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2025 **Halime Aktürk**

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Exiled Kurdish Female Journalists: Struggles and Challenges

Master's Thesis

Author of the Thesis: Halime Aktürk

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Supervisor: doc. PhDr. Alice Němcová Tejkalová, Ph.D.

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on June 30, 2025 Halime Aktürk

References

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Abstract

This research explores the gender and ethnicity-based challenges faced by Kurdish female journalists, focusing on their professional experiences in Turkey and in exile. Grounded in gender performativity and intersectionality theories, the study seeks to address an academic gap regarding Kurdish journalists' lived experiences. Using a qualitative methodology, the research is based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 13 exiled Kurdish female journalists currently residing in Switzerland, Germany, France, Belgium, and Scotland. Findings reveal that participating journalists were forced to flee Turkey due to systematic discrimination based on gender and ethnicity, including threats of rape, arbitrary detention, torture, and intimidation, primarily by state security forces under a patriarchal authoritarian regime. In exile, participants reported ongoing challenges such as limited access to practicing journalism in host country media due to linguistic barriers, continued security concerns, trauma, homesickness, and social isolation. The findings reveal that exile does not mark the end of safety concerns. Far-right extremism in Germany, xenophobia in Switzerland and gendered vulnerabilities in France and the UK continue to impact their safety. Kurdish female journalists faced multiple levels of discrimination due to their ethnicity, gender, profession, and immigrant status. Despite hardships, some demonstrate resilience by working with diaspora Kurdish media and pursuing further education to strengthen their skills with the hope of returning to their homeland. This research contributes to gender and ethnicity in journalism and migration studies by providing a stage for the voices of Kurdish female journalists and highlighting how exile reshapes their roles, identities, and modes of resistance beyond borders.

Abstrakt

Tato studie se zabývá genderově a etnicky podmíněnými výzvami, jimž čelí kurdské novinářky, se zaměřením na jejich profesní zkušenosti v Turecku a v exilu. Studie vychází z teorií genderové performativity a intersekcionality a snaží se vyplnit akademickou mezeru týkající se životních zkušeností kurdských novinářek. Výzkum využívá kvalitativní metodologii a je založen na polostrukturovaných hloubkových rozhovorech s 13 kurdskými novinářkami v exilu, které v současné době žijí ve Švýcarsku, Německu, Francii, Belgii a Skotsku. Výsledky ukazují, že účastnice výzkumu byly nuceny uprchnout z Turecka kvůli systematické diskriminaci na základě pohlaví a etnickému původu, včetně

hrozeb znásilnění, svévolného zadržování, mučení a zastrašování především ze strany státních bezpečnostních sil pod patriarchálním autoritářským režimem. Účastnice uvedly, že v exilu čelí neustálým výzvám, jako je omezený přístup k novinářské práci v médiích hostitelské země kvůli jazykovým bariérám, přetrvávající obavy o bezpečnost, trauma, stesk po domově a sociální izolace. Výsledky ukazují, že exil neznamená konec obav o bezpečnost. Krajně pravicový extremismus v Německu, xenofobie ve Švýcarsku a genderová zranitelnost ve Francii a Velké Británii nadále ovlivňují jejich bezpečnost. Kurdské novinářky čelily diskriminaci na několika úrovních kvůli svému etnickému původu, pohlaví, profesi a statusu imigrantek. Navzdory těžkostem některé z nich prokazují odolnost tím, že spolupracují s kurdskými médii v diaspoře a pokračují ve vzdělávání, aby posílily své dovednosti v naději, že se budou moci vrátit do své vlasti. Tento výzkum přispívá k genderovým a etnickým studiím v žurnalistice a migraci tím, že poskytuje prostor pro hlasy kurdských novinářek a zdůrazňuje, jak exil mění jejich role, identitu a způsoby odporu za hranicemi.

Keywords

Kurdish female journalist, Kurdish Media, exile, gender-based harassment, ethnicity, intersectionality, authoritarianism, qualitative analysis, journalist safety, press freedom

Klíčová slova

Kurdská novinářka, kurdská média, exil, obtěžování na základě pohlaví, etnicita, intersekcionalita, autoritářství, kvalitativní analýza, bezpečnost novinářů, svoboda tisku

Title

Exiled Kurdish Female Journalists: Struggles and Challenges

Název práce

Kurdské novinářky v exilu: úskalí a výzvy

Acknowledgement

Like all my endeavors, this research is dedicated to my beautiful brother Ekrem, who has taught me how to resist.

To my mother, whose courage, resistance, and love have always inspired me.

To all the Kurdish journalists, and especially those who bravely participated in this study and shared their stories with me despite all the challenges. I still hear Participant 8's words echoing in my mind: *"Like our nation, our media is alone too."*

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With great hope, I wish for this study to spark meaningful discussions on press freedom and the experiences of exiled Kurdish journalists around the world.

Jin, Jiyan, Azadî!

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INTRODUCTION

Press freedom is under increasing threat worldwide. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the World Press Freedom Index shows that global press freedom has reached a *"difficult situation"* for the first time in the Index's history (RSF, 2025). Journalists around the world are killed, jailed, arrested, taken to trials, or forced into exile every day. According to data from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), in 2024, 124 journalists were killed, 361 imprisoned, and 67 have gone missing, with the organization calling it the deadliest year of the last 3 decades (CPJ, 2025; Kelly, 2025). Palestine has the most critical number, with 184 journalists and media workers having died since the start of the Israel-Palestine war in 2023 (CPJ, 2025). Not only war zones but the rise of authoritarian regimes around the world subject journalists to danger as well. Russia, Turkey, Belarus, China, and Iran are examples of authoritarian countries where press freedom is undermined through imprisonment, censorship, state repression, torture, harassment, violence, and exile (CPJ, 2025; Kelly, 2025; Aydın, 2019). According to CPJ's reports, "Threats, repression, conflict, and unrest: across the world, these and other factors are pushing journalists into exile in record numbers" (Westcott, 2024). Surveillance in Russia, detention in Iran, and imprisonment in Afghanistan are some of the common threats that cause journalists to flee these countries (Westcott, 2024).

