's values by applying restrictive measures to women even though these measures may threaten women's most basic rights (Cooke, 2002). Thus, some literature investigated the problems with Norway's response to the patriarchal violence among Muslim migrants (Razack, 2004). At the same time, others examined Norway's cultural imperialism that generally racializes Muslims as violent, inferior, and Muslim women as passive victims who need white women's liberation (Bjoernaas, 2015). However, there is a lack of discussion on the security of Muslim women in the Norwegian context. Thus, departing from the discipline of IR, the thesis aims to investigate Muslim women's security for two reasons. First, to address the conventional neglect of women's security as an essential part of security studies (Tickner, 1992). Second, focusing on women will contribute to the understanding of security as opposed to the traditional conception where insecurity is solely linked to military threats launched against states. Thus, the thesis studies the security of Muslim women by investigating the intersection of power systems of both Islamophobia and patriarchal values in Norway. In addition, taking a feminist approach, the thesis aims to connect these experiences to a broader discussion on (in)security, where Muslim women's agency should be recognized and highlighted to be able to defy all systems of power that undermine their capabilities. Hence, this thesis explores

### **How is the security of Syrian Muslim women affected by the dual pressure of Islamophobia and the pressure to preserve patriarchal values in Norway?**

To answer the research questions presented above, we must answer the following two sub-research questions.

1. How does Islamophobia threaten the security of Muslim women in Norway?
2. How does preserving patriarchal values of the Syrian community threaten the security of Muslim Syrian women in Norway?

Thus, drawing from feminist contributions to security studies, the thesis aims to answer these questions by conducting individual interviews with ten Syrian Muslim women who reside in Norway; and three employees that work for organizations that support refugee women in Norway.

## 1.2 Methodology:

It is vital to discuss the methodology of the research study as the type of approaches and methods used to collect and analyze data have implications for the research and the findings. Hence, in this section, the study will outline the research design used for this thesis. Data collection methods, limitations, and strengths faced in the data collection process will be discussed. After that, the study will explain the sampling and data analysis process. This is followed by a discussion on the research validity and reflection on the researcher's position in this study. Finally, I will discuss the ethical considerations taken before, during, and after conducting interviews.

### 1.2.1 Research design:

According to Schwartz-shea and Yanow (2012), the research design is tightly bound to the nature of the research question we wish to answer. For example, "how-possible" questions lead to a critical approach to the construction of reality (Longuenesse, 2008). This critical approach is most achieved when a qualitative method is used to investigate other possible constructions of reality. In other words, the qualitative approach is used when the research is concerned with words more than numbers (Bryman, 2012). Thus, choosing a specific research design has a lot to do with the way the researcher wants to approach the asked question. In this study, the research question is stated as follows:

**How is the security of Muslim women affected by the dual pressure of Islamophobia and the pressure to preserve patriarchal values in Norway?**

Thus, to answer the research question, a qualitative research method was chosen because it allows the researcher to investigate whether Islamophobia and patriarchal values affect the security of Muslim women by sharing their experiences of security/insecurity. According to Bryman (2012), a qualitative approach is used to illuminate an issue or to gain a deeper understanding of an issue through conducting a detailed, thorough investigation of that issue. By using this method, we can interpret the social world through the eyes of the people being studied (Bryman, 2012, p.399). Moreover, the study adopts a feminist epistemology and critical approach, which opens the door for investigating the personal experiences of

(in)security to contribute to the current "security debates." According to Tickner (2005) Feminist approach draws upon a variety of methods as long as it serves the goal of challenging "the often unseen androcentric or masculine biases in the way that knowledge has traditionally been constructed in all the disciplines" (p.3).

### 1.2.2 Data collection

According to Bryman (2012), there are two kinds of data. Primary data is where the researchers collect and analyze the data themselves—whereas secondary data is where the researchers analyze preexisting data. Thus, this thesis is grounded on collecting and analyzing primary data, while secondary data such as existing research and articles are used to support and lay the ground for the discussed topic. Hence, by committing to a qualitative approach, the data collection method is set to be in-depth, semi-structured interviews. According to Lune & Berg (2017, p.70), the nature of the research questions determines the data collection methods as it will determine the type of information needed and how the research will collect it. For example, if the researcher is interested in observing the behavior of people in a particular social setting, participant observation is the best method that could be used. Whereas if the researcher is interested in the perceptions and experiences of people, conducting interviews will be the most suitable method of data collection as it allows the individuals to express their perspectives and assumptions using their own words (Bryman, 2012, p.471). Thus, since the study centers around the experiences of (in)security of Syrian Muslim women in Norway, conducting interviews provides a valuable means of access as it will allow the participants to talk about their feelings of (in)security that the researcher cannot observe.

Moreover, conducting semi-structured interviews provides some control to the researcher in following the main ideas and topics set to be discussed. At the same time, it creates a room for the interviewees to express their opinions freely. It is hard to capture the essence of these topics without letting the interviewees interact with the topic by discussing the issue from new angles and insights. They can bring in many other related topics that were not included in the interview guide (Lune & Berg, 2017, p.70). Thus, conducting semi-structured interviews allows for such a scenario which enhances and enriches the collected data.

As for the interview guide, a set of open questions were included that covered the main issues related to the thesis topic. According to Bryman (2012), the interview guide provides

flexibility in asking questions and creating a nuanced interview. Moreover, the question guide can be helpful as it gives unity characteristics of the main discussed topics to all conducted interviews. The questions were set after reading extensively through multiple studies on the experiences of Muslim women in Europe. Furthermore, the questions were peer-reviewed to ensure they were simple, easy to understand and cause no confusion.

As for the interviews, they were conducted through a video call via the Zoom application. This method was used due to Coronavirus restrictions and high travel costs. Online videoconferencing was an excellent alternative to face-to-face interviews as the interviewer can still have access to observe the facial reaction of the participants. According to Nehls (2015), online videoconferencing overcomes the barrier of geography and offers flexibility since the participants can participate in a study in their location. Thus, access to a variable sample of individuals may be realized. By choosing this data collection method, convenience sampling was minimized as videoconferencing allowed recruiting informants outside the researcher's social circle.

### **1.2.3 Limitations and strengths:**

Some limitations were faced in the data collection process. For example, using a remote data collection method might have reduced trust and rapport between the researcher and participants (Bryman, 2012). However, to mitigate this problem, the interview was designed to start with some "Throwaway questions" to establish a good rapport with the informants. This has eased the tension and created a comfortable atmosphere (Lune & Berg, 2017, p.74). Another data limitation relates to language and interpretation. Firstly, when it comes to collecting secondary data, most of the secondary data that discuss the integration of Muslim women in Norwegian society was in the Norwegian language. However, I speak Norwegian, but I am not as fluent as a native Norwegian. Thus, this task was considered a limitation I faced in this study as it was time-consuming to search for secondary data in Norwegian and translate them into English. Secondly, when it comes to the interviews with Syrian women, all the interviews were conducted in Arabic as interviewees can express themselves better if they use their mother tongue. However, even though I speak Arabic, as it is my mother tongue, language limitation was faced because I had to translate the transcripts into English. This task was time-consuming as it was done with great caution to avoid misinterpretations. On the other hand, speaking the Arabic language and being a Syrian woman has strengthened the research as well because it allowed me to understand the context of the terms and concepts

that the Syrian women used during the interview as Al-Amer et al. (2016) argue that understanding the cultural context in qualitative research is vital to ensure an adequate translation of the participants' meanings and ideas.

#### 1.2.4 Sampling

The study is designed to interview Syrian Muslim women to share their experiences and perception of their security in Norway. On the other hand, it was intended to interview some organizations that support and empower refugee women in Norway to investigate Norway's role in ensuring the security of these women. Thus, the population was set to include all Muslim women that reside in Norway. A non-probability sampling strategy was followed. This sampling strategy is defined as "a sample that has not been selected using a random sampling method. Essentially, this implies that some units in the population are more likely to be selected than others " (Bryman, 2012, p.713). So, the sample was selected strategically to ensure a variation. However, this variation should be within the research frame and serve the research topic. For example, an initial screening was conducted where the possible participants talked about their level of education. Some spoke about abuse experiences that qualified them to participate in this project. Accordingly, to investigate the experiences of Muslim women in Norway, the researcher chose to focus on the Syrian community that resides in Norway since Norway has received thousands of Syrian refugees since 2015 (Statistics Norway, 2016). Thus, the Syrian community suits the objectives of the study since most Syrian refugees are Muslims and they have immigrated to Norway, which has a different culture than the Middle Eastern culture, and since the researcher lives in Norway, it will be convenient to do a research study in Norway.

Thus, to answer the research question, the study recruited a sample according to specific criteria relevant to our research question. This principle is called purposive selection, which derives the criteria followed in the sample selection process from the research questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). So, the selection criteria of the first sample were set as the following: the informants must be Muslim, Syrian, and female. As for the education level, there are no criteria as I am interested in the experiences of Muslim women regardless of their education level. As for the language, informants must speak either Arabic or English. Thus, by committing to these criteria, the informants will form a suitable sample that enable the thesis to answer the research question by investigating their experiences. In addition to the ten women, the researcher has interviewed people who work for governmental and non-

governmental organizations that help refugee women in their integration in Norway. They must speak either Arabic, English, or Norwegian.

As for the sample size, there is no specific number recommended in qualitative research. As per Bryman (2012, p.425), the sample size is determined based on the research scope (if it is a big or small study) and if it is adequate to achieve a convincing conclusion. Thus, I interviewed 10 Syrian women and three organizations representatives, one is a governmental organization, and the other two are Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs). As for the recruitment of informants, it was done through Facebook pages, where I posted invitations to participate in the study in many Syrian Facebook groups. Eighteen participants contacted me, showing interest in participating, and I chose only 10. The shortlisting task was based on initial screening to ensure variety of experiences. Thus, the study ensured to include in the sample, women that are engaged in the work life, women who has no previous education, women who studies at the high school level or the university level.

### 1.2.5 Data Analysis

In this study, a content analysis of the interviews' transcriptions was used as a method of data analysis. According to Berg & Lune, content analysis means "a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material to identify patterns, themes, assumptions, and meanings" (Berg & Latin 2008; Leedy & Ormrod. 2005; Neuendorf, 2002 cited in Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 182). Furthermore, the coding strategy was used as it systemizes the analysis process to answer the research question efficiently. First, all the transcripts were read to gain an overall view of the main topics discussed. Then, each transcript was divided into various topics and labeled. After that, all transcripts were cross-checked, looking for connections and patterns. A color-coding method was used, which helped deconstruct the data and then reassembled each code under one category. Many notes were taken during the coding process on possible interpretations, ideas, and how they overlap with other transcripts to build up the answer to the research questions. Many interesting ideas were presented but discarded as they do not relate to our specific research questions. So, the assessment of the selected material was carefully done. Overall, the analysis process was not linear in a forward direction. However, it was a spiral process in which the initial analysis and coding were updated and amended constantly.

### 1.2.6 Validity and reflexivity

According to Bryman (2012), *triangulation* is defined as "The use of more than one method or source of data in the study of a social phenomenon so that findings may be cross-checked" (p.717). Thus, triangulation is used to check the validity of the findings (Nygaard, 2017) and can uncover inconsistencies and conflicting results (Schwartz-Shea, 2006). There are different ways to do triangulation. For example, using multiple data sources, incorporating different times, persons, and places, or using various methods like interviews, documents, and observations (Schwartz-Shea, 2006). In this study, triangulation was ensured by using multiple data by interviewing different individuals and supporting their arguments with secondary data sources to strengthen the interpretation of each claim. Moreover, triangulation was ensured by interviewing the representatives of the organizations. They work for refugees' empowerment which has supported the findings of the difficulties that Muslim women face in Norway.

As for reflexivity, the researcher's position can influence the way a study is conducted and the results that are analyzed (Salter, 2013). According to Kunz (2013), the researcher's gender, ethnicity, class, and socio-cultural background can influence social research. For example, Stern (2006) highlights that people make conscious choices in including or excluding information based on whom they believe the researcher is and what information they would like to share with the public. Therefore, social research cannot be considered objective. However, addressing the researcher's subjectivity can increase the objectivity of a study (Tickner, 2006). Thus, it is helpful to address the issues that might have affected the objectivity of the research. Thus, in this study, my gender and race could have played a role in the objectivity of the research in a positive and negative way since I am a Syrian woman. For example, some interviewees may hold back some sensitive information that they think might affect the way I perceive them since I am part of the community they come from. On the other hand, being a Syrian woman can encourage them to be more open and to understand them since I am familiar with the cultural context of their experiences.

### 1.2.7 Ethical considerations

The research was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. All informants received an information letter about the nature of the study and a consent form to sign before the interview. This was done to ensure that the participant knowingly and voluntarily

participated in the study (Luna & Berg, 2017). The design of the information sheet and the informed consent were followed according to Bryman (2012). However, all informants preferred to give verbal consent. In the information letter, the study assured the participants that they would stay anonymous and that all the data is stored electronically in an external hard drive and will be deleted after the study is done and evaluated. They were informed of their rights and reminded at the beginning and the end of the interview that they were free to make contact with me if they wished to retrieve themselves from the research. In the analysis section, the informants were given numbers to be identified later when I started with the findings section. I will refer to them as Interviewee 1 or Interviewee 2 and so on.



## 2.0 Literature review and theoretical framework

### 2.1 Islamophobia (understanding the context).

Islamophobia has become widespread in present-day Europe (Hoffmann & Moe, 2020). The term "Islamophobia" can be traced back to the late 1980s, but it gained much attention in 1997 when a report by Runnymede Trust called "Islamophobia – A Challenge for Us All" was published. Trust defines the term as "a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam and, therefore, to fear and dislike of all or most Muslims" (Trust, 1997, p1). However, there was much disagreement on the definition of this term as it is difficult to draw a definite frame that captures the phenomenon's essence. Some interpreted it as a criticism of Islam as a religion (Semati, 2010). While others define it as a fear of Muslims and Islam (Abbas, 2004). However, the study will rely on Bleich's definition of Islamophobia as he described it as "indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims" (Bleich, 2011, p.1582). This definition was chosen because it gives the same weight and importance to both the behavioral and emotional components. As Rosenberg & Hovland (1960) analyze attitudes to be composed of three components: an affective component (feelings), a behavioral component (the influence of the attitude on behavior), and a cognitive component (knowledge and belief). Thus, negative attitudes toward Islam or Muslims should not be linked solely to the behavioral component but also the emotional and cognitive components. In other words, any negative feelings, negative thinking, or negative behavior towards Islam and Muslims should be categorized under the Islamophobia umbrella. These negative sentiments sprung from depicting Islam as incompatible with Western liberal values because Muslim men were viewed as violent and barbaric while Muslim women were viewed as pitiable and oppressed by the orient males (Razack, 2004). Thus, it became the West's duty to protect itself from being affected by primitive values and try to push Muslim society to follow its lead into modernization, as underlined in Afghanistan and Iraq wars. In his book "clash of Civilizations," Samuel Huntington argued that future wars would be fought between cultures, not countries (Huntington, 1996). However, in our modern time, Islamophobia reemerged after the events of September 11, 2001. Thus, the U.S. changed its foreign and domestic policies due to the "war on terror" campaign, which the U.S. launched. Domestically, the US passed the Patriot Act 2001, which expanded the search and surveillance powers of federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Thus, the office of Homeland Security was

created, which was responsible for increasing US security and minimizing the risk of terrorist attacks by applying stricter airport safety procedures and strengthening border control to reduce immigration attempts. Whereas internationally, the U.S. President, George W. Bush, declared a global "war on terrorism," followed by lengthy wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, supported by NATO who issued Article 5 in which it allowed its members to join the US in its attack against Afghanistan (Bergen, 2021). Similarly, in 2017, Donald Trump issued Executive Order 13769, known as the Muslim ban. It suspended the entry of citizens of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen for 90 days, claiming that these countries present terrorist threats to the US (Cainkar, 2020). However, Michael Welch (2006) criticizes the image in which the US has presented this war on terror campaign. Welch argues that this war had two sides. On the one hand, it was launched as revenge for the event of 9/11, and on the other hand, it served as a "more ancient campaign against evil," resulting in securitization that allowed the government to overlook democratic principles for the sake of the nation's security and that emboldened the government's power to grow unchecked. Moreover, the 9/11 attacks changed the public opinion towards Muslims not only in the U.S. but also in Europe. The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) found that Islamic communities and other vulnerable groups have become targets of increased hostility since September 11 in the 15 EU Member States (Allen & Nielsen, 2002). According to Khader (2016), the perception of Muslims as a threat to the social fabric of European societies, the terrorist attacks by Islamist extremists, and the radicalization of "thousands" of native Muslim Europeans have added fuel to the surging anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe. Thus, European countries increased their securitization measures by strengthening their migration policies (Speciale, 2010) which created a sense of insecurity that drove people to follow the state's lead in legitimizing their actions to defend themselves against whom they perceived as the enemy. According to Barbara Perry (2005), "They [white men] experience a sense of displacement and dispossession relative to people of color. This imagery of 'white-men-as-victim' [...] provides an ideological rationale for recreating people of color as legitimate victims" (Berry, 2005, p.238). Thus, due to this intense securitization and high sense of insecurity post 9/11, violence against Muslims, Middle Eastern, and Arab Americans has reached its highest point (Lichtblau, 2016).

### 2.1.1 Islamophobia and the security of Muslim women

After the September 11 attack, the discussion of women's status in Islam and the Arab world dominated the academic debates (Cainkar 2009). Activists, politicians, and the media began to discuss issues such as honor killing, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage. These issues reinforced the stereotypical assumption of the violent orient men who dominate the weak orient women. However, Sabrina Alimahomed-Wilson (2017) criticized the narrow perception in which the security of Muslim women was discussed as she called for a wider approach that would put the security of women at the center of the discussion. She argues that in the academic debates, the security of Muslim women was highlighted only when the perpetrator was a foreign Muslim man, following the dominant cultural ideology of "saving Muslim women from Muslim men." While scholars, on the other hand, overlooked the violence that Muslim women endure in the public sphere. Thus, she investigated the violence that Muslim women experience in the public sphere due to the securitization of Islam in the United States after the bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. She concludes that this type of violence against Muslim women is shaped by the overlap of Islamophobia, racism, and sexism as she examines how the intersection of Islamophobia and gender has limited the perception of Muslim women's security in the US. Even though Muslim women experience double the rate of hostility compared to Muslim men in the US (Cainkar, 2009), still violence against Muslim women was categorized as a form of racial discrimination, disregarding gender as a contributing system of power that would explain this phenomenon as Muslim women remained "both visible targets and silent victims" (Aziz, 2012).

Moreover, the September 11 terrorist attack transformed the meaning of the Muslim headscarf, which has serious consequences for Muslim women's security (Aziz, 2012). The debate around the veil ceased to revolve around how it suppresses women's freedom and controls their sexuality. Rather, the headscarf became a religious gender marker that represents terrorism. This perception has legitimized discrimination against Muslim women because Islam was viewed as a political ideology, not as a religion (Aziz, 2012). Thus, Leila Ahmed (2011) discussed how the resurgence of the veiling of women in the twentieth century had a complex background that is not attributed solely to religion. She argues that veiling had a larger context than religion. It expresses Arab nationalism, countering Western influence and repudiation of Western imperialism. Ahmad explored more in-depth the motivations that led to women veiling. Some attributed veiling to their religious commitment or to pressure from their communities that require them to abide by a certain dress code. Others saw veiling as a representation of their political views that reject the materialism of Western capitalism.

Thus, the Hijab was adopted not only due to its religious connotation but also to its other equally important representations. However, the new meaning of the headscarf post 9/11 impacted the Muslim women differently than the securitization of Islam did to the Muslim man. As Sahar Aziz noted, "the headscarf "marks" women as sympathetic to the enemy, presumptively disloyal, and forever foreign" (Aziz, 2012). Nadine Naber argues, "[a] general consensus among community leaders was that federal government policies [post 9/11] disproportionately targeted men while hate crimes and incidents of harassment in the public sphere disproportionately targeted women" (Naber, 2008, p.293).

Similarly, Aziz (2012) talked about the psychological and physical violence that Muslim women endured post the September 11 attacks. She argues that Muslim women sit at the bottom of gender, religion, and racial hierarchy. The Muslim women's autonomy was underrated as they were viewed either as confederates to their Muslim male terrorist partners or as silent, passive women who were not allowed to demand their rights while the scarf on their heads stood as a marker for legitimizing these pre-made assumptions. Thus, their freedom of choice in religious practices was restricted due to discrimination and ethnic violence. Henceforth, they feared for their safety and suffered the government's harsh policies. They even suffered economic loss through termination because they decided to wear Hijab. Thus, they could choose between practicing their faith freely or seeking economic independence. If they choose one, they must forfeit their rights in the other.

## 2.2 Patriarchalism from the Middle East to Europe:

Suad Joseph defines *patriarchy* in the Arab context as "the prioritizing of the rights of males and elders (including elderly women) and the justification of those rights within kinship and values which are usually supported by religion (1996, p.14). Thus, patriarchy is a social pattern that exists in Arab countries due to the importance of the family, as it is considered the basic unit in society (Barakat, 1993). Suad Joseph argues that patriarchy persists in the Arab social structure because it becomes "part of the psyche, one's sense of oneself as a person" (Joseph, 1996, p. 18). Hence, patriarchy is connected to the sense of the self, which is embedded in relationships, in contrast to individualism which separates one's self from the others. Moreover, Lama Abu Odeh (2010) argues that due to the patriarchal structure of Arab societies, men are viewed as providers of their families in exchange for women's obedience. So, they became responsible for bringing order to their house by using any means they saw fit. On the other hand, women are considered weak, vulnerable, and in need of protection.

They tend to relinquish their rights to preserve their marriages and accept their secondary role in society which is the reproductive role. Therefore, women continue to be second-class citizens in Arab countries. Moreover, women are taken as a symbol of the family's honor (Abu Odeh, 2010). This notion has been dangerously used to justify violence against women as it has opened the door for various forms of abuse, maltreatment, and exploitation. For example, in patriarchal societies, women's hymen represents the family's honor. According to Lama Abu Odeh (2010), there are many rules and regulations that are set to control women's behavior because women's body has a mark of virginity which is the hymen. Since the hymen is attached physically to the women's body, this makes the body stand as the virginity's marker, and it is protected by having a social hymen embedded in the rules and regulations that the women must follow to prove their chastity. "The hymen becomes displaced from its biological vessel, the vagina, onto the body as a whole, "hymenizing" it, and producing it as a body called female. But then it is displaced again onto the social space where the female body is allowed to move and be, encircling it as a social hymen that delimits its borders." (p.918). Thus, when a woman fails to abide by these rules, that will make the community question the chastity of her social hymen, and she will be stigmatized. So, in Middle East countries, honor is highly valued, and it is firmly attached to female behavior. Hence, patriarchal communities control the women's social and sexual behavior in order to safeguard the family's honor (Ortner, 1978) and to maintain the patriarchal status quo that preserves the men's domination and their political and cultural authority within the social system (Welchman & Hossain, 2005).

Moreover, Aisha Gill (2009) investigates how violence is committed within patriarchal minority groups living in Western societies. Thus, she investigated honor crime issues within Iranian and Kurdish communities in the UK. She explained how even though the law of the wider society governs patriarchal minority communities, they still establish their own cultural norms and laws to seek their autonomy. Hence, there is no surprise that the patriarchal communities impose their patriarchal order regardless of its inconsistency with the norms of the wider society. For instance, even though Sweden has a high rank in the UN gender equality index due to their strict measures that promote gender equality, still, the homicide of Fadime Sahindal in 2002 was committed by the hand of her father for refusing to marry the man he chose for her (Dustin, 2004). This proves how traditional patriarchal culture still haunts women regardless of the type of wider society they live in. Hence, the security of Muslim women is not well represented and discussed in Western societies. Regardless of the grown migration waves from Arab countries to Europe after 2015, there is still a gap in

discussing the security of Muslim women in Western societies, and this thesis aims to contribute to filling this gap by exploring the threats that Muslim women can be subjected to by her own community and by the Western community they are living in.

## 2.3 Situating the security of Muslim women within the theoretical discussion

### 2.3.1 Security from a feminist perspective:

In defining security, feminists believe that military capability is no longer an accurate measure of states' security in the globalization era. Instead, they advocate for a broader security concept that concentrates on individuals rather than nations. Sara Smith (2017) accused traditional IR of focusing on what is called "real issues of military security" while ignoring problems like domestic violence, racism, and inequality and considering them as "soft issues" that have to be dealt with internally (Smith, 2017, p.66). Christine Sylvester (2013) advocated for a "bottom-top" approach to exploring security. She called for diving into people's experiences to let the voice of those who have been marginalized and those who have experienced insecurity be heard. Thus, the security concept was widened to include all types of threats that are imposed on people, as *security* was defined as "freeing individuals and groups from the social, physical, economic and political constraints that prevent them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do" (Basch, 2004, p. 9). This definition of security is central to our study. It challenges the traditional definition that links security with physical protection as it acknowledges the other insecurities that people may face, like the one we are investigating in this study which is social insecurities.

This broader conceptualization of security brings out the agency of non-state actors in constructing a more salient, comprehensive approach to security (Hoogensen & Stuvøy, 2006). As Basch (2004) highlighted that "victimization and agency are seen as two parts of a reality that should be addressed together rather than as opposites, as is usually the case" (p.7). However, this call for shifting the focus from states to people needed a supplementary approach to help in understanding how the individual realm is constructed and how people interact within this sphere. Hence, feminism's significant contribution lies in its approach to exploring how identity is constructed through social and cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity. Gender theory challenges the traditional perception of gender by differentiating between "sex" as a biological characterization and "gender" as a socially constructed role. As Simone de Beauvoir stated, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a

woman" (1993, p.281). Simone de Beauvoir here explains how the female position in society is determined by society as identity is not independently inherently constructed; instead, it is built through the social norms that assign roles to people based on physiological characteristics (male-female binary). The way we think, speak and act is being dictated to us by society (Butler, 1990). This contribution has allowed feminists to redefine many core concepts in IR, such as security.

Gender theory has contributed significantly to redefining security concept in the globalization era. Putting on gender lenses while examining security concept compels us to question the traditional normative assumptions. Tickner (1997), in her article, *You Just Don't Understand: Troubled Engagements Between Feminists and IR Theorists*, attributed the rupture between the traditional IR theorists and feminists to the different ontologies and epistemologies that they rely on when looking at the IR domain. The traditional IR theories perceive the international sphere as asocial and anarchic. In contrast, feminism takes social relations as a point of departure in its analysis.

Moreover, Tickner explained how gender approaches are more than investigating the relation between men and women. Instead, gender differences penetrate both the public and private spheres which depuffed the claim that the gender approach cannot benefit the international relation domain where there is a detachment between the internal and external realms. She argues how gender approaches were able to connect the private with the global sphere and how taking gender as a starting point, we could reach a more comprehensive understanding of a state's behavior. As Cynthia Enloe stated, "if we take seriously the lives of women – their understandings of security – as well as on-the-ground workings of masculinity and femininity, we will be able to produce more meaningful and more reliable analyses of 'security' – personal, national and global" (Enloe, 2007, p. 47).

Similarly, Judith Ann Tickner, in *Gender in International Relations* (1992), criticized the realist's masculinizing assumptions of the national security concept that is derived from both Hobbes's view of the state of nature as a state of war, struggle, and competition where women seem to be absent; and Machiavelli's characterization of anarchy as feminine where it needs to be tamed by heroic men.

Thus, Tickner highlighted how the patriarchal nature of mainstream IR theories has contributed to the construction of unequal hierarchical gender relations. She believes that the behavior of the state is a manifestation of the ideal picture of the glorified male warrior, where its success in the international sphere is measured according to what Tickner calls "masculinist underpinnings" (1992, p. xi).

Similarly, bearing in mind the centrality of the state's role in security studies, Tickner criticized how Kenneth Waltz conceptualized the state as a rational actor that reflects the rationality of the modern economic man (Tickner, 2018). For Tickner, these assumptions are masculinized and gendered (Tickner, 1992).

Similarly, many gender proponents see the state as a collection of social institutions responsible for naturalizing the gender stereotypes that perceive men as leaders (economic men) and women as subordinates (Peterson, 1992). Hence, Tickner (1992) believes that international politics is constructed through men's experiences and knowledge while women's experiences are classified as secondary.

Therefore, Tickner calls for exploring and emphasizing women's experiences to bring new insights into the domain of international politics. Thus, many feminists revisited and explored the taken-for-granted concepts by applying gender theory. For example, Christina Sylvester, in her book *War as Experience* (2013), challenges the traditional approaches toward war and how rationality means ignoring emotion and focusing on states' practical interaction and strategies, while Sylvester believes that emotion can never be divorced from rationality as she attributed the work of humanitarian interventions to the rationality's emotional aspect.

### 2.3.2 Violence against Women (VAM).

At the center of security lies violence as the prime cause of insecurity. Violence was usually evoked as "non-state actors, or those the author does not approve of" (Thomas, 2011, p.1820). Traditionally, violence was perceived as a legitimate instrument over which the state had a monopoly. Thus, it was not questioned in the traditional field of IR (Thomas, 2011). However, Galtung (1969) argues that violence should not be depicted in its narrow conception. He calls for broadening the definition of violence because "peace," seen as an antonym to "violence," cannot be achieved in the modern social order by deterring only physical harm and threats. Thus, he sees that the extension of the violence concept is a necessity that cannot be rendered as unrelated or undesirable things. For Galtung, "violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (1969, p.168). The potential realization is meant to refer to the things that are possible in relation to the level of insight and resources. For example, in the Neolithic period, the life expectancy of 30 years would not be considered violence. However, in our modern time and based on the current resources and insights, the life expectancy of 30 years is regarded as violence due to war and social injustice.



Similarly, feminist scholars have called for broadening the violence concept. Accordingly, feminists contributed to the security debate by exploring a new type of violence: violence against women (VAW). VAM has been greatly discussed over the last three decades and gained the focus of major public debates and academic interest. Many scholars investigated the VAM issue to understand its nature, causes, and consequences (Gangoli, Razack, & McCarry, 2006; Hester, Kelly, & Radford, 1995; Thiara, 2003). In the Declaration on the elimination of violence against women issued by the United Nations (1993), Article 1 defines VAM as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life." Thus, violence can take several forms. It can range from physical violence such as sexual violence, domestic violence, and forced marriage to psychological violence such as isolation and exclusion. Galtung (1969) made six distinctions when it comes to violence. However, the thesis will focus on only four distinctions that are more relevant to the topic at hand. First, Galtung (1969) differentiated between physical violence and psychological violence, i.e., "violence that works on the body, and violence that works on the soul" (Galtung, 1969, p. 169). Secondly, he distinguished between a "negative and positive approach to influence." Galtung argues here how a person can be influenced through a negative approach where the influencer punishes the influenced when he does something that the influencer considers wrong. And through a positive approach, the influencer rewards the influenced for doing what the influencer considers right. A third distinction shows the possibility of having violence with no actor that commits this violence. In this case, the violence is "structural or indirect" as opposed to "personal or direct." Galtung stated that "violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (1969, p. 171). A fourth and last distinction is between manifest violence and latent violence. Manifest violence is when the violence is physical, while latent violence is the prejudice that has caused this physical violence. Hence, introducing the concept of VAM helps in understanding the security of Muslim women by looking at the gender aspect that plays a significant role in the experiences of Muslim women. While applying Galtung's categorization of violence types helps identify the various types of violence that women can be subjected to.