Turkey is a country where many journalists from these states relocate, but it is not any safer for media workers. The country was ranked among the 10 worst jailers of journalists by CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists) from 2012 to 2023 (CPJ, 2025). According to another organization, Freedom House, Turkey is a country where journalism is not free (2024). Further to this, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked the country as 159 out of 180 states in its 2025 World Press Freedom Index (RSF, 2025). Journalists in Turkey who are critical of the state face persecution, detention, trials, violence, or exile. Pressures on journalists are increasing at such high rates that even while completing research for this thesis, two Kurdish journalists, Nazım Daştan and Cihan Bilgin, were killed by a Turkish drone in Rojava, Northern Syria (IFJ, 2024). In a second incident, 4 months earlier, another two Kurdish female journalists, Gulistan Tara and Hero Bahadin, were killed by Turkish drones in northern Iraq (IFJ, 2024).

The scholar Bermal Aydin (2021) argues that Turkey is an outstanding example of authoritarian neoliberalism with its ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The scholar highlights that the government targets journalists due to their capability to tell the truth (Aydin, 2021, p. 678). Based on data from Expression Interrupted (2025), a website launched by a media organization to gather and track information related to journalists on trial, at least 32 journalists are currently in prison in Turkey. Terrorist propaganda, membership in a terrorist organization, and an insult to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan are common accusations that journalists face (Guerrero, 2023). According to the Coalition for Women in Journalism (CFWIJ) (2025), predominantly Kurdish media workers and journalists are subjected to these legal persecutions. The same organization further indicates that authoritarianism is increasing in such a phase that critics against state politics are being silenced through the politicization of the judiciary system (CFWIJ, 2025). In addition, reporting that women journalists are often subjected to *"excessive force used by the police,"* particularly in covering protests (CFWIJ, 2025). Not only are journalists in Turkey facing these arbitrary treatments due to their work, but even journalists who have fled the country are still unable to escape trials or accusations. Geşbun Ayşe Kara, another Kurdish female journalist who has been exiled to Germany, very recently had an arrest warrant issued against her by the High Supreme Court in Diyarbakır, Turkey (Tekin, 2024).

This research aims to study the challenges Kurdish female journalists from Turkey face in exile. To have a comprehensive understanding of the subject, and because of the lack of documentation on relevant matters in academia, the research will begin by focusing on the factors that led Kurdish female journalists to leave Turkey and later their experiences in exile. While this study will concentrate on the influence of gender and ethnicity on challenges Kurdish female journalists experience, making reference to the academic resources centering gender in journalism, female journalists in the field and conflict zones, up to now, close to no comprehensive research exists on the persecution Kurdish female journalists face in Turkey, or on their experiences in exile. An online news piece published by Politics and Rights Review (2024) entitled: *"Kurdish Journalists: The Untold Struggle for Free Expression"* states these words in the first paragraph: "Unlike journalists from recognized nations, Kurdish reporters operate in a vacuum of political legitimacy." In light of this notion, this research aims to document and understand the experiences of Kurdish

female journalists in exile and is inspired by my own experiences as a Kurdish female journalist.

To have a deep understanding of the subject, Butler's (1999) gender performativity theory and Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality theory will be utilized as a lens to study how Kurdish female journalists' gender and ethnicity play a role in their careers. Scholars Ataman and Çoban (2023), who characterize Turkey as an authoritarian country, emphasize the inescapable oppression of journalists, even in exile, as "many journalists who go into voluntary exile due to threats and pressures can also be attacked by the proxies of the government even though they are abroad, and in the end, they still continue their lives under pressure and threat" (p. 224). As this research aims to gather interviews with Kurdish female journalists who have recently fled Turkey due to repression, trials, and persecution, it will also study the concept of exile and diaspora to have a better understanding of their current life conditions in their host countries around Europe.

This study has one main research question and three sub-questions. Although sub-question one was not formulated during the initial stages of the research and its proposal, it was determined by the researcher and her supervisor based on gathered data to be a necessary addition to understanding the various reasons why participants were forced to flee Turkey. The questions are as follows:

RQ: What challenges and struggles do Kurdish female journalists face in exile?
SRQ1: What are their reasons for fleeing Turkey?
SRQ2: How does gender play a role in their experiences?
SRQ3: How does their ethnic identity play a role in their experiences?

The research will begin with a theoretical framework and literature review where studies on gender, ethnicity, exile, historical context, initiation of Kurdish media and working as female journalists in Turkey will be studied. In the methodology section, data regarding the participants, interviews, and the researcher's background will be provided. The findings section of the research will share the analysis of themes gathered from 13 exiled Kurdish female journalists, followed by a discussion and conclusion.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is grounded in two interrelated theoretical frameworks: Judith Butler's (1999) theory of gender performativity and Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality. These frameworks offer valuable tools for analyzing how gender and ethnicity shape the challenges and discrimination faced by Kurdish female journalists within various power structures. Additionally, relevant literature on the concepts of diaspora and exile will be explored to provide a broader understanding of the lived experiences of these journalists in their host countries across Europe. The experience of Kurdish journalists in Turkey, with particular attention paid to female Kurdish journalists, is summarized at the end of this chapter.

1.1 Gender Theory

Gender is not fixed but performed based on society's gender norms and expectations (Butler, 1999). With gender performativity theory, Butler challenges traditional feminist scholars' fixation on *"woman"* as a singular subject with essential features by introducing the concept of gender as performative (p. 6). Butler (1999) argues that feminist theory should break the limitation of gender categories that are dictated by power structures and instead emphasize the variability and fluidity of gender (p. 176). The scholar clarifies gender performativity as a concept where individuals behave and perform certain genders based on social constructions. For instance, an individual who identifies as female performs femininity through their behavior, gestures, and language as it's expected by society's norms (Butler, 1999). In another study on "bodily vulnerability," the scholar argues that "Within the terms of both military and economic policy, certain populations are effectively targeted as injurable (with impunity)" (Butler, 2014, p. 111). Bodies could be targeted and harmed yet, the body could also become a tool for political resistance (Butler, 2014, p. 101). Kurdish female journalists in Turkey not only perform gender roles in a traditionally patriarchal society but also navigate the expectations imposed by their ethnic and political identities.