### 2.3.3 Power relation

This research focuses on the experiences of Syrian Muslim women in Norway in relation to security. Hence, it is important to introduce the concept of power relations due to its importance in gender studies. Many feminists are interested in studying "the power dynamic of gender relations" (dominant/ non-dominant) (Hoogensen & Stuvøy, 2006, p. 213) as it explains how power relations have links to unequal gender relations. Thus, understanding power is fundamental to our understanding of the security of these Syrian Muslim women. To understand power relations within gender studies, it is important to unpack the meaning of power, where it comes from, and how it affects us. Thus, this study refers to Foucault's notion of power as he is considered an important contributor to feminists' discussions about bodies and their relation to power. Foucault rejects the traditional view of power, which was believed to be concentrated in the political institution of the sovereign state that has the ultimate power and extends its force in a top-down manner (Foucault, 1978). Instead, he sees power as the 'interaction of warring parties, as the decentered network of bodily, face-to-face confrontations, and ultimately as the productive penetration and subjectivizing subjugation of a bodily opponent' (Foucault in Habermas, 1994, p. 63). Thus, Foucault believes that power resides everywhere, in every social relation. Power is exercised as it circulates and moves around us in all directions: 'Power is located at the levels of struggle and manifests in its effects' (Haugaard, 1997, p. 67). He believes that individuals exercise the power by which they have been constituted. In other words, individuals are considered both the subject and object of power (Foucault, 1991). Foucault explored the evolution of power as he was particularly interested in disciplinary power. Disciplinary power is an invisible system that derives its strength from the power of norms as this power shapes individuals' behavior and normalizes it. Thus, whoever deviates from these norms is seen as abnormal and in need of reform and rehabilitation (Johnston, 1991). So, Foucault differentiated between disciplinary power and sovereign power as he commented, "The discourse of discipline has nothing in common with that of law, rule, or sovereign will. The disciplines may well be the carriers of a discourse that speaks of a rule, but this rule is not the juridical rule deriving from sovereignty, but a natural rule, a norm. The code they come to define is not that of law but that of normalization" (Foucault, 1994, p. 44). This means that sovereign power is exercised through law and governmental institutions, while disciplinary power is exercised through normalization.

In his book *Discipline and Punish* (1991), Foucault believed that the modern state replaced its methods of exercising authority from the physical to the mental form. Exercising power in the physical form led to riots and resistance. Alternatively, the modern state exercises power in a

concealed and indirect way by applying the concept of "self-governance," where individuals feel obligated to abide by law and regulation because they are being observed. As power is shifted from the central authority to the population, people exercise self-governance as they regulate their behavior on their own as a form of action of the "self on a self" (Dean, 2010, p.20). Foucault sees that the self-governance concept constrains individuality and creates homogeneity. In other words, people will start talking, thinking, and acting in the same way out of fear of being punished if they do otherwise. Foucault calls this "dynamic normalization," which is fundamentally undemocratic because it oppresses free will and creates a society of "robots."

Similarly, Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) visited the same concept of normalization when talking about the performativity of gender. Foucaultian normalization and self-governance concepts are extended in Tickner's discussion of gender and identity. For Butler, Gender consists of the iterative actions that materialize themselves into gender dichotomy (female and male). This gender dichotomy results from accumulated characterization of how the behavior of males and females should be. Therefore, self-governance is manifested in the segregation of actions and behaviors between males and females, creating a conduct code that links identity to the intrinsic essence/ physiological attributes of males and females. However, Butler claims that gender identity is the product of actions and behaviors governed by normalization power. Thus, Butler depuffed the notion of perceiving identity as fixed or static as she claims that the various signs we use to denote gender have changed drastically through time. Thus, identity is changing through time due to the resistance of these premade perceptions of what gender is.

Looking at power relations through gender lenses, we see that gender studies do not focus solely on women. Instead, it identifies the position of power that an individual occupies in the realm of social relations. Gender is the most helpful category that enables us to analyze relations of power because unequal gender relations are the most common criteria found among many cultures (Tickner, 1997). Accordingly, *gender* is defined as "a set of variable but socially and culturally constructed characteristics—such as power, autonomy, rationality, and public—that are stereotypically associated with masculinity. Their opposites—weakness, dependence, emotion, and private—are associated with femininity" (Tickner, 1997, p.614). Thus, since masculine characteristics are antonyms to feminine ones, Tickner concluded that masculinity could never be separated from femininity as the definition of both terms is relational to each other. Accordingly, the patriarchal system is not a manifestation of male

intrinsic power. Still, it is the articulation of the dominant power, claiming a form of masculinity and exercising its power over those who are marginalized and oppressed and who are considered the non-dominant power or the dominated. As Enloe and Cohn (2003) put it, "you have to ask about the daily operations of both masculinity and femininity in relationship to each other. It is not men-on-top that makes something patriarchal. It's men who are recognized and claim a certain form of masculinity, for the sake of being more valued, more 'serious', and 'the protectors of/and controllers of those people who are less masculine' that makes any organization, any community, any society patriarchal" (Enloe & Cohn, 2003 cited in Hoogensen & Stuvøy, 2006, p. 218). Thus, Gender theory highlights how the interaction between these two categories (dominant/ non-dominant) is based on a hierarchy where the dominant defines the norms and practices that should be followed. This relation of power is not found only in the individual realm, but we can find it as well among states. Hoogensen & Stuvøy (2006) see that this power relation is apparent in every relation between and across individuals, societies, and states. When the dominant state defines the security concept, it sets the selection parameters of who is worthy of being saved or to be valued. By this, the security concept will be politicized and so narrowed that it will miss those who have fallen through the cracks. Thus, gender approaches try to unravel how those power relations work and how they affect us as insecurity can be attributed to the power structure. Hence, they call for bringing these power relations and structures into question.

Moreover, when talking about power relation, intersectionality stands as an important concept to the understanding of power relation. Intersectionality is an important concept that we use in this research as it highlights the role of gender, religion, and ethnicity in how the security of these Syrian Muslim women is experienced. Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) criticized how antiracist policies and feminist theory exclude black women's experiences as they examine race and gender by a "single-axis framework" which does not fully represent the actual experience of black women. Crenshaw sees that this single-axis framework diminishes black women's experience and blends it within the experience of black people in general, which conceals the degree of harm cast upon black women due to overlapping race and gender. Crenshaw calls for a change of framework that is used in translating black women's experiences to come up with effective policies that can address the real problems as she argues that the American court forces black women to choose one aspect of discrimination, either gender or race, and deny them the right to combine both aspects. By doing that, the court narrows the perspective used in examining black women's discrimination cases based on

the assumption that "their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional" (Crenshaw, 1989, p.149). Thus, Crenshaw argues that "black women are protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with those of either of the two groups [which are race or gender]" (Crenshaw, 1989, p.143). Similarly, in this research, we aim to use the multi-axis framework in viewing the security of these Syrian Muslim women. We aim to investigate the effect of gender and race combined on their security. Without an intersectionality perspective, we cannot analyze the core security problems women face around the world. To conclude, applying the intersectionality and gender approach in the security debate helps us identify security problems by understanding the dynamics of the complex social relations among individuals, societies, and states.

### 3.0 Background chapter: Muslim Women's dilemma in Norway

Not many research articles talk about Syrian Muslim women in Norway perse, especially since the Syrian immigration to Norway started seven years ago, in 2015. More than half of the asylum seekers to Norway in that year were from Syria (Statistics Norway, 2016). The literature contains many articles discussing problematic issues faced by Afghan immigrants in Norway. Thus, considering that Afghanistan's culture is similar to Syrian culture in relation to religion, as both countries are Muslim, and in relation to the fact that both countries are third-world countries. Thus, it is helpful to review literature written concerning how Muslim communities were perceived and viewed in Norway and the difficulties faced by the two communities (Norwegian and Muslim) in Norway. Thus, this chapter will start with an overview of Syrian culture and how Syrian women were treated in Syria. Then it will move to Norway to discuss how the Norwegian community perceives Muslim communities from cultural and political perspectives. After that, it will review how Muslim women are perceived in Norway and what measures were taken regarding women's veils.

#### 3.1 The Syrian culture and the position of Syrian women in Syria (A case of coexisting with the patriarchal values)

It is worthy of demonstrating that the Syrian culture enjoys diversity. According to CIA World Factbook (2022), 87% of Syrians are Muslim. Christians constitute 10% of the population, with the remaining 3% being Druze. Thus, Syrian culture shows religious tolerance as mosques and churches coexist peacefully. Schools offer religious education (Islam or Christianity) according to the student's religion. However, it is scarce to see a conversion out of the faith of one's family as the family is considered a primary concern to Syrians. It stands as the core social security system on which Syrians rely. As the parents provide for their children, and when they get older, children reciprocate roles by taking care of the elderly. Accordingly, and due to this strong connection between the family members, family reputation is defined by the reputation of its members, especially the female members, as the woman's hymen is regarded as a symbol of the family's honor. Thus, the women's activities are closely monitored as they represent the family's honor, which must be preserved. Any failure in abiding by the social conduct assigned to women, adopted from the patriarchal society, will reflect negatively on the family's honor, and any action taken by men of this family to correct this distorted behavior is excused. Thus, gender disparity is rendered clearly

in Syrian society. According to the 2020 Human Development Report, Syria's rank in the gender equality Index is 122 out of 162 countries (UNDP, 2020). These disparities are embodied in, first and foremost, the Syrian judicial system. For example, the judicial system offers males impunity in the cases of honor crimes because they were born males, regardless of the harm they inflicted upon the victim.

Article 548 of Syria's Penal Code allows for a lesser punishment for men who kill their wives, sisters, mothers, or daughters on finding them engaging in an "illegitimate" sexual act. The standard punishment for murder is hard labor for 20 years. The penal states, "He who catches his wife, sister, mother or daughter by surprise, engaging in an illegitimate sexual act and kills or injures them unintentionally must serve a minimum of two years in prison" (Syria – The Penal Code, 2021). Thus, the judicial system in Syria is penetrated by patriarchal values. Pimentel et al. (2005) see the defense of such crimes relies on "arguments that link the law to a patriarchal moral framework" (p.260). Many activists consider this biased code discrimination against women because the female gets the maximum sentence without any reduction if she harms her husband after catching him committing adultery with other women.

Moreover, the law permits male polygamy and gives the husband the sole right to divorce his wife without a valid reason or consent. Upon divorce, women can be cast out by their husbands from their marital residence. Men are given the leading role as the providers of their families in exchange for women's obedience (Khafagy, 2005). Thus, women tend to relinquish their rights to preserve their marriages and accept their secondary role in society which is the reproductive role. Therefore, women continue to be perceived as second-class citizens.

However, Leila Ahmed (1992) investigates the historical roots of the Arabs patriarchal system and Muslim women's subjugation to the male's authority to better understand the contemporary debate about Muslim women in Muslim societies. She argues that the social status of women in the pre-Islamic era declined due to the rise of urban culture, as the need for a labor force has contributed to the subordination of women. However, during the rise of Islam, women enjoyed a wide range of rights and social roles as she argues that the Quran, the sacred text of Muslims, contains ethical and moral values that are "stubbornly egalitarian" (1992, p. 63). These ethical and moral values were obliterated in the Abbasi period. Thus, Ahmed challenges the opinions that attribute the gender-inequality traits to Islam's sacred texts, but she believes that those inequalities emanated from the interpretation and codification of the gender meanings of those texts in the Abbasi period. She states, "Had the

ethical voice of Islam been heard ... it would have significantly tempered the extreme androcentric bias of the law, and we might today have a far more humane and egalitarian law regarding women" (1992, p. 88).

### 3.2 Muslim communities in Norway:

From a cultural perspective, many theorists believe, according to Gullestad (2004), that racist ideologies have been transferred after World War II to a more disguised form, replacing "race" with "culture" with the implication of having some cultures as better than others. Homi Bhabha thinks that the postcolonial definition of modernity allows the West to discuss the "subaltern agency" matter from a higher level (Bhabha, 1994 cited in Bjoernaas, 2015). Similarly, Moallem (2005) stated that "in the context of modern colonial racial formations, religion becomes not only a means of racialization but also a theoretical tool for justifying assessment of Islamic inferiority and thus the need for European intervention" (p.42). In Norway, the concept of Islam is used as an antonym to the civilized person. Most Norwegians do not trust Muslims as they think of the young Muslims as someone who "speak with two tongues" one is public. The other is private (Gullestad, 2003a). The false representation of Islam as a violent and oppressive religion was quickly spread in the Norwegian culture, as it became the dominant perception, especially after the 9/11 attacks. In light of this attack on the US, the Norwegian government adopted many political policies such as migration control and demand for assimilation (Razack, 2004).

Nazneen Khan is a Muslim woman born in Kenya and raised in the UK. She moved to Norway when she was ten years old. She wrote an article in 1999 describing the dilemma she was facing in Norway. She felt that her identity was unclear concerning her Muslim heritage and the secular Norwegian culture around her (Khan, 1999). Another article followed this article in 2002, where she looked at the 9/11 incident from a different angle. She calls for not turning a blind eye to the circumstances that motivated those 19 men to commit this horrific act (Khan, 2002). She argues that we cannot simplify things to suit the scenario that is easier to believe. Khan argued that a person's self-image is developed through taking the perspective of how others view them. Thus, when someone experiences a daily rejection of who he is by others, some people take "ethnicity and religion as sources of belonging in relation to changing majority frameworks of interpretation" (Gullestad, 2003a, p.532). In other words, their clinging to their heritage signifies their rejection of the discriminating society and its values as Khan (2002) argues that "the polarization between 'Christians' and 'Muslims'



characterizes our political and social sphere and expresses itself in stigmatizing attitudes in everyday life" (Khan, 2002, cited in Gullestad, 2003a, p.534). Thus, she believes that the need for belonging is a very important factor that plays a big role in explaining our actions. She assures that when this need is held back by discriminative others, this could lead to monstrous acts such as terrorism.

On the other side, and from a political perspective, we see that in 2015, there was a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers in Norway due to the Syrian war that started in 2011. Accordingly, intense debate in the media has increasingly begun to discuss migration and refugees. For example, In June of 2015, Hege Storhaug, a journalist for Human Rights Service, a private organization that operates both in Norway and internationally, wrote an article criticizing Jonas Gahr Støre, leader of the Labour Party's demands to accept more than 10,000 Syrian refugees into Norway. The article's title was "At least 8,000 IS sympathizers brought to Norway?"<sup>1</sup> which reveals, by only reading the title, the reason behind this criticism. She argues that 81% of Arabs support IS (The Islamic State), and by receiving Syrian refugees, Norway's security will be jeopardized (Storhaug, 2015). Norway adopted this biased construction of Muslims to be associated with terrorism due to the global campaign of the 'War on Terrorism' (GWT) launched by the US in the aftermath of the 9/11 incident. Mahira Karim (2021) argues that even though all the terrorist attacks carried out in Norway were right-wing terrorists, the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) has reported in their annual threat assessments that extreme Islamist terrorism is the biggest threat to Norway's security. Similarly, Norwegian civil society in general and media outlets, in particular, were not less biased than the Norwegian Police Security Service in perceiving terrorism to be related to Muslims. For example, in 2011, eight people lost their lives due to a bomb explosion near the Norwegian Government Quarter in Oslo. A few hours later, on the same day, a man opened fire at the annual summer camp at Utøya that was held by the Workers' Youth League. As a result, 69 people were killed (Gjørsv, 2012). Instantly, those two incidents made it to the top headlines of most newspapers, news channels, and media outlets. Assumptions were circulating about whether these terrorist attacks were carried out by 'international extreme Islamists.' As a report issued by the 22. July commission, reviewing those two attacks on the government quarter, stated that "Although everyone was careful not to speculate about what happened, there was a widespread assumption, both in the

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes and literature in Norwegian are translated to English by the author of this study. The translation is done in such a way that the original meaning and term is kept. Error may occur.

government apparatus and within agencies responsible for terrorist preparedness in Norway, that it was most likely a terrorist attack. Most were probably also inclined to believe that an extremist Islamist group carried out the attack and that the motive was related to Norway's role in the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, Afghanistan or Libya" (Gjørsv, 2012, p. 22, Translated). This sentiment comes in line with James' (1996) argument that we discussed earlier in the previous chapter of how civil society tends to adopt the state's ideology in the US. And how the aggregated negative stereotyping of Muslims is a reflection of the state's perception of Muslims. Similarly, these instant assumptions made by the Norwegian governmental apparatus and the media about the perpetrator's ideology as related to extreme Islamists speak volumes about how Muslims are viewed and perceived in Norway.