Butler (1999) further indicates that by performing certain gender roles, individuals also reinforce social norms that shape those roles. In their article, Palmer and Melki (2016) introduce the concept of shape-shifting in war zones in relation to Butler's conception of

cultural constructions of gender. The scholars discuss the increasing number of female war reporters in war zones, a predominantly male-dominated environment and socially coded as a *"manly"* job, since the end of the twentieth century (Palmer & Melki, 2016; Steiner, 2017). Furthermore, they discuss how female war journalists adapt and behave depending on the environment to navigate their jobs. Utilizing Butler's (1999) performativity framework, Palmer and Melki (2016) argue that "gender performances might change, depending on the audience" (p. 128). This strategy helps female journalists to continue doing their work safely. While Butler's gender performativity theory is crucial as a framework to analyze and understand social expectations and challenges Kurdish female journalists face in Turkey, Palmar and Melki's shape-shifting concept helps this research to find and analyze the existence of similar patterns in the work field.

1.2 Intersectionality Theory

For this research to have a comprehensive understanding of issues related to identity, it is crucial to broaden its scope to not only gender but also the ethnic and other identities of Kurdish female journalists. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality is an important lens through which to conduct this research. As a feminist framework, intersectionality theory focuses on social identities such as race, gender, class, and sexuality and the outcome of the overlapping of these identities in cases of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991). In her article based on the experiences of women of color, the scholar notes that "the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class" (p. 1242) as a "product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism" (p. 1243). The scholar discusses the different dimensions of discrimination between a woman of color and a white woman by relating to the intersection of race and gender identities.

In addition to intersectionality studies, Patricia Hill Collins and her colleagues (Collins et al., 2021) argue that intersectionality should not only be understood from the perspective of intellectuals or experts. A more democratic and participatory approach is needed, bringing together the experiences of intellectuals, experts, and people with different standpoints (Collins et al., 2021). This method allows for more diverse knowledge and global discussions on intersectionality, potentially sparking social change. In this context, interviewing Kurdish female journalists will offer new insight for this study. Butler's

(1999) gender performativity and Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality theories, as well as Palmer and Melki's (2016) shape-shifting concept, will serve as key analytical tools to explore how gender, ethnicity, and class shape their experiences in society.

1.3 Defining Diaspora and Exile in Journalism

Grossman (2018) argues that the word diaspora has been used widely for groups like immigrants, exiled communities, refugees, or immigrant workers. However, there is no clear definition of the word. Through his study with various articles based on studies on diaspora, the scholar provides a suggested definition of diaspora as being "a transnational community whose members (or their ancestors) emigrated or were dispersed from their original homeland but remain oriented to it and preserve a group identity" (Grossman, 2018, p. 1267). In addition to Grossman's (2018) definition of diaspora, scholars O'Loughlin and Schafraad (2016) define exile as a "temporary state" (p. 47). The scholars further emphasize the importance of distinguishing between journalists in the diaspora and those in exile. While diaspora journalists are generally more familiar with the social, cultural, and political contexts of their host countries, often working in Western media as fixers or commentators, exiled journalists are considered "journalists in transition" (O'Loughlin & Schafraad, 2016, p. 47), having been forced to flee their home countries due to repression. Unlike diaspora journalists, exiled journalists form a distinct group, "caught between two worlds": their homeland and their host country (O'Loughlin & Schafraad, 2016, p. 47).

Today, many journalists around the world are living in exile, having been forced to flee their home countries due to persecution, threats, imprisonment, and censorship (Dodds et al., 2024), or simply because they were perceived as threats by authoritarian regimes (RSF, 2021, Shahbazyan 2025; Marston, 2023). Exiled journalists mainly come from regions where democracy is weakened, such as Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Eastern Europe (Selva, 2025). For instance, in Afghanistan, approximately one-third of journalists left the country following the Taliban's takeover in 2021 (Kumar, 2023). According to the International Federation of Journalists, 72% of journalists who lost their jobs are women, forcing many to flee the country (IFJ, 2022). Similar patterns can be seen in Russia and Belarus, where widespread censorship has forced approximately 1,800 journalists to flee Russia after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Shahbazyan, 2025).

In exile, journalists face numerous challenges, including linguistic barriers, cultural adaptation, homesickness, isolation, and psychological stress (Shahbazyan, 2025). Many are unable to continue practicing journalism due to language difficulties or limited employment opportunities for newcomers (Shahbazyan, 2025). However, there are exiled journalists who continue their work despite these obstacles, contributing to democratic discourse in their home countries with limited resources (Noorzai, 2023; Shahbazyan, 2025). According to Dodds et al. (2024), their motivation stems from "a desire to expose injustice, hold regime authorities accountable, and continue advocating for press freedom and human rights from exile" (p. 3).

1.3.1 Historical Overview of Kurds and Assimilation Politics

Kurdish people, "largest nation without a state," have a population of around 40 million people, with a majority living in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria (Dirik, 2021, p. 30) Their land, known as Kurdistan, was officially divided during the establishment of the Republic of Turkey (Aydın, 2019; Dirik, 2021). With the newly established Turkish state in 1923, Kurds, along with ethnic and religious minorities such as Armenians, Assyrians, Alevis, and Arabs, have faced discrimination and assimilation politics. According to Aydın (2019), the concept of Turkification was a coercive agreement between the state and its citizens to accept assimilation. Under the concept of Turkification, minorities in Turkey were forced to abandon their ethnic identities and languages. Most prominently, Kurds, Armenians and Assyrians who have rejected Turkification policies faced genocide, massacres, violence, displacement, torture, and imprisonment (Aydın, 2019). As the largest minority in Turkey, Kurdish ethnic identity has faced extreme oppression since the establishment of the Turkish state, with a denial of the language, culture, history, and especially education in their mother tongue and representation in media (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2012). They have often been framed as "others" of an imagined homogeneous nation through state media and organizations. Aydın (2019) states that "mainstream media in Turkey frame Kurds as terrorists and internal enemies with unreasonable and unending demands" (p.737).

1.3.2 The Emergence of the First Kurdish TV Channel in the Diaspora

Although there is no formal data on the exact number of Kurds in the diaspora, Dağ (2022) discusses that today, the number is believed to be somewhere between two to three million Kurds, mainly settled in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Austria and the

Netherlands. The need for immigrant workers in Europe between the 1960s and 1970s, increased human rights violations, ethnic cleansing, and displacements in Kurdish cities in Turkey in the 1990s were some of the historical events that led large numbers of Kurds to immigrate and flee to Europe (Ayata, 2011; Hassanpour, 2003). Kurds in the diaspora, who fled the Turkish state's discrimination and assimilation politics, established the first Kurdish media channel, Med TV, in the United Kingdom in 1995 (Sinclair & Smets, 2014). Ayata (2011) underlines the importance of the channel as "a milestone within Kurdish politics and Kurdish history in general" (p. 526). The channel provided programs, primarily in Kurdish and its dialects Sorani, Kurmanji, and Zazaki, aiming to challenge Turkification from abroad. Perceived as a threat to Turkish sovereignty and security, the channel was shut down soon after launch. (Sinclair & Smets, 2014; Hassanpour, 2003) Although new channels emerged, such as MEDYA TV in France and ROJ TV in Denmark, similar pressure from the Turkish government led the host countries to revoke their broadcasting licenses (Ayata, 2011, p. 528).

Kurdish intellectuals and journalists who are in the diaspora continue to challenge the Turkish government by opening new TV channels and media outlets from abroad. Amir Hassanpour (2003), one of a few Kurdish scholars who mainly studied Kurdish media and diaspora, highlights the importance of Kurdish media outlets as "using satellite broadcasting and other new communication technologies in the diaspora, they (Kurds) were able to evade the borders of the Turkish state and to exercise limited sovereignty over the Kurdish population of the country" (p. 87). Today, there are Kurdish channels such as Stêrk TV and Medya Haber based in Belgium and various online media outlets around Europe that continue covering issues related to Kurds despite pressure from host countries and the Turkish state (Medya News, 2024).

1.4 The Role of Kurdish Media in Turkey

Kurdish journalists, Kurdish media organizations, and its workers have been challenging the state's assimilation politics and denial practices for decades. The scholar Aydın (2019) emphasizes the importance of Kurdish media outlets as "Kurdish media are a field of resistance and '[a]n act in opposition to hegemonic power,' through their persistence in offering a voice to Kurds and other minorities under long-term repression in Turkey" (p. 735). In relation to Aydın's argument, Kurdish media outlets established a concept called

Özgür Basın Geleneği (Free Press Tradition) during state repression in the 1990s in order to report on human rights abuses and violence committed by the military forces in Kurdish cities despite pressure and denial from the government (RSF, 2015). These media organizations act as representation, discussion, and dissemination platforms not only for the Kurdish population but also for all minorities in Turkey, such as Armenians, Alevis, LGBTQ+, etc. (Aydın, 2019). The crucial role of Kurdish media is to build collectivity and resistance among the minorities in Turkey against the state's oppression (Aydın, 2019). A study conducted by Caspi and Elias (2010) on ethnic minority media indicates the importance of *media-by* minorities in "displaying greater resistance to political pressure" (p. 77).

Kurdish journalists and media workers who took part in Özgür Basın Geleneği faced death, assassination, jail, torture, persecution, or exile (Aydın, 2019). The media outlets such as Özgür Gündem (Free Agenda), Kurdish language-based Azadiya Welat (Free Homeland), and Dicle Haber Ajansı, DİHA (Dicle News Agency), which lead the tradition were subjects to the state violence (RSF, 2015). An example of this is the bombing of Özgür Ülke (Free Country in English), a newspaper established by mainly Kurdish and leftist-socialist journalists. In 1994, the newspaper's branches were bombed simultaneously, leading to the death of journalist Ersin Yıldız and injuring 23 other journalists (Akyol, 2023). A few weeks later, the same newspaper published documents from the National Security Council (MGK), revealing that the attack had been signed and ordered by then-Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller (Akyol, 2023). A turning point for Kurdish, left-leaning, and ethnic media outlets was July 15, 2016, after the failed coup attempt by the Gülenist movement, which led to the closure of many Kurdish media outlets. Arsan (2018) argues that the coup attempt served as an excuse for President Erdoğan and his government to silence ethnic media outlets (p. 20).

1.4.1 Kurdish Women's Liberation Movement

Kurdish women, as part of the largest ethnic minority in Turkey, have faced discrimination for decades (Erel & Acik, 2019). The Turkish state, through its various policies, has led to Kurdish women becoming vulnerable subjects to gender-based ethnic discrimination and violence with a lack of recognition of their mother tongue and equal rights (Erel & Acik, 2019, p. 486). Denial of their rights has led Kurdish women to actively participate in social

and political activities seeking equal rights. Women subjected to ethnic and religious discrimination *"developed a sense of Kurdishness"* at an early age (Orhan, 2019, p. 280). *"They become political subjects"* (Erel & Acik, 2019, p. 486), not only in formal politics but also in their local communities and families. The Kurdish women's movement took shape with the development of the Kurdish national movement (Al-Ali & Tas, 2017). Through activism, they achieved establishing women's assemblies, women's quotas in political parties, and a co-chair system where both a man and woman share leadership and the same responsibilities (Erel & Acik, 2019, p. 480). The women's movement played an important role in the recognition of Kurdish identity and gender equality despite the Turkish state's gendered and ethnic marginalization and oppression (Al-Ali & Tas, 2017; Erel & Acik, 2019).

1.4.2 Kurdish Female Journalists: Resistance and Oppression

As part of the Kurdish movement, Kurdish female journalists initiated media organization outlets that would represent the true identity of the Kurdish people to challenge assimilation politics and break male-dominant media atmospheres. Despite oppression from the government, Kurdish female journalists were able to initiate Turkey's first female News Agency, Jinha, in 2012 (Tahaoğlu, 2012). All the female workers who took part in the establishment of the agency and worked as media practitioners ethnically identified as Kurdish. As the first-ever gender-based media agency, Jinha aimed to break the male-dominant media tradition by changing the patriarchal language in media to provide more space for female perspectives and gender-based news stories. The agency was one of the opposition media outlets that was shut down by the government in 2016 (Sims, 2016). A few months later, a new Kurdish all-female online-based media outlet, Şujin (Needle in English), was launched with the notion of "Solidarity, participation, collectivism, collaboration, decentralization and the rejection of authority" (Karagöz, 2020, p. 120). However, less than a year later, it was shut down by the government. A month later, female journalists initiated another news outlet, JINNEWS, which continues covering news in multiple languages despite the pressure from the government.