### 3.3 How are Muslim women perceived in Norway?

The debate about the position of women in Islam and the (in)compatibility between Islam teaching and Norwegian values started in Norway halfway through the 1990s, as there was growing attention on the integration and emancipation of Muslim migrant women (Razack, 2004). The West views Muslim women as "confined, mutilated, and sometimes murdered in the name of culture" (ibid, p.130). Bjoernaas (2015) wrote a research article exploring the cultural imperialism that views Muslim women as passive victims. She was motivated to write about this topic by her personal experience of racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia in Norway, even though she is not a Muslim. But, according to her, she was perceived as inferior by the community around her because she looked like an Arab or a Muslim. Thus, she describes, based on her experience, how "Muslim girls are thought of only as victims of genital mutilation who are forced to wear a veil and take a husband, preferably an older family member, at the age of puberty" (p.80). This perception suits, completes and supports the allegation against Muslim men, seen as a threat to the West. This picture of barbaric Muslim men justifies the measures of violence adopted by the West (Razack, 2004). From a Western perspective, Muslims come to the West, drawn to its superior wealth, bringing their feudal culture that will eventually infect the European civilization to which they have migrated (ibid). Thus, the perception of immigrants as "unassimilable" determines the hierarchy of the interaction between the West and non-West, even before those immigrants reach the West's countries. Hence, upon this view, European countries took some legal approaches, mostly revolving around family reunification measures within immigration law

and measures that aim to protect immigrant women from discrimination and violence (ibid). These sentiments were seen as typical examples of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 1993, p.93). A condescending attitude that many Norwegians have toward Muslims (Bjoernaas, 2015). For example, Shazia Seleh was reported dead in Pakistan sometime after contacting the Norwegian crisis center to help escape marriage arrangements made by her family. As a result of this incident, the Norwegian government took the initiative with Pakistan to seek an agreement against forced marriages (Razack, 2004). However, to understand the problem of forced marriage, we need a comprehensive approach that scrutinizes the problem exhaustively. In the effort to do so, Hege Storhaug (2003) wrote a book under the name *Human Visas: A Report from the Front Lines of Europe's Integration Crisis*. She narrates the tale of a Norwegian girl of Pakistani descent who was forced to marry a man of her family's choice in Pakistan. When the girl came back to Norway, she annulled her marriage by going to court and explaining what had happened to her. Accordingly, the Norwegian parliament passed a law criminalizing forced marriage where the penalty can reach up to 3 years (Razack, 2004). Storhaug's analysis in this book concludes that the problem of forced marriage was attributed to the clash between the two cultures. However, Razack rejects this analysis and criticizes the Norwegian government for comprehending the forced marriage issue in such a way. Razack sees Norway's response in this matter as "racist and culturalising" (2004, p.131) because the forced marriage problem is understood to be emanated from only one source, which is the Muslims' culture, ignoring the West's role in perceiving the Muslim community as inferior culture. Thus, the Muslim community experiences racism due to the Western policies of surveillance and control, which inflames the conditions under which the Muslim communities become more patriarchal towards women (Razack, 2004). Thus, viewing the source of the problem as having pure culturalist grounds provided a distorted, incomplete picture that led to stigmatizing the Muslim community as a whole.

### 3.4 The long-standing debate: Muslim women's veil in Norway

Moira Dustin (2004) has issued a report identifying legal measures taken by many European countries to protect and empower women from minority communities. One of these measures concerned the veil of Muslim women. Hence, it will be useful to go through the measures taken by Norway in this regard to try to conceive a better understanding of the

circumstances that revolve around Syrian Muslim women as a part of minority communities. Norway has considered that Hijab bans to be a violation of Norway's Gender Equality Act. Thus, employers could not reject a job applicant because she wears a headscarf. However, the Progress Party in Norway, led by Siv Jensen, proposed banning headscarf (Hijab) in primary and secondary schools, adopting ethics of assimilation where a person is encouraged to give up his identification with a primary cultural community to adopt a cultural identification with another group (often the dominant group) to create one homogeneous culture.

Moreover, he held the immigrants accountable for their failure to integrate into Norway, as he stated, "It is a rather striking paradox, at least from a Norwegian point of view, that a relatively large group of immigrants seems to be quite reluctant to integrate into the society they have voluntarily chosen to settle in, or voluntarily choose to live in" (Urbye, 2004, translated). Similarly, the Progress Party argues that allowing female children at a young age to wear headscarves means allowing those girls to be raised as subordinates who later become suppressed adults (Dustin, 2004). This argument reveals the Progress Party's general perception of Muslim women's veil. It implies that adult women who wear hijabs were once manipulated by their male relatives to believe that wearing Hijab is what those women want, which is, according to Progress Party, considered a type of oppression because women have not freely chosen whether to wear a headscarf or not. This notion was heavily criticized by Bjoernaas (2015). She thinks this perception of Muslim women as passive victims with no agency is a living example of "Islamophobic victimization" (p.79). She criticizes the Progress party for the unification of the experience of Muslim women. As they assume that all Muslim women have the same needs and face the same struggle, and it is the West's duty to liberate them, first by pinpointing the cause of the problem, which is "the patriarchal Islam," and second by supporting them to assimilate to the civilized and superior Norwegian society. Thus, they adopt the "savior narrative" and demand measures to unveil the Muslim women in Norway. Rey Chow described how the West turns minorities into "an absolute entity in the form of an image, whose silence becomes the occasion for our speech" (Chow, 1993, p. 33). However, even though this proposal of banning the headscarf has not gained much support from other political parties, it influenced the parliament to pass a bill banning the niqab/burka from being worn at educational institutions. Niqab or the Burka is different from the headscarf, as wearing a niqab means the woman covers her whole face or part of it. They argue that wearing a niqab obstructs communication, especially at schools. As

Åshild Bruun-Gundersen, Progress Party's MP, stated, "suppressive garments that prevent integration, prevent women from living a free life" (Christopoulou, 2018, June 11).

## 4.0 Findings

### 4.1 The meaning of security for the Syrian Muslim women in Norway

As discussed in chapter 4, security was defined as “freeing individuals and groups from the social, physical, economic and political constraints that prevent them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do” (Basch, 2004, p. 9). Thus, security in the new conception has ceased to be revolved around the security of states only. In fact, the security of the states became undetachable from the security of its individuals. Hence, in this sub-chapter, an understanding of what security means to the informants is developed through investigating the main sources the interviewees draw their sense of security from. This will help in setting the ground on which the security threats and constraints will be discussed in the coming sub-chapters. Thus, during analysis, the study found that Syrian Muslim women conceptualize their security through two main categories: physical security against all types of violence and psychological security, which is achieved by having stability and successful integration within the Norwegian society.

For example, Interviewee 4 is a single mother of two children. Her husband was arrested by the Syrian regime in 2013, and she has not heard anything about him ever since. She fled to Norway in 2016. She got so emotional as her eyes began to tear up when she talked about her sense of security in Norway, which indicates the sensitiveness of this topic to her. She expressed how she has not felt secure for a long time as she stated:

“It has been almost nine years that I have not felt a sense of security. Only in the past few months, a month or two or maybe three, I started feeling secure and stable.”

She further commented that she would feel more secure and protected if she lived in stability as she stated:

“You know what I mean by stability is when we were living in Syria. When you wake up, and you have a normal day where you have your family, you have people around you. You know nothing bad will happen. There is no war. You will not lose anyone. This feeling I have been living for nine years, but I really haven’t felt safe except for the recent period” (Interviewee 4, 9. June.2022).

Thus, security for Interviewee 4 revolves around stability which she could not achieve in the past nine years. Stability for her means having social support (psychological

security) and physical security that makes her feel protected from war violence. Similarly, interviewee 10 is a single mother of 3 children, and she has been living in Norway since 2015. She left her husband, who used to abuse her and her children. Now she is afraid that her husband will find her and punish her for running away. Thus, she resides in one of the crisis centers that take in people who go through a personal crises. She conceptualized her sense of security as having physical protection. As she stated,

“Currently, I do not feel safe, and I do not expect that I will feel safe unless my husband understands that I want to live my life, but I don’t expect that he will understand” (Interviewee 10, 14. June.2022)

Interviewee 10 expressed how she wants to live her life, having the ability to decide for herself as her husband used to decide everything for her and her children; she stated:

“Do you know what it means to run away with a girl [ interviewee’s daughter] while her father and her aunts wanted to marry her off as she has grown old enough to get married” (Interviewee 10, 14. June.2022)

Thus, the conceptualization of security by having physical security emanates from the experience of abuse she endured at the hands of her husband. According to Maslow (1942), the sense of (in)security is shaped by the individual’s past experiences. However, this case can be an example of both the physical and psychological security threats that some Syrian women face in their lives. According to a report issued by UNHCR (2006), the refugee community can be one of the multiple sources that could threaten the physical security of refugees, as the vulnerability of refugees makes them an easy target for various types of violence.

Moreover, there was a consensus among the interviewees to perceive integration in Norwegian society to be the main source of their security as they feel that a successful integration will provide them a sense of psychological security that makes them feel part of the society in which they are living. The integration goal was conceptualized as learning the Norwegian language, having economic independence, and having a social network. According to the European Commission’s statistics report on migrant integration (2017), employment, education, and participation in society are considered to be the main indicators of migrant integration. However, this study will not focus on the language or economic factors. The focus will be on the social factor, as many informants expressed the importance

of having a social network for strengthening the sense of security in Norway. As interviewee 5 & Interviewee 6 comment,

*“Security is having people that I trust around me, having friends [emphasis added]. Security means to live in a country that has no war”* (Interviewee 5, 11, June 2022).

*“When I came here [to Norway], security became for me to integrate into society. To have an income that gives me security and stability for my family and that we coexist and live peacefully with each other [emphasis added]. For me, psychological security has become more important than anything else”* (Interviewee 6, 11. June 2022).

Thus, to conclude, some Syrian women conceptualized their security as having physical security against all forms of violence (war violence, domestic violence). At the same time, others conceptualized their security as having psychological security that can be obtained by having stability, a social network, and successful integration within Norwegian society.

#### 4.2 Islamophobia and the Syrian Muslim women’s security in Norway

According to Wes Streeting (2019), in his article *Yes, Islamophobia is a type of racism. Here’s why*, Islamophobia is more than anti-Muslim hatred as it begins with simple prejudice in schools, workplaces, and communities, and it ends up with a mosque shooting like the one that happened in Al Noor Mosque in New Zealand in 2019. He argues that “Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness” (Streeting, 2019). This notion comes in line with Skenderovic & Späti’s definition of Islamophobia (2019) that was discussed in chapter 2, as they defined it as a “unidimensional conception of an essentialized Islam and a racialized Muslim” (p.130). Accordingly, Islamophobia is not conceived separately from racialism; on the contrary, it intersects with it. Thus, discrimination against Muslim women should be perceived as Islamophobic/racialized/gendered discrimination. Hence, since the security of the informants revolved around two categories: psychological security and physical security, the thesis will investigate whether Islamophobia affects the security of Muslim women in relation to each type of these securities.

##### 4.2.1 Islamophobia and the Muslim women’s psychological security:



Psychological security is defined as “a feeling of confidence, safety and freedom that separates from fear and anxiety, and especially the feeling of satisfying one’s needs now and in the future (Maslow 1942 cited in Wang et al., 2019). Thus, psychological security is obtained when a person feels empowered, safe, and not restricted by any factor. However, these elements were absent from the Syrian women's experiences in Norway. For example, Interviewee 3 sees that the stereotypical assumption of Muslim women as weak and oppressed is wrong and should not be generalized as most Syrian women are strong and independent women. As she stated when she was asked how she thinks the Norwegian society perceives Muslim women,

“[They think that] we are oppressed. Men dominate us. But in reality, we are not. Syrian women are extremely strong. There are some cases of violence in which they might be oppressed, but not always” (Interviewee 3, 9. June.2022).

Thus, Interviewee 3 opposed the victimization sentiments as she thinks that generalizing these characteristics on Muslim women produces an inaccurate picture. The notion of being modest and conservative is interpreted by the West in being silent and submissive. Similarly, Interviewee 8 expressed the same discontentment when she talked about how Norwegian society perceives Muslim women as she stated,

“Norwegians view us as victims, and I call it “positive racism.” When they feel sympathized that you come from Syria. They say “oh poor you.” But for us, this is negative sympathy because I am not pitiful” (Interviewee 8, 12, June 2022).

However, Interviewee 8 thinks that this victimization sentiment is justifiable because the Norwegian society can see for themselves that most Muslim women have been assigned the reproductive task of caring for the children and doing the household chores. As she stated

“Most of the time, they see her as a victim because this is clear in all the activities where the woman is the one who is taking care of the children. The woman is the one who works at home. Whether we are at school, at home or doing activities, the woman is the one who is doing all the work” (Interviewee 6, 11. June.2022).

On the other hand, other informants think that the victimization of Muslim women by Norwegian society is built on no basis other than their race and religion. So, it is due to racist/Islamophobic perception. For example, Interviewee 3 commented:

“Whatever we do, we will be looked at in the same way. Unless you try to be like them, they may accept you, but you will never be one of them. You are not blond nor have blue eyes, and you are from the Middle East” (Interviewee 3, 9. June.2022).

Thus, regardless of whether the informants think that the victimization sentiments are justifiable or not, most of the informants acknowledge its existence as they feel it in their interaction with Norwegian society. However, the thesis argues that this victimization perception is an act of violence toward Muslim women, based on Galtung’s (1969) definition of violence that was discussed earlier. Galtung considers that violence exists when “the mental realization” of a person is below their “potential realization.” In this case, informants’ mental realization when they are perceived as victims or agentless is below their potential realization that could be reached by perceiving them with no prior conception of what Muslim women are like. Thus, this perception affects the psychological security of Muslim women who feel that their image is predetermined in the mind of the Norwegian society in which they are living in. For example, Interviewee 9 commented on the victimization sentiments and how it affected her life as she shared her story of the suffering she endured to prove herself in the labor market, even though she has a long work experience in the United Nations organization. She commented

“They didn’t spend efforts to know exactly who I am and what I am capable of... It was a very difficult time for me, and I had to prove myself in all the ways I could. I struggled a lot, cried a lot, and collapsed a lot” (Interviewee 9, 12. June.2022).

Here, Interviewee 9 feels that with her previous experience, she would have been taken more seriously in the job market. However, since she was a refugee from a third-world country, she was assumed not to fit well. Thus, she feels that Muslim Arab women have to pay extra efforts to prove that Norwegian society’s perception of who they are, is wrong.

Furthermore, Interviewee 7 expressed her perception of how Muslim women’s behaviors and decisions are misrepresented in Norwegian society as she stated,

*“They [the Norwegian society] cannot accept Muslim woman, because they see that she accepted to be less than the man [emphasis added], especially here women in the north. You saw them. The Norwegian women in the north are stronger than any woman in Norway. Here, the women are strong and they feel*

they are better than the men. So, when they see that the Muslim woman is eager to hide her hair with her veil and hide their body, *they consider it as a sign of your unrecognition of your freedom and your equality with men [emphasis added]*” (Interviewee 7, 11. June.2022).

Interviewee 7 feels that the Norwegian society stigmatizes Muslim women by blaming her for her choice to wear Hijab and for accepting men's dominance. This blame is based on the Norwegian society's understanding of the Hijab as restrictive to Muslim women's freedom and their perception of how Muslim men oppress Muslim women. Interviewee 7 commented on this notion by saying:

“They consider the veiled woman to be a broken woman, deprived of her rights. She is a victim. Although I did not feel that we were victims when we were veiled” (Interviewee 7, 11. June.2022).