Turkey, as a patriarchal authoritarian regime, often targets female journalists working in alternative media (Erkmen et al., 2022; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011). Research conducted by local and international organizations supporting journalists, focusing on freedom of speech,

human rights, and the rule of law, highlights the declining standards of democracy in the country (Our World in Data, 2024; TGS, 2024; CFWIJ, 2025). These reports frequently emphasize government-led assaults driven by Islamist and nationalist ideologies, which are particularly aimed at women whose ethnic identities or political affiliations intersect with their gender (Erkmen et al., 2022). A striking finding from these studies shows that female journalists who were victims of sexual assault, discrimination, and violence, mainly experienced this treatment by the state police (Erkmen et al., 2022).

A Kurdish female journalist who was harassed by a police officer while reporting from the field shared her experience in a video project (MEKK, 2020). In her own words, she explained the moment the police officer found out about her ethnic identity and profession. "A police officer told me, 'You are Kurdish, a woman and a journalist. What should I do with you? You wouldn't be worth it even if I kill you'" (MEKK, 2020). Scholars Ataman and Çoban (2023) outline the importance of the work field: "The news field is also a potential harassment site for female journalists. They are frequently confronted with the male-dominated open/discreet, discursive/physical oppression and violence imposed by the state and the society" (p. 226). The same journalist encountered physical harassment from another police officer, where he placed his hand on her breasts and pushed her instead of asking her to step back during a protest (MEKK, 2020). Erkmen et al. (2022) emphasize that sexual harassment, backed by the patriarchal state, is common. However, Kurdish female journalists are especially targeted due to the intersectionality of their ethnicity, gender, and profession, which adds another dimension of discrimination and oppression.

The Coalition for Women in Journalism (CFWIJ, 2025) states that women journalists in Turkey, whether critical of the government or simply performing their duties, face oppression and are often charged with terrorism-related offenses. The organization criticizes the broad and vague definition of Anti-Terrorism Law No.3713 and how it's often used by the government to label critical journalists as *"terrorist offenders"* (CFWIJ, 2025). Kurdish media practitioners who cover news related to Kurdish issues are mainly subjected to this law. Data collected since 2019 by the same organization illustrates that 78% of female journalists who were working for Kurdish media outlets and reporting on Kurdish issues were charged with terror-related offenses (CFWIJ, 2025). The coalition described this revelation as a *"disturbing reality,"* highlighting how the government

equates journalism on Kurdish issues with terrorism, using such accusations as a tool to silence dissent and suppress legitimate expression within the Kurdish community (CFWIJ, 2025).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This research aims to study the challenges and struggles Kurdish female journalists experience in exile and Turkey. To collect experience-based information and analyze this data a qualitative research design has been utilized. Flick (2022) defines the qualitative research design as "planning research for collecting and analyzing data for catching meanings or representations" (p. 7), whereas Lim (2024) emphasizes the method as providing in-depth, human-centered insights that aim to "unveil the "what," "why," "when," "where," "who," and "how" (or the "5W1H") behind social behaviors and interactions, rather than merely quantifying occurrences" (p. 200). As this study is conducted based on human experiences, a qualitative research design would provide a comprehensive collection of data along with its analysis. Flick (2022) further highlights the importance of research questions to build a vision for a research design. "A good design has a *clear focus* and is built around *a clear research question"* (Flick, 2022, p. 11). Following Flick's (2022) guide, one main research question and three sub-questions have been formulated for this study as follows;

RQ: What challenges and struggles do Kurdish female journalists face in exile?

SRQ1: What are their reasons for fleeing Turkey?
SRQ2: How does gender play a role in their experiences?
SRQ3: How does their ethnic identity play a role in their experiences?

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions have been utilized for this research to collect in-depth data from experiences of exiled Kurdish female journalists. In total, 13 exiled Kurdish female journalists have been interviewed. The collected data coded and thematically analyzed. All the steps of this research are detailed in the following sections.

2.2. Researcher's Background and Ethics

As mentioned in the introduction section of this research, the inspiration for this study comes from the researcher's own background. As a Kurdish female journalist from Turkey, the researcher believes that she has professional knowledge and understanding of Turkey's social, political, and cultural context. Yet, as a master's student, the researcher seeks to gain knowledge throughout this research and study to develop her understanding of the subject on an academic level. To reach out to participants, the researcher utilized her network from her previous experience in journalism. All the participants knew of the researcher's work as a TV reporter in Turkey, which made connecting and developing trust with each interviewee possible. However, none of the participants have any personal relation or connection whatsoever to the researcher.

The researcher would like to highlight the aim of this research as a goal to contribute, even if it is a drop in the sea, to studies that are made to shine light on women's experiences, specifically Kurdish women. Hesse-Biber (2014), a scholar, calls this type of research "feminist" as "it is grounded in the set of theoretical traditions that privilege women's issues, voices, and lived experiences" (p. 3). This expands from creating interview questions to data and participation that are women-centric (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Scholars call this notion *"counting women in"* (Hawkey & Ussher, 2022, p. 177) as researchers and as participants in research (Grady, 1981). Yet, to manage the level of power and authority between the researcher and participant, the researcher needs to practice reflexivity, "a process by which they recognize, examine, and understand how their social background, location, and assumptions can influence the research" indicates Hesse-Biber (2014, p. 3). By practicing this method, researchers are aware of their personal biases and their possible effect on the production of information gained throughout the research (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

In connection to bias, it is important to have an understanding of the production of knowledge related to women's lived experiences. As a critique of male-dominated fields of science, Feminist Standpoint Theory provides a comprehensive understanding of the matter. Scholars who studied and contributed to feminist studies emphasize the historical background of man-centric knowledge and methodologies for emerging researchers to

overcome these issues. In addition to this, it will be important to briefly examine and discuss Feminist Standpoint Theory in the following title.