Interviewee 7 used to wear Hijab, but now she does not. She explained that when she used to wear Hijab, she did not feel that she was a victim; even after she took it off, she still thinks that Hijab was not restricting her freedom. Thus, for her, the Norwegian society is speaking on behalf of Muslim women when they attach Hijab to the concept of powerlessness. Then, they stigmatize Muslim women for their choices, disregarding that many Muslim women view Hijab as a symbol of freedom and empowerment (Ruby 2006; Droogsma 2007; Carland 2011). Similarly, Interviewee 8 explained how negative stereotyping has led to stigmatizing the whole community. As she commented,

“A large percentage of Norwegians thinks that if one of us [Muslims] did something wrong, so all of us will do the same thing. For example, you enter a store and you find their eyes are following you all the time, fearing that you might shoplift. I really hate this, and when it happens, I leave the shop immediately. I mean, the thief who has a mental illness can be from any race. Why do you look at me because my hair is dark?” (Interviewee 8, 12. June.2022).

Thus, here stigmatization is embedded in the stereotypical image of negative attributes of Muslims and Arabs. Even though Interviewee 8 does not wear a headscarf, still her physical attributes (dark hair) were sufficient to stand as a reason to be classified as a Muslim or as a foreigner from a third-world country. As discussed earlier, islamophobia and racism intersect and cannot be separated to have a pure 100% islamophobia experiences or racialized experiences. Thus, stigmatization and stereotyping that is based on how a person looks or

where he/she comes from is an act of violence that is cast upon Interviewee 8. She despises this attitude as this creates social insecurity because she feels that she is not treated equally to other Norwegians just because she has the look of an Arab. According to a study done by Frost (2011), social stigmatization can manifest in the form of daily stress, the expectation of rejection, or internalized stigma, where the stigmatized person applies the negative social meanings of stigma to his/her own self-concept. Thus, stigmatization can threaten the psychological security of Muslim women and can lead to adopting defensive mechanisms that protect them from feeling ashamed or undervalued, and the story of Interviewee 6 is a living example. Interviewee 6 talked about how Hijab was part of her cultural customs and traditions, but she had to give it up because Hijab in Norway is viewed strictly as a religious symbol. She stated:

“I used to wear a hijab in Syria. In Norway, I took it off and put on a hat instead. I did not accept taking off my hijab completely, even though I do not have much adherence to the hijab, I mean, as an essential part of my style or as a religious symbol. It was something that is part of our customs and traditions [...] I felt that I had a big responsibility in balancing between the Syrian community here and the Norwegian community, since I had many Norwegian friends” (interviewee 6, 11. June.2022).

In this example, Interviewee 6 felt that she was pressured to remove her Hijab even though Hijab was not a religious symbol for her, but it was a part of her culture. However, she decided to remove Hijab due to the indirect pressure that is embedded in the integration goal, which is foreseen as not possible with keeping the Hijab on. Interviewee 6 mentioned that she used a hat instead of Hijab because she felt a big responsibility in balancing between the two communities. This indicates that removing Hijab is a way to be closer to the Norwegian community. The problematic side of wearing a Hijab is not in its style, but it is in viewing Hijab strictly as a religious symbol and as a symbol of gender oppression. This view can cause an integration problem that has social ramifications, like being viewed as inferior and submissive. Many studies have found that Muslim women might dissociate partly or fully from their cultures and Islamic identities, such as removing their Hijab, in order to mitigate social barriers and avoid social discrimination. This happens as a result of social conflict or due to the emergence of a new identity that suits secular societies, which view the Hijab as suppressive and demeaning (Weber 2016; Mohammadi 2018; Finn et al. 2018). Thus, viewing Hijab as a religious symbol means disregarding the other factors that Hijab can stand for.

While many Muslim women view Hijab as a symbol of freedom and empowerment (Ruby 2006; Droogsma 2007; Carland 2011), or they wear it as part of their traditional clothes (Slininger, 2014). These representations cannot be reduced to only religious factors. Hence, viewing Hijab strictly as a religious symbol has an impact on the Interviewee's freedom of practicing her traditions, has reduced the perception of Muslim women to be viewed only through unilateral view through her religion, and finally pressured some Muslim women to remove it just to avoid being seen as inferior or unwilling to integrate. Thus, this triple effect threatens Muslim women's psychological security as they become constrained and constricted, with no freedom to practice their religion or tradition.

Thus, if we analyzed the above examples and experiences of victimization, misrepresentation, and stigmatization of the informants, we would find that these three categories have one thing in common, which is negative stereotyping of Muslim women. In a study conducted by Maimuna Abdullahi (2016) on the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women in Sweden, she found that stereotyping Muslim women as weak and passive is Islamophobic discrimination. Similarly, in this study, we note that negative stereotyping has contributed to the victimization sense by Norwegian society. Negative stereotyping has caused a misrepresentation of Muslim women by viewing them in a unilateral religious dimension. And finally, negative stereotyping has led to her stigmatization because the belief that Muslim women are oppressed and agentless would heighten the stigmatization sense that blames Muslim women for not acting against their oppressor. Thus, the study found that stereotyping Muslim women as inferior, submissive, and victims has a huge impact on how Syrian women experience confidence, safety, and freedom in Norway, which in extension, influences the degree of psychological security the Syrian Muslim women feel. One way of understanding this is to look at the stereotyping of Muslim women from the lens of Islamophobia. This comes in line with what Bjoernaas (2015) calls "Islamophobic victimization," which is the stereotyping of Muslim women as passive with no agency. Hence, according to the analysis of the experiences of Syrian women, the thesis finds that the psychological security of the informants was threatened by the power of stereotyping that has heightened the victimization sense, caused a false representation of Muslim Syrian women and stigmatization of Muslim women's behavior.

#### 4.2.2 Islamophobia and the Physical security of the Syrian Muslim women in Norway:

To define physical security, it is helpful to bring in Galtung's definition of physical violence, which he sees as any type of violence that is directed at the somatic element of a human being (Galtung, 1969). According to the survey conducted by Hoffmann and Moe, 10 percent of the Norwegian society supported the statement, "With regard to recent terrorist attacks, harassment and violence against Muslims can be justified" (Hoffmann & Moe, 2017, p.9). Even though the percentage is not that high, but still, it indicates that there is a prejudice toward Muslims that justifies physical violence toward Muslims. In reference to this study, Interviewee 9 was the only one who shared a story where she was attacked physically due to racial discrimination. As she stated:

"I have gone through some experiences where I felt that the community attacked me. Of course, at that time, I felt so fragile, but after a while, I recovered and became stronger. Not everyone can get over such experiences. It was a very absurd experience of racism. I was in the metro, and it was not too late, I mean, about 8 O'clock. There was me and a Norwegian woman and this guy on the train unit. So, the man was looking at me and heading toward me, cursing. He intended to hit me. He looked like he was drunk. The Norwegian woman did nothing, but she was scared as well. I thought of what I should do, and I was very scared that he would reach me and hit me. Luckily, we were close to the station. Although it was not the station that I wanted to get off at, I went immediately to another door, it opened, and I got off. He didn't have time to catch up to me as the door closed on him, and he started banging on the door, saying [obscenities]<sup>2</sup>. I got scared and stressed. I know he attacked me because of my Hijab. It was a very difficult situation, and whenever I passed the same station, my heart beat faster. However, I got over this incident. There are people who have been exposed to situations that are more difficult than this" (Interviewee 9, 12. June.2022).

Interviewee 9 got so emotional when she narrated this story as if she was reliving it all over again. She says she got over it, but how she talked about it tells otherwise. Racial trauma has many effects on people who have experienced racial discrimination. It can cause low self-esteem and self-worth (priest et al., 2013), it can cause severe emotional problems (Polanco-

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<sup>2</sup> The text has been edited to remove swear words.

Roman et al., 2016), or it can contribute to the avoidance of people, places, or situations that reminds the person of traumatic incidents (Resnick, 2022). As discussed in the literature review, Galtung (1969) has differentiated between manifest violence and latent violence. As in racial fights, the violence is visible and manifested in the actual fight. However, there is hidden violence that existed long before initiating the fight, and that is what Galtung calls latent violence. Thus, in the previous example, Interviewee 9's physical safety was endangered. She believes that the aggressor intended to harm her physically, but she was out of his reach. She believes as well that the attacker had a negative prejudice toward Muslims. From Interviewee 9's point of view, her physical security was threatened due to a racist attack that was directed at her because of her Hijab. Here, her Hijab identified her as being different. Nadine Naber argues how wearing Hijab has made Muslim women more visible, and that heightened the risks of being discriminated against by the public sphere as she said, "Women who wear the hijab were more of a target because they're more visible than Muslim men in public. The awareness that they were in more danger and were more impacted than men could be seen by all of the events that were organized in solidarity with veiled women in response to the backlash" (2008, p.293). However, it is noteworthy that even if the attacker did not have any prejudice toward Muslims and Interviewee 9 was a random person that he attacked; we are still interested in the perception of Interviewee 9 and how she perceived this incident as an attack with racial discrimination motives. Here, the study argues that stereotyping Muslim women as weak and inferior has not only impacted the way Norwegian society looks at Muslim women but also has impacted the way Muslim women attribute all negative incidents to be related to racial discrimination. According to Stephan (2000), negative stereotype by the in-group members affects the attitude of both the in-group and out-group members. Thus, in this case, even though the attacker did not say any word that indicated his actions to be attributed to Muslim hatred, Interviewee 9 perceived the incident to be racial discrimination because of her Hijab. Thus, stereotyping of Muslim women has negatively affected both societies; where in both cases, the Muslim women are the ones who had to pay the price in being harassed and in experiencing the feeling of inferiority which makes her see all negative experiences to be related to her race and religion, even with a lack of clear evidence that these experiences are racially charged. Thus, the study concludes that Islamophobia has jeopardized the physical security of Interviewee 9, and in some cases, it alters the negative experiences of Muslim women to be perceived and explained largely by her race and religion.

#### 4.2.3 Islamophobia as a threat to Muslim women's integration in Norway:

Based on the analysis of the security concept from the interviewees' perception, integration was found to be an important factor for the interviewees' feeling of security in Norway. As successful integration provides them with a sense of belonging and acceptance in the new society, which has a positive effect on their psychological security. Thus, it is worthy of investigating whether Islamophobia has any effect on the informants' integration. According to Berry (1997), integration is a combined form of high structural assimilation and low cultural assimilation. High structural assimilation can be achieved by having high and constant interaction between the two groups (dominant and non-dominant), while low cultural assimilation is achieved when each group maintains their cultures. However, during analysis, it was found that the interviewees faced many difficulties in achieving both components (the high structural assimilation and the low cultural assimilation). According to the analysis of the data in this research, some informants expressed that their integration was hindered by the inferiority feelings which they experienced when they engaged with the Norwegian society. Others expressed that they experienced negative identity changes in their integration within Norwegian society. Thus, in this sub-chapter, I am going to explore these two themes and discuss whether Islamophobia contributes to the promotion of inferiority feelings and the negative change of identity, which can have an effect on the informants' psychological security.

Contemporary research has shown that keeping ties with one's own culture and integration in the new society can co-occur at the same time without having any negative effect on each other. On the contrary, one may promote the other (Upegui-Hernandez, 2014). However, this argument is disputable because it takes for granted the openness of the host country toward the minority's culture. According to Berry (1991), integration can be successful only when the individual has the choice of integrating and when the dominant group is open toward cultural diversity (Berry. 1991 cited in Berry, 1997, p.10). Thus, transnational connections with one's culture cannot promote integration in the new society when one's culture is constructed within a racialized discourse. Thus, we can investigate the openness of the Norwegian society toward cultural diversity by looking at how the informants perceive the Norwegian society's attitudes toward them. Hence, Interviewee 6 described how the integration process was difficult because of the way the Norwegian society perceived her as she stated:

“You feel like you're being chased by their eyes. You can sense it in their uncomfortable gaze, always there wherever you go. Even if you have friends



or you are integrated into Norwegian society. Wherever you are, in the street, in the boutique, at school, wherever you are, you see it in their gaze that keeps following you to see what you are doing, right or wrong, how you deal with your children [...] You feel that they are monitoring you in every little detail and that is really tiring” (Interviewee 6, 11. June.2022).

Here, Interviewee 6 feels that she is monitored all the time by the Norwegian society to judge her behavior that does not suit the Norwegian culture. As discussed in the power relation sub-chapter, the concept of disciplinary power was introduced by Foucault (1991); where the modern state employs the self-governance concept where individuals feel obligated to abide by the rules, regulations, and social norms because they feel that they will be outcast by the community if they did not follow the rules. Similarly, Syrian women are experiencing a self-governance attitude because they feel that they are being observed all the time. This state of being observed was described by interviewee 6 as tiring. The feeling of distress and uncomfortableness that was experienced by interviewee 6 can be interpreted to be due to the fact that most of the social norms and behavior codes that she adopted since she was a child have changed for her drastically in a short period of time. According to Hasenfratz and Knafo-Noam (2015), social norms are transmitted between generations where certain elements of culture remain stable and other element change over time. This means that the change of some cultural elements and norms takes time which allows individuals to adapt to the new regulation and new social norms gradually. However, in the case of migrants who endured a sudden change in social norms and behavior codes, this could be so overwhelming that it would give rise to feelings of distress and insecurity, especially when this regulatory power is exercised with a charged notion of being inferior. By the same token, Berry (1991) sees that sometimes, “changes in the cultural context exceed the individual’s capacity to cope, because of the magnitude, speed, or some other aspect of the change, leading to serious psychological disturbances, such as clinical depression, and incapacitating anxiety” (Berry, 1991 cited in Berry, 1997, p.13). Thus, the thesis argues that the experiences of Muslim women are different from other experiences of the subjugating regulatory power that is exercised on individuals from the same community because the notion of inferiority is essentialized to the identity of Muslim women. This notion of being inferior is driven by the Islamophobic sentiments that made these informants perceive the way Europeans look at Muslim women in a negative way. Any person from the same community will be judged only if they act out of the community’s social norms. However, Interviewee 6 feels that she is being judged even

before doing any act that shows her deviation from the Norwegian social norms. Thus, being monitored by people has given the informant the feeling that she is expected to act outside the Norwegian social norms, and any deviation from the new social norms will be frowned upon. Hence, from Interviewee 6's point of view, monitoring her is wrongly justified by the Norwegian community to correct her behavior whenever needed. And this has created a sense of distress and unbelonging. According to Butler (1993a), certain bodies, which have been constructed within a racialized discourse, are seen as dangerous bodies, even before they make a move. Thus, the subjugating power that is exercised on informants is Islamophobic by nature as it's driven by the superiority-inferiority aspect. This was also manifested in other experiences by some of the informants. As Interviewee 4 stated,

“I remember when I removed the hijab, the first day I went to school. I saw my teacher, whom we used to think of as racist and looks down on us. She looked at me with sparkling eyes. Even the principal looked at me in the same way. I wondered why they had not looked at me in this way when I had my head scarf on and why their gaze had changed when I removed it. This means that they perceive the hijab as a bad thing. I do not want to generalize, but they do not consider it a positive thing as their eyes were really shining as if I had done something wow, a great achievement” (Interviewee 4, 9. June.2022).

Based on Galtung's classifications of violence, which were discussed in chapter 2, the subjugating power here is considered a type of violence. According to Galtung (1969), violence can occur when the dominant group influences the behavior of the non-dominant group by rewarding or punishing them through what he called a “negative and positive approach to influence.” Thus, in this example, the teacher and the school principal rewarded Interviewee 4 with an admiring look that she did not see before as a result of removing her Hijab. Thus, they exercised a type of violence on her that made her feel that now she is recognized and seen. As if she could not be recognized before when she had the Hijab on. This violence clearly emanated from an Islamophobic perception that views Hijab as degrading to Muslim women's identity.

Moreover, Interviewee 4 talked about the inferiority feeling, which was considered one of the reasons that made integration hard. As she commented on the reasons she could not make any Norwegian friends by saying:

“In my opinion, there are many reasons, psychological reasons more than tangible reasons on the ground. The first thing, I feel that we are not accepted a hundred percent, that they look at us with the view that you can't be elevated to my position as a Norwegian or as a European, that you come from a backward environment with a meaningless culture, that you will not understand the rich European culture and how we made changes and sought equality between men and women and many other ideas” (Interviewee 4, 9. June.2022).

Here interviewee 4 feels that the superiority attitude is the barrier that made her distance herself from building a social network within the Norwegian society. Similarly, Interviewee 9 expressed that integration is difficult when society assigns who she is by her religion, race, and ethnicity, disregarding her inner identity as she stated:

“When you look at any human being, you should perceive him as a human being. You should look at my work achievements, my education achievements, my social life, and how I treat you regardless of my hijab, my clothes, or my language” (Interviewee 9, 12. June.2022).

Here the stereotyping not only has an effect on the psychological security of the Syrian women, as we discussed earlier, but it also has an effect on her integration. Interviewee 9 has expressed her discontentment in integrating into a society that perceives her according to what she wears or which religion she adopts.

Another point was raised by Interviewee 1 when she was asked if she has ever felt restricted in wearing Burkini (a swimsuit for Muslim women that covers the whole body except the face) in Norway. She expressed that she never felt restricted because Syrian women prepare themselves mentally for any type of racism they face. As she stated:

“I think that the Syrian woman has a lot of freedom here because the Norwegian society is not so restrictive; even if someone said something upsetting, most Syrian women do not care as they think it is normal, and they have prepared themselves for these situations” (Interviewee 1, 10. June.2022)

Thus, here Interviewee 1 sees that Muslim women expect and prepare themselves mentally for the otherness experience as they have taken this experience to be part of the difficulties they must overcome in the integration process within the Norwegian society. Hence, they try to adapt and overlook the racist experiences for the sake of reaching a more important goal

which is integration. One interpretation that could explain this perception is in accordance with what Maslow (1942) suggested some insecure people tend to be submissive that they do not challenge anymore as a back to safety mechanism to lessen the insecurity they feel. Another interpretation suggests that ignoring abuse can be a self-preservation tactic for dealing with its persistent and everyday nature (Browne et al., 2011). Thus, Muslim women may use this mechanism and view racism/ discrimination as normal experiences that they should ignore so they can move on in their lives. However, if Muslim women expect to be discriminated against in public places and in social relations, it is a societal problem that could have a negative effect on both societies and on the individuals who endure this discrimination. On the other hand, it was interesting to find a completely opposite perception of integration in Norway. Interviewee 2 was the only Syrian Muslim woman among the ten interviewed women who expressed that she didn't face any problems in her integration within Norwegian society. Interviewee 2 was asked if she had ever experienced any direct or indirect racist reaction in Norway. As she stated:

No, not at all. I was supported by the Norwegian community and my teachers at school. They all stood by me taught me the value of myself and, how I was living, and how I am living now. I became more relieved now. I loved Norway more. I love Norway a lot" (Interviewee 2, 10. June.2022).

Thus, Interviewee 2 does not think that Norwegian society looks at Muslim women as inferior. On the contrary, she thinks that they have been like a family to her. Thus, in this situation, the Norwegian society served as the supporting net that boosted the feeling of security for interviewee 2. However, interviewee 2 expressed the lack of support she received from the Syrian community in Norway, and that will be discussed in the coming chapter.

The second theme that was depicted during the analysis is identity change. It could be argued that identity change is a natural phenomenon within the migration process as new identities emerge in the process of adaptation to the new society. According to Essed et al., "relevant dimensions of identities are strategically renegotiated and changed in the process of recreating a sense of home and meaningful life in new environments" (Essed et al., 2004, p.5). Thus, the identity here is renegotiated until a new identity that suits both communities emerge.

However, the identity change which was experienced by some Muslim women was perceived by them as a negative change. For example, Interviewee 7 dyed her hair blond to blend in with the Norwegian community. She commented she did this to feel safer. As she stated:

“I was very afraid at the beginning to show that I was a Muslim [...] Fear of the strangers to know you, that you are a Muslim because I saw the glasses in which they see Islam, and I cannot change it by myself” (Interviewee 7, 11. June.2022)

Interviewee 7 is aware of the Islamophobic perception that most Muslim women are viewed with. Thus, she intends to avoid this classification by removing all the signs that would give away her real identity, being an Arab or a Muslim. This comes in line with the findings of Finn et al. (2018), who concluded that disassociation from the Arab or Muslim identity is a mechanism to mitigate social discrimination. Thus, this disassociation is driven by the Islamophobic view of Muslim women as victims, weak, and pitied; and it results in a compulsive identity change to preserve her threatened security if she was identified as a Muslim or as an Arab woman. Moreover, this perception gave Interviewee 7 a sense of vulnerability. She used to be so confident, strong, and independent. Now she describes herself as weak, hesitant, and incapable of doing what she wants as she states:

“The identity has changed. I mean, they [the identity in Syria and the identity in Norway] are different. [referring to herself], who was in Syria, was much stronger [...] I felt stronger and smarter because I knew everything, I knew how to plan, I knew how to execute this plan, and I could even do more than that [...]. But here in Norway, I felt like a weak person, almost illiterate, who needed to learn a lot of things. The lack of information has made me have a state of hesitation and a feeling that I am a weak person, I was not that person who can do anything and has self-confident” (Interview 7, 11. June. 2022).

Here, it can be argued that the presumed stereotype that Interviewee 7 was looked at by the Norwegian community has affected her perception of herself. The Islamophobic perception of Muslim women as weak and submissive has a negative effect on Interviewee 7's personality. She used to perceive her personality as strong and independent in Syria. While in Norway, she perceives herself as a weak person. Thus, Interviewee 7 experience powerlessness and uncertainty. According to Levy et al. (2009), the awareness of the negative stereotypes of the minority group undermines the well-being and effective performance of this group in their daily life. Thus, the new perception of Interviewee 7's identity affects her integration within the Norwegian community as she feels less confident and disempowered. And this feeling ultimately

affects her psychological security by not being able to perceive herself in the old way, the strong version of herself.

Another example is set by Interviewee 5, who expressed that she experienced an identity split, not identity change, as she could not use her real identity outside her house as she commented:

“The first character is who I am, but the second character is the artificial character. It is the external character in my dealings with co-workers, at the university, and with any Norwegians. The second character is a more serious character who does not joke much, who just wants to reach her goal and just wants to move things forward” (Interview 5, 11. June. 2022).

When Interviewee 5 was asked to elaborate on the reasons behind this split, she attributed it to the language factor and to the cultural differences factor. Thus, here the cultural difference factor was considered as an obstacle that pressured her into adopting another personality that concealed her real one. One might explain that this phenomenon is natural as everybody tends to switch codes of their behaviors to appeal to a different crowd or audience. However, this shift was more than just a change in behaviors. From Interviewee 5’s perception, it is a change of personality, one that she does not even recognize and like as she stated:

“Since we came to Norway, I feel that I developed a new personality which I don’t feel familiar with. It is the character that I use in my daily life when I leave the house. My old personality, I use with my family, when I am at home”  
(Interviewee 5, 11. June. 2022)

Thus, having an identity split is a clear indication of how Interviewee 5 feels the urge to conceal her real identity because of the unacceptance of who she is outside the boundaries of her house. This pressure is due to the notion of the unaccepted Islamic norms within European societies, which is one of several notions of Islamophobia. If Islam and Muslims were fully accepted in Norwegian society, Interviewee 5 would not have endured this identity split that would ultimately affect the security of her identity and, in turn, her psychological security.

To conclude, the integration of informants was hindered by the Islamophobic discrimination they experienced. Islamophobic discrimination was embedded in the feeling of being inferior, which was communicated through casting the informants as “the others.” through the attempts to correct the Muslim women’s behavior even before

they act, through the cultural pressure that was felt by Muslim women which led to a negative change in their identity or identity split.

#### 4.3 The impact of preserving patriarchal values on the security of Syrian Muslim women in Norway.

Social values are seen as values that are “deeply embedded in the world around us, in our material culture, collective behaviors, traditions, and social institutions. They are important concepts that define and bind groups, organizations, and societies” (Manfredo et al., 2016, p.3). Thus, social values are important to group dynamics as it stands as the unwritten behavioral code among the group’s individuals that should be abided by and followed. As discussed earlier, the social values of the Syrian community are considered patriarchal. Patriarchalism is rooted within the social and juridical system in Syria, and it is manifested through traditions, customs, and social norms. Patriarchy is defined as a “system of practices, arrangements and social relations that ensure biological reproduction, child rearing and reproduction of gender subjectivity, as well as gender ideology, or the sense of gender identity, itself” (Fox, 1989 cited in Bahlleda, 2015, p.16). However, In the case of immigration, migrants’ values and beliefs start to change as a part of the adaptation to the new society. Hence, in this sub-chapter, the thesis will investigate the experiences of Syrian Muslim women in relation to their position of preserving their community’s patriarchal values and whether the rejection or acceptance of preserving these values affects their physical and psychological security in Norway. Thus, I have categorized those experiences into two categories. Experiences in the private sphere and experiences in the public sphere.

The private sphere is defined as the realm of the nuclear family. Women occupy a certain position within the nuclear family, as a wife, a mother, or as a daughter. Interviewee 2 shared her experience in defying patriarchal values that were practiced inside her house. First, she talked about her relationship with her husband. Even though she migrated to Norway in 2017, she felt that she was still living in Syria till she got separated from her husband in 2021. As she stated:

“I feel that I moved to Norway exactly six months ago. In November 2021, I felt that I was living in Norway. Before that date, I felt that I was living in Syria because my mentality and my thinking were like the old life that was in Syria [...] The man has the final word. The woman is born to be at home. She cannot work, she cannot go out of the house, and she is not allowed to keep pace with the modern

developments as the world is developing, but we remain backward in Syria, and of course, I am not generalizing; I am talking about my own experience. The woman must obey her husband. She must be below his rank” (Interviewee 2, 10. June.2022).

Here Interviewee 2 expressed how Syrian women’s role was mainly within the household. They are seen as subordinates to men and are expected to obey them since men are considered the main providers. Even though she moved to Norway, a country where gender equality is high, she still felt that she was living in Syria with the same patriarchal system that assigned her role to do the house chores and be obedient. That affected her integration as she was isolated from Norwegian society for five years. According to Welchman and Hossain (2005), cultural change that gives women access to their rights can be perceived by some men as a threat. Similarly, Interviewee 2 expressed how her husband’s motive to distance her from Norwegian society was to maintain her role as an obedient wife, as she commented:

“For the sake of keeping me under his control, my husband used to tell me that they [ the Norwegians] do not like us, that they do not want to talk to me. Stay away from them. He did not want me to have any kind of interaction with them, so I do not get the chance to know their culture and to know that I have the right to live my life” (Interviewee 2, 10. June.2022).

Thus, Interviewee 2’s husband exercised violence on her by manipulating her thoughts about the Norwegians’ rejection of her for the sake of keeping her under his control. As a result, Interviewee 2 lived under the patriarchal system for 5 years in Norway and that has affected her psychological security as she was imprisoned, distanced and isolated from the outer community.

Another example was set by Interviewee 10, as she shared her experience where she had to endure seven years of abuse at the hands of her husband. It was hard for her to stand up against her husband’s authority as she felt powerless due to the constant reminder of her role as an obedient wife within the Syrian community. She moved with her husband to Norway in 2015 and left her husband in 2022 to live now in a crisis center. She talked about her sense of security after she defied the patriarchal social norms as she stated:

“Do you know what it means to run away with the girl [ interviewee’s daughter] while her father and her aunts wanted to marry her off as she has grown old enough



to get married? So, you take your daughter and run away? And tell the father that you have nothing to do with me or with your daughter? Do you know what might happen? I took this decision 3 or 4 months ago, and I am still alive!” (Interviewee 10, 14. June.2022)

In this example, violence is being exercised on two women, the daughter, and the mother. The father exercises violence on his daughter as he wants to marry her off without her consent, and violence is exercised on the mother, as she is not allowed to object to his decisions in running the family’s matters. Thus, Interviewee 10 decided to run away with her children to protect them. Hence, her physical security was threatened as she implied that her life was in jeopardy by saying, “I am still alive!”. She expressed her wonderment that even though she defied her husband’s authority, she still breathes, implying that the expected reaction of her husband is to pursue her and kill her for her revolutionary actions. Moreover, her psychological security is threatened as well because she is living under the fear that her husband might know her location and kill her. Thus, she could not move on in her life as she still resides in a crisis center. She expressed that she could not move out of the crisis center as she does not feel safe living alone anymore, and that shows the extent of the psychological damage that Interviewee 10’s husband has caused her under the name of abandoning the social values of the Syrian community.

Thus, from the above examples, we get a glimpse of the internal pressure to preserve patriarchal values. Men tried to impose gender identity on their partners by pressuring them to abide by the patriarchal rules that are entrenched in the patriarchal Syrian society. However, the physical and psychological security of both Interviewees (Interviewees 10 & 2) has been threatened by either preserving the patriarchal values, which led to isolating Interviewee 2 from the Norwegian community for five years or by challenging the patriarchal values, which threatened Interviewee 10’s life. Thus, the patriarchal social norms that are enforced by males continue to be observed in Norway, irrespective of having legislation that promotes and protects the rights of women. However, not all interviewees felt insecure inside their houses. Only two out of ten shared their experiences of insecurity in the private sphere. Interestingly, these two women haven’t criticized the perception of viewing Muslim women as weak and passive. As the rest of the informants are the ones who criticized this perception, and they are the ones who expressed that they have a peaceful life where patriarchal values have no room in the private sphere. However, when we talked about the experiences of insecurity in the

public sphere, all the interviewees, with no exception, expressed that they have been subjected to the Syrian community's pressure to preserve patriarchal values.

The public sphere is defined as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed” (Habermas et al., 1964, p.49). Thus, Social norms are constructed in the public sphere so it can provide order to it. All the interviewees have shared the notion that the Syrian community is pressuring Syrian women, in particular, to preserve the patriarchal values. This subjection is exercised through community shaming. Braithwaite (1989) understands shaming as “all social processes of expressing disapproval which have the intention or effect of invoking remorse in the person being shamed and/or condemnation by others who become aware of the shaming” (p.100). Thus, before going into examples of community shaming and its effects on their psychological security, the Interviewees described how it is like to live within such a system. For example, interviewee 1 expressed how the patriarchal system runs in the veins of the Syrian community as she stated:

“We have a principle that a man can do anything. No one criticizes him because he is a man. He has all the right to do whatever he wants. While the woman, no, no, everything she does is under observation, under the microscope” (interviewee 1, 10. June.2022).

According to Baker et al. (1999), this urge to control and criticize women's behavior in a patriarchal society is linked to the concept of honor. Honor is an integral part of patriarchalism because it is in the name of honor; males have the right to monitor, adjust and even punish women if they see any deviation from the standard conduct of women. For example, Interviewee 9 expressed how the Syrian community uses shaming and stigmatization as a tool to control the behavior of Syrian women in everything she does as she stated:

“I feel that the Syrian community here is so critical. Most of the people around me interfere and pressure women to maintain the Islamic dress code, criticize how she speaks and how she walks with a male friend in the street even though this man is only a friend from her school, and how she takes the train with a company of a man. As if they want to make a small Syrian community in Norway, but it is never going to happen. So, the judging eye was very strong and noticeable. And it does not end with their judging, no they pass this information to other people, so everyone knows

as if this woman has done something outside the accepted behavior that was common in our country” (Interviewee 9, 12. June.2022).

Here, interviewee 9 talked about how the Syrian community pressures Syrian women into maintaining the Islamic dress code, maintaining the patriarchal values that prohibit socializing women with men. This pressure is exercised through the act of shaming. Shaming for relinquishing her traditions and social values. Similarly, Interviewee 1 talked about how the Syrian community in Norway would criticize and stigmatize the Syrian woman if she asked for divorce due to her husband’s abuse, as she stated:

“Why can't you stand it? Women must endure this situation. This is the way we have been raised. You came here; you should not change your habits and traditions. You must live in the same way you were living before. You should not change anything” (Interviewee 1, 10. June.2022).