2.2.1. Feminist Standpoint Theory

Emerging from the 1970s, Feminist Standpoint Theory became known as one of the most debatable theories from second-wave feminist theories. Based on the methodology provided by the Marxian theory, the scholar Nancy Hartsock (1983) examines women's societal role and labor to highlight the male-dominant systematic structure. The scholar emphasizes the importance of a perspective that centers on women's knowledge to address the issues exposed by the patriarchal system (Hartsock, 1983). Following Hartsock's cornerstone analysis, American theorist Sandra Harding (1993; 2000) called for an epistemology that is produced and shaped by women's experiences, and which, as Wigginton and Lafrance (2019) describe, is "defined as theories of knowledge that influence what and how we can 'know,' and who can know in science" (p. 4). In their study of Feminist Standpoint Theory, Campbell and Wasco (2000) argue that "working from the ontological assumption that there is no single objective truth, this theory claims that class, race, gender, and sexual orientation structure a person's understanding of reality" (p. 781). Further, the scholars point out the lack of adequate information in science about women's experiences as a result of knowledge production based on assumptions of educated white men (Harding, 1993; Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). Simply put, the Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith (1987) explains this man-centric knowledge production as "What men were doing was relevant to men, was written by men about men for men" (p. 18). In addition to Smith's critique, this research is conducted on women, with the inclusion of women and by women. Yet, this does not mean the researcher's gender matters, as feminist researchers may come from all genders. "The gender of the researcher is also not an infallible predictor, as feminist scholarship is conducted by both women and men" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 778). It is the standpoint that matters.

In addition to the researcher's background, the *"knower"* also has crucial importance in the production of knowledge, according to Naples (2007). They are the ones who collect, analyze, and interpret the data and make decisions as to what to consider as knowledge (Naples, 2007). Because of this procedure, feminist scholars argue that the researcher's background could not be isolated from the research, adding that "all knowers are socially

situated, and hence all knowledge is socially situated (i.e., there is no such thing as a neutral, detached observer)" (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019, p. 5). In relation to this argument, feminist scholars emphasize that "Western science has developed through the exploitation and silencing of colonial subjects. In this way, much useful knowledge has been lost or rendered suspect" (Naples & Gur, 2014, p. 19). Furthermore, feminist scholars argue that marginalized people have a better understanding of reality because their location in relation to their oppressors is seen to create the potential for critical social analysis. This, therefore, has led feminist theorists to study the experiences of marginalized groups to have an understanding of social structures (Campbell & Wasco, 2000).

Following the guidance of Feminist Standpoint Methodology, the researcher takes into account a Feminist Standpoint to highlight the struggles and challenges Kurdish female journalists face in Turkey and exile. "Feminist research seeks to respect, understand, and empower women. Therefore, feminist epistemologies accept women's stories of their lives as legitimate sources of knowledge, and feminist methodologies embody an ethic of caring through the process of sharing those stories" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 778). As part of a *"largest nation without a state"* (Dirik, 2021, p. 30) the participants of this research have the ability to critically approach and share their experiences which aligns with the Feminist Standpoint Theory. Through this study, the researcher is able to record, document, and analyze the experiences of exiled Kurdish female journalists with the purpose of having a further discussion around the matter in academia. The researcher would also like to highlight the importance of this research, once again, as it aims to close the gap in academia, which lacks documentation of the experiences of exiled Kurdish female journalists.

2.3. Semi-structured In-depth Interviews and Questions

For this stage of the research, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data based on journalists' life experiences. Lim (2024) highlights the importance of in-depth interviews as "this technique is highly effective for exploring sensitive topics where in-depth understanding and the context of personal stories are crucial" (p. 215). The interviews took place online via Google Meeting except for one interview, which was conducted in person due to safety concerns. Prior to the interviews, an informed consent form was prepared and sent out to participants to read so they may have an understanding

of the research and sign it before the interview starts. “Informed consent is the first step toward helping participants understand any potential risks they face when they agree to be interviewed” (Seidman, 2019, p. 66).

To have good organization and keep track of information, semi-structured questions were prepared by dividing them into three sections. The interviews started with easy conversation for both parties, the participants and the interviewer, to warm up. First, background questions were asked, which aimed to have an easy start and help interviewees to share their background information such as full name, age, country of exile, time in exile, and motivation to journalism. The second part of the questions was based on their journalism experiences in Turkey. This part aimed to receive sensitive information related to their gender, ethnicity, harassment, and violence in practicing journalism. This part took the majority of the interview time as in-depth follow-up questions were asked to gain more information regarding their experiences. While conducting this part, the researcher put extra effort into providing more time and showing a gesture of attention, such as a head nod, to let participants know that they are being carefully listened to. Through this part, some participants got emotional while sharing their experiences related to violence and harassment and why they were forced to leave the country. In these cases, extra time was provided to interviewees, as consideration for these moments was also expected and informed by Seidman (2019), who states, “the process of in-depth interviewing may bring up areas that cause emotional discomfort for the participant” (p. 68). The third part of the questions was based on exile, their life experiences in their host country, journalism work, and the challenges they face.

The interviews were structured in a conversational way to let the participants feel comfortable and safe. All the questions were open-ended questions to let the participant share as much information as possible. Seidman (2019) defines the open-ended concept which “establishes the territory to be explored while allowing participants to take any direction they want” (p. 91), whereas Lim (2024) places emphasis on the emergence of new information through this technique “that were not initially anticipated by the researcher, providing a richer, more complex picture of the subject under study” (p. 215).

While in-depth interviews provide comprehensive insight and information, it also has limitations such as time consumption. To manage this issue, Lim (2024) recommends being strategic in the planning and preparation of interviews, whereas Seidman (2019) suggests at least 90 minutes of interview time to have a good amount of data. Though taking into consideration these suggestions, the participants were not interrupted or reminded of the time. Eventually, all the interviews ranged between 33 minutes at the shortest and 1 hour 41 minutes at the longest. The length of the interviews was also parallel with journalists' work experiences. For instance, participants who worked for only a short time as a journalist shared less experience than those who worked for longer.