A study done by Saleh & Luppicini (2017) on Arab women in Saudi Arabia found that divorced women are being blamed and perceived as sinful. They feel that they have been criminalized and outcast from their society. These feelings become an integral part of the divorce decision as Interviewee 1 thinks that women must be strong enough to stand up for themselves against a patriarchal society that will try to stigmatize her in every possible way; as she commented,

“I think that if a woman wants to get divorced, she has to be prepared psychologically for these things. For sure, she did not take the divorce decision overnight. As if she said, “I’m done, I will be divorced.” No, I think she thought about all the negative sides. So she is prepared mentally for all the downsides. It is only a short period of time, then people will forget about her” (Interviewee 1, 10. June.2022).

Similarly, Interviewee 10 expressed the same notion that when a woman wants to change anything in her conduct, she should ignore the verbal abuse she could receive from the Syrian community as she stated:

“If she decides to make this decision, she must be strong to bear the words and criticism of backbiting and gossip, because she will become the center of the talk, all the time” (Interviewee 10, 14. June.2022).

Thus, community shaming is exercised on Syrian women to control their behavior and to prevent them from seeking their rights. However, community shaming has serious consequences that affect the psychological and physical security of Syrian women in Norway. For example, Interviewee 6 used to wear Hijab in Syria, and she wanted to remove it in Norway due to some reasons that were discussed in the previous chapter. However, she could not remove her Hijab completely, but she used a hat instead to cover her hair. As she commented

“If I want to remove the hijab completely, I will be rejected and cast out from the Syrian society in my area” (Interviewee 6, 11. June.2022).

Thus, not abiding by patriarchal values that perceive the Hijab as an essential part of women’s chastity will lead to women’s stigmatization as the Syrian community will not accept them.

Moreover, community shaming can threaten the physical security of women as well. Interviewee 10 expressed how she endured her husband's abuse for seven years because she feared that the Syrian community would stigmatize her and question her morals if she ever dared to ask for a divorce as she stated:

“I endured many things in my marriage. If I was in Syria, I would not have accepted them. For example, after I came here, my husband and I had huge disagreements regarding fundamental issues. I should have asked for a divorce, but I did not because they [the Syrian community] would talk about me. They will say that after I came to Europe, I left my husband; or they will say that I left my husband for someone else” (Interviewee 10, 14. June.2022).

In answering a question, “If you were in Syria, would you have asked for divorce earlier?”. She said, “Yes because my family would defend my name. I would return to my family’s house. Here, they will make up stories that he is good, but I am the ....” (Interviewee 10, 14. June.2022)

Thus, here interviewee 10 has endured physical and mental abuse from her husband because she thinks that society’s wrath will be harsher. She expects that the Syrian community will dishonor her name and stigmatize her. Many women prefer to preserve their marriage and endure abuse because of the social stigma of being a divorced woman. The concept of divorce in Europe is looked at differently than divorce in Syria. Interviewee 10 talked about how she

would not have accepted the abuse from her husband if she had been in Syria because she could ask for a divorce and returned to her family's house, which will protect her honor. But in Norway, she does not have a family. Thus, asking for divorce will make society question her motives by assuming that she wants to get divorced and live freely with no male authority to guide her and keep her on the right path. This perception stems from perceiving honor as intrinsically linked to women's behavior and body. Thus, a woman's body should always be governed by a male figure (father, brother, husband, male relatives) (Welchman & Hossain, 2005). However, with the lack of presence of a male figure to protect the male's honor after divorce, women become vulnerable, as they might go astray and lose their path.

Another interesting point was raised by some interviewees is that they faced an internal culture clash within the Syrian community in Norway. These interviewees have expressed that they enjoyed their freedom in Syria more than they did in Norway. For example, Interviewee 3 described herself as an open-minded Muslim woman. She was raised in a nonconventional environment as she never felt like an outsider from her community in Syria. However, when she moved to Norway, she felt a cultural clash between herself and other Syrian women, which made her fall back from engaging with the Syrian community. So, she expressed how she felt as an outcast from the Syrian community as she stated:

“In Syria, I was free to wear a short dress. My friends and my family are all beside me, but here the community watches you and judges you. They accuse you that you have changed your traditions and the way you dress, without even knowing your past” (Interviewee 3, 9. June.2022).

Similarly, the same notion was expressed by Interviewee 7 as she stated:

“In Syria, we used to go out; my friends and I stay out late at night. In the evening, we go shopping after work. We almost never go home straight away after work. But here, I feel that we became homebodies because Syrians here still hold on to old social norms like having separate gatherings for men and women. Or that women should not talk to strange men” (Interviewee 7, 11. June.2022).

This internal cultural clash was never felt by Interviewees 3& 7 in Syria. This can be interpreted to be due to the redistribution of the Syrian population via migration. Even though 87% of Syrians are Muslims, still cultural diversity is considered prominent in Syria (Office

of International Religious Freedom, 2021). According to Tam (2015), variation in social norms can be related to the subcultures within cultural groups. This means that within a cultural group, variation can exist in terms of the level of commitment to religion or traditions. As interviewee 7 commented:

“We came from a very conservative environment, the Douma area. It has a very conservative and religious atmosphere. I moved to Damascus, the city because I wanted to live my twenties and thirties the way I wanted. In Damascus, the city, I did not feel constrained. Once I left Douma and moved to the city, I stopped feeling constrained because people there are freer” (Interviewee 7, 11. June.2022).

Thus, after migrating to Norway, the Syrian population was redistributed, and that caused an internal cultural clash. This internal clash has contributed to Interviewee 3 & 7’s perception of being an outsider from the Syrian community in Norway. As they stated

“I am not close to the Syrian community. We meet only on religious holidays. Other than this, I stay away from them. It is better for my mental health” (Interviewee 3, 9. June.2022).

“I try to attend their [the Syrian community] gatherings, and I love how when we meet, we sing and dance. But I feel that they cast me out sometimes. As they say that I adopt Norwegian habits, I dress like them, go out like them, talk like them” (Interviewee 7, 11. June.2022).

Thus, stigmatization, outcasting, and the feeling of non-belonging are themes that were discussed in the experiences of the informants in engaging with the Syrian community in Norway. These experiences defy the very definition of having psychological security that is conceptualized in the feeling of confidence, safety, and freedom. Hence, community shaming has a huge impact on the informants’ life. Some of the informants had to endure the abuse that jeopardized their physical security just to avoid their community’s stigmatization. Others refused to abide by the patriarchal norms and faced the harsh consequences of being stigmatized and cast out from the Syrian community, ultimately affecting her sense of belonging. According to Twenge & Baumeister (2004), social exclusion increases aggression and self-defeating behavior, and it causes human suffering as it is considered an obstacle to achieving a livable society because

the need for social belonging—to be connected socially to a bigger network—is a basic human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Thus, to conclude, two informants out of ten have endured pressure on the private sphere to maintain patriarchal values, and that affected their physical and psychological security. On the other hand, all ten interviewees expressed that they have been subjected to stronger pressure in the public sphere by the Syrian community to maintain the patriarchal social norms. Similarly, coping mechanisms differed as some women tried to preserve the patriarchal values but acknowledge the Syrian community's pressure and what might happen if they decided to renounce some social norms which have caused a feeling of confinement; others distanced themselves from the Syrian community in Norway to not be subjected to the Syrian community's restrictions which has caused a feeling of non-belonging and estrangement.

## 5.0 Discussion: From Syria to Norway: Are Muslim women secured?

Muslim Syrian women who live in western countries are caught between two fires. They must constantly negotiate their behavior between the Western values of the host country and the patriarchal values of their own community. On the one hand, they must satisfy the expectations of their own community to preserve patriarchal social norms, and on the other hand, they must also follow the social norms in the Western society they live in (Wayland 1997; Gies 2006). Thus, in this sub-chapter, and after we have dug deep into the experiences of (in)security of Syrian Muslim women in the Norwegian and Syrian societies, it would be helpful to take a step back and view the security problems that were faced within the Syrian community in relation to the security problems that were faced within the Norwegian community and vice versa. Thus, by viewing the security of Muslim women by a multi-axis framework, we might achieve a true representation of the security of Muslim Syrian women in Norway to be able to answer the thesis's research question that revolves around investigating the dual pressure of Islamophobia and patriarchal values on the security of Muslim Syrian women in Norway.

### 5.1 Why are Muslim women the target of violence in both societies?

As discussed earlier, violence lies at the center of security as the prime cause of insecurity. Thus, to investigate the security of Muslim women, it would be helpful to examine their experience of in(security) in relation to violence. Violence against women is a global issue that is not specific to a certain system, tradition, or society. According to Galtung (1969), violence that is directed against one woman is considered personal violence, while violence that is directed against one million women is considered structural. Thus, Galtung defines structural violence as a type of violence that is exercised and reproduced in society as a result of social injustice that exists due to inequality. Galtung attempts to understand the social structure that produces inequality as he argues that within a structure, an actor might have a high rank in one system and a low rank in another system (1969). Thus, if we look at the experiences of Muslim women in Norway, we find that they have been subjected to structural violence by the social system of both societies, the Norwegian and the Syrian. The structural violence that is exercised by Norwegian society stems from the notion that Muslim men are backward, ignorant, and barbaric, while Muslim women are perceived as victims and passive with no agency (Razack, 2004). Thus, inequality is manifested through hierarchy and the notion that first-world countries are higher in rank than third-world countries. Accordingly,



structural violence is directed against those Syrian Muslim women to try to elevate them into the position of Norwegian women who enjoy more freedom. At the same time, Muslim women are subjected to structural violence by the Syrian society that tries to preserve the dominance of men over women. Thus, inequality is manifested through hierarchy, and the notion that men are leaders and women are subordinates. Hence, Syrian Muslim women find themselves in a low rank in all the social systems they have been living in.

Similarly, Butler (1990) links security and the relation of dominance as she promotes a new way of perceiving violence through gender lenses. This helped in gaining a deeper understanding of how the world is constructed and how violence continues to exist. Butler introduced gender as a socially constructed identity. She believes that the world is constructed into gender categories, masculinity and femininity, and the interaction of these two terms is based on hierarchy and power relations. As discussed in chapter 2, the patriarchal system is not a manifestation of male intrinsic power, but it is the articulation of the dominant power, claiming a form of masculinity and exercising its power over those who are marginalized and oppressed and who are considered the non-dominant power or the dominated. Thus, by this definition, we can conclude that both the Norwegian society and the Syrian society are patriarchal societies. As discussed in chapter 4, Syrian women have been subjected to psychological violence and physical violence by two societies. From the experiences of those Syrian Muslim women, we conclude that the Norwegian society represents the dominant power, and it exercises its power over those Muslim women, who represent the non-dominant power. This dominant power aims to amend Muslim women's behavior to suit the Norwegian social norms. At the same time, the Syrian community exercises its dominant power over those Syrian Muslim women to uphold the patriarchal values. According to Hoogensen & Stuvøy (2006), the dominant power is the power that defines the norms and practices that the non-dominant power should follow. Thus, the Syrian Muslim women became the arena where two dominant powers are engaging in a cold war by pressuring the non-dominant power into following their rules. And here lies the invisible security threat that these Syrian women have been subjected to.

## 5.2 The effect of structures of power on Muslim women's security

According to Hoogensen & Stuvøy (2006), structures of power “reproduce structures of insecurity” (p.216). Thus, in order to investigate how the structure of power affects the security of Muslim women, we have to understand how the identity of Muslim women is

constructed in both communities that strengthen the current structure of power in both communities. According to Tajfel & Turner (2004), individuals construct their social identity by being defined by others and by themselves as part of the group members. People apply social categorization to categorize the social environment in order to define their places and their roles in the social world. As stated by Tajfel & Turner (2004, p.283) “Social groups, understood in this sense, provide their members with an identification of themselves in social terms.” According to Epstein (2007), this identification can be established by classifying the bodies into “right” or “wrong” bodies. Right bodies are seen as productive bodies that cause no harm to society because their behavior and their identity can be predicted. However, the wrong bodies are perceived as destructive because they represent the unknown which mirrors itself as a threat to other bodies in society (Epstein,2007, p.153). The recognition of bodies as wrong or right is done based on perceiving certain features. Similarly, Sylvester (2013) argues that bodies have features such as gender, class, and ethnicity. These features play different roles, and they are perceived differently according to the social context in which these bodies exist. If we want to apply this notion to Syrian Muslim women, as discussed in sub-chapters 4.2 and 4.3, Syrian women are identified by the Norwegian community by certain identity markers such as race, gender, and religion. Similarly, the same identity markers are used to identify Syrian women by the Syrian community. However, the conception of each identity marker holds a different notion in both societies.

As discussed in the findings chapter, from the perspective of Syrian women, the thesis finds that Norwegian society identifies informants’ race as a sign of backwardness, their gender as a sign of passiveness, and their religion as a sign of victimization. At the same time, the Syrian community perceives the informants’ race as a sign of conservatism and their gender as a sign of powerlessness, and their religion as a sign of obedience. Hence, we conclude that the identity of Muslim women in both societies is constructed in different ways. However, the problem does not reside only in how each society looks at those Muslim women, it also resides in the contradiction of their conceptualization of these identity markers as the Muslim women are the scapegoat of this contradiction. For example, as discussed in chapter 4.2, interviewee 6 talked about how Hijab stands as part of her culture, but she had to remove it to integrate with the Norwegian community, and as discussed in chapter 4.3, Interviewee 6 did not want to remove Hijab so the Syrian community would not cast her out because by removing the Hijab, she would give up an important religious marker. Thus, she ended up wearing a hat to please the two societies. So, here Interviewee 6 is torn apart between what

the two societies want her to do, neglecting what she really wants, which will never be known, even to her, without lifting these constraints from both societies. Thus, the identity marker (Hijab) became a threat marker as she had to conceal it to avoid being identified, threatened, or stigmatized. And if she removes the Hijab to conceal the threat marker, she will face another threat from her own community, which will shame her for abandoning her religion and traditions. This internal conflict can be perceived in the interviewees' experiences whom they ended up commenting on how they should either hold on to their eastern values or be prepared for racist experiences, as Interviewee 1 commented:

“Even if someone said something upsetting, most Syrian women do not care as they think it is normal and they have prepared themselves for these situations”  
(Interviewee 1, 10. June.2022).

Or they should change their behavior to integrate within the Norwegian society but have to be prepared to face the Syrian community's shaming and stigmatization, as Interviewee 7 commented:

“I feel that they [Syrian community] cast me out sometimes. As they say that I adopt Norwegian habits, I dress like them, go out like them, talk like them”  
(Interviewee 7, 11. June.2022)

Thus, Muslim women's bodies became a political sphere where the fight between Western values of the host country and the patriarchal values of her own community is taking place. According to Sahar Aziz (2012), “she [the Muslim woman] finds herself an object within a grander political conflict between two patriarchies that are different in form but similar in substance” (Aziz, 2012). Thus, this fight impacts and influences the identity of these Syrian women and how they perceive themselves. Feeling that they should always adopt a defensive position against the Syrian community or the Norwegian community, or both, as Interviewee 7 commented:

“The effort you put in to be with them is overwhelming. Sometimes I wonder about this, and it makes me reject many invitations. As I think whether going to these gatherings is worth the effort I put in order to be perceived as one of them”  
(Interviewee 7, 11. June.2022).

In another incident, Interviewee 6 talked about her experience of wearing Burkini in Norway as both societies (the Norwegian and Syrian) perceived her as an outsider. She stated:

“Not only do they [the Norwegian community] look at me differently, sometimes they approach me and tell me that it is not allowed to swim, wearing Burkini. I tell them no; it is allowed because I am wearing a specially made swimsuit for Muslims. Still, they keep looking at me with unaccepting gazes, but I do not care. I know what I am doing. Similarly, Arab people criticize me for wearing Burkini and swimming with men. But I do not get affected by this criticism. I do what I want and what I am convinced that should be done” (Interviewee 6, 11. June.2022).