To briefly mention, even though all the participants are Kurdish, the interviews were conducted in the Turkish language. This is a direct outcome of Turkification, an assimilation concept that is based on the denial of Kurdish identity, which is also discussed earlier in section *1.3.1. Historical Overview of Kurds and Assimilation Politics* of this research. Due to pressure on Kurdish identity and language, none of the participants were able to receive official education in their mother tongue, which leads to weakness in communicating in their mother tongue. Therefore, the interviews were conducted in the Turkish language, which is the official language of Turkey, and later have been translated into English with the help of DeepL, an online translation service. All the interviews were recorded through audio recording, and interviewees were informed of the recording beforehand.

2.3.Participants

Thirteen exiled Kurdish female journalists *(see Table 1)* were interviewed for this research. The majority of the participants reside in Switzerland and Germany, as well as France, Belgium and Scotland. To find participants, a snowball sampling technique was applied, a method that is utilized "when it is difficult to access subjects with the target characteristics*"* (Naderifar et al., 2017, p. 2). After reaching out to the first exiled Kurdish female journalist, the researcher asked if she knew any other journalists in a similar situation to contact. Through this method, which is also known as the *"chain method"* (Naderifar et al., 2017, p. 2), a number of participants were contacted. While snowball sampling helped save time, it also created a sense of trust and safety among the participants and the researcher. Yet, to broaden the circle, the researcher reached out to a number of

exiled Kurdish female journalists through social media channels such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, or X (formerly Twitter) independently. However, this method was not as successful as the snowball sampling technique. Only a few journalists agreed to be interviewed, and this took much more time than the snowball sampling technique.

Moreover, the sensitivity of the subject carries a high-security risk for the participants. To protect the participants' identities their personal information is anonymized. The scholar Walford (2005) defines anonymity as "not including information about any individual or research site that will enable that individual or research site to be identified by others" (p. 84). While complete anonymity is not fully possible due to participants' recognition of their own interview quotes or identification by others coming from the same profession, the researcher aimed to anonymize as much as possible to eliminate this risk. Instead of sharing participants' exact personal information, a generalization technique was utilized, which had "specific values reported as range" (Lubarsky, 2017, p. 207). For instance, information related to participants' age is categorized as 18 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64, and 65 or over based on data from Esomar (2022), a guideline on how to use personal data in surveys.

Despite challenges in reaching out to participants due to the sensitivity of the matter, the researcher believes that a wide range of perspectives have been collected through interviews. Among exiled journalists who participated in this research is a journalist who had just been smuggled into Greece and was on her way to Belgium to seek asylum to a journalist who had been exiled with her two young children. Bowleg (2008) emphasizes the importance of the inclusion of different perspectives in intersectionality studies as "it is important to examine how the experience of being a mother intersects with the other identities and how this relates to social inequality" (p. 318). Therefore, this research brings various participants and perspectives to an in-depth understanding and analysis of the experience of these journalists under the lens of gender and intersectionality theories. The researcher stopped reaching out to journalists once realizing the content of the interviews had become repetitive. The scholar Seidman (2019) argues that when the content becomes repetitive, "that is the time to say 'enough'" to seek participants for interviews (p. 61). *Table 1,* below is the list of participants who contributed to this research.

Participants*	Age Group	Media**	Previously Jailed	Legal Case	Years in Exile	Country of Exile	Works as Journalist***
Participant 1	35-44	Online	Yes	Ongoing	1-5	Switzerland	No
Participant 2	35-44	Online	No	No	1-5	Germany	No
Participant 3	25-34	Online	Yes	Ongoing	1-5	Belgium	Kurdish M.
Participant 4	35-44	Traditional	Yes	Ongoing	5-10	Germany	Kurdish M.
Participant 5	25-34	Traditional	Yes	Ongoing	1-5	Germany	No
Participant 6	25-34	Online	Yes	Ongoing	5-10	Switzerland	Freelance
Participant 7	35-44	Online Traditional	Yes	Ongoing	1-5	France	No
Participant 8	35-44	Online Traditional	Yes	Ongoing	1-5	Switzerland	No
Participant 9	35-44	Online	Yes	Ongoing	1-5	Germany	No
Participant 10	25-34	Online Traditional	No	Ongoing	1-5	Switzerland	No
Participant 11	35-44	Traditional	Yes	Ongoing	5-10	Scotland	No
Participant 12	35-44	Online	No	Ongoing	5-10	France	No
Participant 13	25-34	Online	Yes	Ongoing	5-10	Switzerland	Kurdish M.

Table 1. List of participants

*Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, participants' real names are not disclosed. The order follows the interview dates, beginning with Participant 1.
**"Traditional" media refers to newspapers, television, radio, and magazines, while "online" refers to digital platforms such as online news agencies, web-based media, podcasts..
***Only one participant reported freelancing for a radio station in the host country. Three participants mentioned working for Kurdish media outlets (referred to as "Kurdish M.").

2.4.Thematic Analysis

To analyze data for this research, a thematic analysis approach has been utilized. The scholars Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (p. 79). The scholars Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest six steps to employ thematic analysis, such as becoming familiar with the data, creating initial codes, identifying potential themes, refining and reviewing these themes, defining and labelling them, and ultimately writing the final report (p. 87). Following these steps, the

analysis began with transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews through Google Pinpoint and TurboScribe, a transcription software. Once all the recordings were transcribed, the researcher listened to the interviews while reading the transcription simultaneously to make sure there were no mistakes or missing information. This also helped the researcher immerse herself in the interview data, a process that Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as *"vital"* for becoming "familiar with the depth and breadth of the content" (p. 87). Once the first review of the transcription was completed, a number of initial codes were identified. In the second round of transcription review, the excerpts related to these codes were categorized under similar themes to have a more structured vision of the data. All the gathered themes were reviewed and renamed based on the related data, and quotes were selected. All the steps taken during the thematic analysis technique were processed in relation to research questions to finalize this step of the study. Furthermore, the researcher remained open-minded while reviewing the transcriptions and gathering unforeseen data, guided by the work of Seidman (2019).

3. FINDINGS

To address the research questions, findings are divided into related themes based on challenges faced around gender, ethnicity, and exile. They start with background data where several participants shared challenges they faced growing up due to their ethnicity, which also created a path for them to become journalists. It is also important to highlight that the majority of the participants who were based in Kurdish cities have experiences of working in western cities, as Kurdish media outlets have branches all around Turkey. There are only 3 participants with short journalism experiences in mainstream media outlets.