According to Butler (1993b), subjects are recognized only when there is an “abjected outside.” The bodies that are compliant with the dominant norms will be perceived as important and valued, while the bodies that have deviated from the dominant norms will be perceived as bodies that do not matter. Thus, the deviation is what constitutes the “outside,” and it is important for the recognition of the “inside” (Butler, 1993b, p. xxiv). Thus, to apply this notion to Muslim women, we have to take into consideration how their bodies are constructed. From interviewee 6’s perspective, when she wears Burkini, she becomes the “abjected outside” because her dress code is not compliant with the Norwegian dominant norms. At the same time, when Interviewee 6 wears Burkini and swims in a public place, she is perceived by the Syrian community as an “abjected outside” because the dress code and her behavior are not compliant with the dominant social norms. Thus, Muslim women have been perceived as “the outside” in both societies. This perception has negative consequences on their security in relation to their identity and feeling of belonging. Hagerty et al. (1992) define belonging as “the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment” (p. 172). Thus, losing the sense of belonging can jeopardize psychological and physical safety as it could result in serious mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and suicide (Salami et al., 2019). This violence that is being directed at Syrian Muslim women is reproduced when Syrian women have to consider the consequences of their behavior if it does not suit the social norms of both communities. For Interviewee 7, she dyed her hair blond to not be spotted as Arab by the Norwegian community, and for Interviewee 6, she wore a hat as a substitute for Hijab to not be considered an apostate by the Syrian community. Thus, the thesis argues that

the experiences of Syrian Muslim women in Norway resemble a multi-way intersection. In one way, she experiences discrimination by the Norwegian community due to the intersection of her gender, race, and religion. On the other way, she experiences discrimination by the Syrian community due to the intersection of her gender and race. These two ways intersect as well to cause the invisible violence which our interviewees expressed through their effort in negotiating their behavior to suit the social norms of the two communities and to not be looked at as an outsider. Syrian Muslim women are not emancipated from the constraints that are set by both communities, which hinders the emergence of who they really are and what they really want. According to Judith Butler (1990), life is more livable when we are not confined to categories that do not work for us. Categories that are imposed on us and take away our freedom. Thus, there is a driving force by the Norwegian community that pulls Syrian Muslim women to integrate into the new society, and at the same time, a driving force by the Syrian community is pulling the Syrian Muslim women to preserve the patriarchal values that are embedded in traditions and customs. In other words, Syrian women are surrounded by danger in all their choices because the change of their identity to adapt to the new society is threatful because of the way the Syrian community perceives this change as a rebellion against patriarchal values. And on the other hand, the refusal of change in her identity is threatful because of the way the Norwegian community perceives her attitude as a sign of passiveness, and they stigmatize her for that. Hence, if Syrian women took their stand against one of those streams, not only did they jeopardize their security by the other stream, but also it deprived them of the option to choose for themselves without being punished by one stream or rewarded by the other. Thus, there is a danger in being static and in being active toward change. In both cases, her security is endangered.

### 5.3 Norway's role in securing Muslim women in their integration

The integration barometer shows that the majority of the Norwegian population believes that immigrants have the main responsibility for successful integration. At the same time, more than half believe that the rest of the population and the authorities are also responsible for problems with integration and that discrimination against immigrants is an obstacle to integration (IMDI, 2014). Geir Barvik, who held the position of Director-General of the Directorate of Integration and Diversity, IMDI (2014), stated that "Integration is a two-way process, which requires adaptation and effort from both immigrants and the rest of the population" (p.3). On the other hand, Enloe (2014) has shown that security cannot be reduced

to the notion of state, but it is as well a matter of the personal. Thus, the security of individuals is an integral part of the security of the state. Accordingly, the role of the Norwegian government in ensuring the security of Muslim women in Norway is important for the security of the state itself. Thus, in this subchapter, the thesis is going to discuss the role of Norwegian organizations in securing Syrian Muslim women by exploring their efforts to mitigate discrimination by the Norwegian community and by her own community (the Syrian community).

### 5.3.1 The role of governmental organizations in securing Muslim Syrian women in Norway:

After refugees are granted a residence permit in Norway, they are usually settled by public authorities in one of Norway's municipalities. Refugees have the right to and are obliged to complete an introductory program to integrate into Norwegian society (IMDI, 2019). Thus, municipalities are obliged to offer the introduction program, and they are responsible for refugees' affairs throughout the settling period. The Norwegian Introduction Program (NIP) was launched in 2003. This program lasts from 2 to 3 years, and its main objectives are to teach the refugees the Norwegian language and to provide training opportunities to engage them in the Norwegian labor market (Tronstad, 2019). This was also confirmed by Marte Aasen, an employee who works in the refugee service department, which reports to NAV (Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration) in Ås municipality, as she stated:

“The most important thing is that they can manage themselves, they can be independent, that they do not need support from the government” (Aason, 17. July. 2022).

Thus, NAV has a huge role in providing the basic tools for integration which is the language and work life. And this is consistent with what we discussed earlier, as according to our interviewees, learning the language and becoming economically independent was one the most important factors for the Syrian women's integration. However, ensuring the psychological and physical security of these Syrian women was absent from NAV's objectives. Refugee service employee has commented on this point by criticizing the Norwegian government and how they cut the budget, which leads to limited manpower and has a negative effect on the quality of integration of these refugees. As she stated:

“I think it is in the system of NAV. From the government, they cut money, then there are less people working, and then it is more expensive because they just put

on more money. They [NAV employees] don't have time to do all these meetings and give them [the refugees] the support" (Aason, 17. July. 2022).

Thus, the governmental organizations which are represented by NAV fail to provide full, customized support for those who need help. The support which is given has focused on economic integration. In comparison, social integration is not set as part of their scope of work. When Aason, NAV employee, was asked if there were any efforts that aim to boost the psychological security of Syrian Muslim women by mitigating the problems that are caused by cultural differences, she said that Syrian women could participate in programs that are initiated by many volunteer organizations and local NGO that work on refugee's assistance in integration. However, participation in these programs is voluntary, and NAV can direct them to participate in these NGOs' programs. According to Liebig and Tronstad (2018), women refugees are considered a vulnerable group as they experience a triple disadvantage when it comes to integration due to three factors "gender, immigrant status, and forced migration" (p. 8). However, these disadvantages are not addressed in the governmental mandatory introduction program, and it is left to the refugees' choice to seek this kind of help from non-governmental organizations.

On the other hand, the Norwegian government adopted an action plan to combat racism, religious discrimination, social control, and prejudice based on ethnicity. These efforts are embodied in many initiatives, such as enhancing diversity and inclusion in the cultural sector by allocating 24.5 million in 2020 to a broad initiative that will contribute to diversity, inclusion, and equality in the cultural field and launching a Campaign against discrimination at restaurants/pubs, clubs (Norwegian Ministries, 2019). However, these efforts have a broad approach, and it is hard to feel their results on the ground. According to the barometer, the proportion of Norwegians who believe discrimination against immigrants occurs "to a large extent" has increased from 9 percent in 2013 to 22 percent in 2017 (Norwegian Ministries, 2019). Thus, the role of the Norwegian government to empower women, refugees, within the Syrian community by launching mandatory educational programs for both men and women to overcome the problems that stem from the cultural difference between the Syrian and Norwegian cultures is very limited and at the same time, its role in mitigating racism, discrimination has a broad approach which makes its desired results hard to capture in the short term.

### 5.3.2 The role of non-governmental organizations:

The term "nongovernmental organization" generally refers to organizations that are not government-based and not profit oriented. These organizations have primarily humanitarian or cooperative objectives. The Norwegian government has included in the national budget a grant scheme that aims to promote the integration and inclusion of people from immigrant backgrounds by strengthening the role of NGOs in integration (IMDI, 2017). However, This thesis will focus on one type of NGO, which is immigrant organizations, such as Fakkeltog, and Caritas. These organizations, “on the one hand, they are seen as channels for influence, and on the other as social communities that may promote the acquisition of knowledge and establishment of networks, as well as preserve identities and have a protective effect” (IMDI, 2017, p.16). According to Imtithal Elnajjar, the leader of the Arab women union, immigrant organizations are important because many women seek the help of these organizations due to their mistrust of governmental organizations. As she stated:

“They think, because of the misinformation they have, that if they went to NAV to tell them about their problems, they would have bigger problems. Arab woman wants someone from her own culture to tell them about her problems and to get some advice” (Elnajjar, 19. July. 2022).

In fact, this concern was raised as well by some of the Syrian women interviewees as Interviewee 4 had some psychological disorders like stress and depression, but she faced them by herself without any support due to her fear of the Child Protection Services taking her children away, as she stated:

“I worked a lot on myself. I, as a person, think a lot about my inner needs and try to heal my wounds. I try to understand what is happening to me. I read a lot on psychology so that I do not have to go to a psychiatrist because I have children, and I was afraid that the Child Protection Services would look at me in a negative way” (Interviewee 4, 9. June.2022).

Thus, the perception that the Norwegian society does not understand the Syrian women’s suffering has negatively affected Interviewee 4’s trust in the governmental organizations to help her with the difficulties that she is facing. According to Nerij Network for Investigative Journalism, “The contagion of the fear of Child protection services is rampant among the



communities residing in Norway. The media outlets have seldom presented news related to the positive role of this institution” (Shamdeen, 2020).

On the other hand, there are many NGOs that work on women’s empowerment such as “Fakkeltog.” Fakkeltog is a non-governmental organization that launched an initiative under the name of “Hun” which means “She” to empower refugee women in Norway. The Hun initiative aims to develop the women refugees’ mental and physical health by putting them in the right projects, workshops, outside activities, and inside activities. As Razan Zamazam, a volunteer in Hun, stated:

“Last project or last activity we had was how to self-defend yourself in the Norwegian society like physically, and that was for girls between 13 and 15” (Zamazam, 12. June. 2022).

“I did courses on how to trust in yourself and how to build yourself again, after what you've been through during the war because we are talking about women who have been through very difficult circumstances and who have come to Norway as a refugee” (Zamazam, 12. June. 2022)

Thus, physical and psychological security are two themes that have been focused on by this type of NGO due to their importance in empowering Syrian Muslim women in Norway. However, relying on NGOs to ensure and retain the physical and psychological security of refugee women is not a very systematic solution because these initiatives are not available in each municipality, as not all refugee women have access to the same support which is given by this organization.

Another point discussed is the lack of any initiatives that launch educational programs that focus on how refugee men should acknowledge refugee women’s rights and how this can be incorporated within Syrian social norms to help refugee women in having a better integration by mitigating the internal stress and pressure that the Syrian community is casting upon her.

“There should be educational programs for men that teach them how to give women space without relinquishing your religion, your morals, nor changing your identity. You are just living in a country that gave you shelter, and it has rules and regulations that demand you to change the way you treat your children and your wife because this treatment will cause problems such so and so” (Elnajjar, 19. July. 2022)

Thus, this type of initiative that targets the refugee men instead of women is, unfortunately, missing from the objectives of both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Hence, the Norwegian organizations are turning a blind eye to the situation of Syrian refugee men, as they empower Syrian women only through educating them about their rights, neglecting their role in educating Syrian refugee men as well because they are part of Syrian women's suffering, and they should be part of the solution as well.

## 6.0 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is not to generalize but rather to complement previous research on security in Norway by discovering the hidden security conflict which Syrian Muslim women experience in Norway. It is crucial to be aware of the variations in their experiences in order to avoid stereotypical or essentialist constructions of a group. Thus, by adopting a post-structuralist feminist approach to security studies and by introducing a different understanding of violence and the role of power relations in subjugating the behavior of Muslim women, the thesis aims to investigate the security problems that Syrian Muslim women face in Norway.

Based on interviews with Muslim Syrian women, the thesis discussed how security is perceived differently among the informants. The concept of security is primarily attached to the informants' previous experiences. Thus, each informant had a different conception of what security is. However, the study found that the security of Muslim Syrian women revolved around two main categories. The physical security that can be obtained by having a physical protection from any type of threats directed to their somatic characteristics and psychological security which can be obtained by having stability, a social network, and successful integration within the Norwegian society. Hence, in the investigation of the effect of Islamophobia on the security of Muslim Syrian women, the study concluded that in some cases, Islamophobia can stand as a direct threat to the physical security of Muslim Syrian women. Moreover, the stereotyping of Muslim women as weak and passive has contributed to her victimization, and it caused a misrepresentation of Muslim women by viewing her in a unilateral religious dimension. Finally, it heightened the stigmatization sense because she is blamed for relinquishing her rights and freedom—these experiences of Islamophobic discrimination run against interviewees' perceptions of their psychological security. Thus, Islamophobia has an indirect effect on the security of Syrian Muslim women in Norway.

On the other hand, Syrian Muslim women face another threat from the Syrian community. This threat is embedded by the pressure of preserving patriarchal values which perceive the man as superior to the woman. However, the thesis concluded that only two out of ten interviewees experienced insecurity, whether physical or psychological, in the private sphere due to the pressure of preserving the patriarchal values by their husbands. In contrast, all ten informants have reported experiencing pressure to preserve patriarchal values by the Syrian community in the public sphere. This pressure was reported to be executed through community shaming. Some informants were confined in what to wear, how to act, and whom

they could talk to, so they could escape community shaming that results in condemnation and stigmatization. Other informants endured physical and mental abuse as they could not ask for a divorce in fear of the community's wrath that stigmatizes women who ask for a divorce in Europe. Hence, the physical and psychological security of Muslim Syrian women was undermined by the pressure of preserving patriarchal values.

Thus, from an intersectionality perspective, security threats that are faced by Syrian Muslim women are interrelated and cannot be discussed separately. Muslim women are subjected to violence by the Norwegian community and by the Syrian community. The thesis concludes that Syrian Muslim women in Norway are pressured by their own community and the Norwegian community to take two different paths jeopardizing their security. The Syrian community in Norway pressures Syrian Muslim women to preserve the patriarchal values by committing themselves to certain conduct as they are considered the representative of preserving their community's social values, and any change or adaptation of women's behavior in the new society is considered by Syrian community as relinquishing their religious values and social norms. On the other hand, by assigning women as the representative of preserving the patriarchal social norms by their own community, they stand on the front line in the face of Islamophobic discrimination. So, they become victims of hate crime and hate speech, especially if they wear a headscarf which is a sign of their religion. Thus, women are pressured to adjust their conduct to fit within their internal or external community. On the one hand, if they decide to alter their behavior to integrate within the Norwegian society, they will be punished by their internal community and stigmatized. On the other hand, if they stood committed to their community's tradition and values, they would be accused by the Norwegian community of being passive and being a victim for not standing up against the patriarchal system. Thus, the Syrian Muslim woman became the arena where two dominant powers exercise their authority to control her behavior, and whoever wins in subjugating her, the other power will punish her by stigmatizing her and casting her out as an outsider. Finally, the study took an extra step to investigate Norway's role in mitigating the security threats which are faced by Muslim Syrian women; it was found that there are insufficient measures that boost the physical and psychological security of Muslim Syrian women in Norway.

In conclusion, the security of Muslim Syrian women should be viewed and investigated through multiple axis. In this way, a new understanding of the security of Muslim Syrian women can be developed, and it can contribute to the security discussion. For future

recommendations, the study recommends investigating how the dual pressure of Islamophobia and preserving patriarchal values can be mitigated. The Norwegian government can implement a more specific initiative at the local level to mitigate the Islamophobic perception of Muslim women among the Norwegian community. At the same time, it can focus on educating Syrian men to teach them how to give women space without relinquishing their religion or changing their identity. However, these initiatives should be studied in a more comprehensive way to guarantee a strategic approach to increasing the Security of Syrian Muslim women in Norway.

## 7.0 References

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**Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet**  
Noregs miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet  
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Postboks 5003  
NO-1432 Ås  
Norway