3.1.From Denial to Journalism: Early Challenges in Turkey

To understand the challenges Kurdish female journalists experienced, it is important to study their background coming from an ethnic minority in Turkey. During the interview process, a majority of the participants mentioned experiences of displacement, assimilation, and ethnic discrimination as factors in choosing journalism and Kurdish media outlets as an advocacy platform.

3.1.1. Displacement and Identity-Based Challenges

The 1990s were the years of displacement for many Kurdish families who refused to become "*Korucu,"*someone who was forced by the Turkish government to inform them about the activities of, and take up arms against the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) (Çelik, 2021). As a result of this repression and conflict between the two parties, Kurdish families were forced to move to Turkish cities. Coming from a displaced family, Participant 2 indicates:

> "In the Kurdish provinces, in rural areas where Kurds live, there was pressure to become a *korucu*, to take weapons, to be informants, and so on. My family did not want this, so they were pressured for a long time. My father couldn't stand this pressure and had to move. [...]. but they have never given up on their identity." (P2)

Similarly, P8 characterizes her family as patriotic, therefore becoming a target by the Turkish state. "The reason my family moved was because they were Kurds. They wanted their rights and to live as Kurds, and because of this, they were forced to move" (P8). Another participant recalled growing up with stories of displacement told by her grandparents, which led her to "develop a consciousness about her ethnic identity" (P3).
For Participant 10, her parents chose accepting assimilation and hiding their Kurdish identity to protect her and her siblings, which she indicates: "I grew up like a Turk because my mother was afraid."

To adapt to a Turkish-speaking city, linguistic challenges became an issue for many participants. Participant 4 recalled receiving help for translation from her classmates, where she also faced physical violence from her teacher due to linguistic difficulties: "My teacher asked me to memorize my father's name, but I couldn't because I didn't know Turkish. [...]. In the end I couldn't learn, so my teacher slapped me" (P4).

As part of Kurdish identity, participants with Kurdish names faced ethnic discrimination as well. Kurdish alphabet and names are not officially recognized in Turkey, despite a reform at legalization in 2013 (Yaşar, 2022). Participant 2 mentioned that she was constantly marginalized because of her name. "I didn't have any problems with people who I just met, up until I said my name" (P10). Similarly to what Participants 2 and 4 mentioned: "I was

constantly having issues related to my name, they remind you every day that you are 'Other'" (P4).

Access to education was also challenging for some participants for such reasons as armed conflict, politics, patriarchy, or poverty. Participant 11 taught herself how to read and write when she was 15: "The place I grew up in the 90s was a conflict area. All the schools were closed because of the armed conflict, and they weren't open for a long time" (P11). Participant 8 mentions her experiences of getting expelled from university after asking for education in the mother tongue.

> "Not only did they expel me, but they also banned me from any education forever. During that time, 1600 students were expelled from the schools in Turkey. That's how my higher education ended without starting." (P8)

Participant 5 mentioned getting jailed for more than five years due to reporting on a student protest while interning for a left-leaning media outlet, therefore quitting university. Growing up in a displaced family, Participant 4 lacked higher education due to financial challenges."I couldn't go to university because of economic issues. We were seven siblings, and we had to take turns to study" (P4). Participant 9 emphasized on the patriarchal structure of her family. "My father registered my older brother in a *dershane* (equivalent to cram schools), but the same day, he took me out of school. 'You are a woman,' he said.'That is it. It is done'" (P9).

3.1.2. Journalism as a Platform for Self-Reflection

Displacement, discrimination, and state-based pressure motivated the majority of the participants to choose journalism to reflect on their experiences. Several journalists mentioned that they became journalists because they witnessed state repression while growing up. "As a child, I witnessed a lot of things, and I wanted to write about it, and I thought the best way to do that was journalism" (P8). While Participant 4 became a journalist in response to state oppression on Kurdish journalists, the death of Alevi Kurdish journalist Metin Göktepe in police custody in 1996 served as a major motivation for two other journalists who shared his ethnic and religious background (P5; P7).

> "My father used to follow the news regularly every day since my childhood. One day, while watching the news, I saw news about the anniversary of Metin Göktepe's death. Actually, before that, I always said I was going to be a lawyer. After seeing that news, I said I was going to be a journalist." (P7)

Participant 5 noted that journalism was known as a "sacred job" for her family.

Participants' decision to become journalists received various reactions from their parents. While Participant 2 mentioned that she became a "source of pride" for her family, Participant 4 mentioned that her parents thought journalism was safer than politics. "They were taken to custody and tortured. To them; journalism was better than politics, less dangerous" (P4). Another journalist mentioned that her decision was expected, but her mother would worry about finances, telling her, "'What are you going to do in journalism by quitting a program like architecture? You will starve'" (P5). Participant 9 became a journalist after her father refused to allow her to continue her education because of her gender: "My father actually caused me to become a journalist by not sending me to school. I started writing columns and started doing journalism" (P9). In contrast to these journalists, families of Alevi Kurdish journalists rejected supporting their daughters' decisions to become journalists because of the dangerous nature of the job (P13; P7).

> "Of course, my father didn't take it well. He would never accept it. My opinion has never changed. When I was 21 and about to start journalism school, my mother said, 'You need to go over my dead body to go. I'll never let you go.' I said I'd go. They said, 'We wouldn't send you any money.' I said I will still go." (P7)

Many participants stated that practicing journalism in Kurdish media outlets was their only viable path at the start of their careers. Participant 8 stated:

> "I had nowhere else to go because that was the only place that was close to my thoughts. It was about Kurds, socialists, feminists, and children, and I found myself there, so I started there because there was a sense of belonging." (P8)

In contrast, Participant 9 started her career in a state-run agency but soon quit and moved to a Kurdish media outlet because of the intense manipulation of her work:

> "For example, I say someone was murdered. A citizen was killed in the street. They use my signature and say, 'a terrorist was killed.' But the people they call terrorists are actually my cousin, my aunt's son, and my relatives. I can't call my relatives terrorists." (P9)

Kurdish media outlets became a training platform for many journalists starting their profession. Participant 12 mentioned that she learned more at the job than at school, adding that another female worker learned literacy at the agency: "We had a reporter who learned how to write and read at the agency" (P12). Another journalist, P8 mentioned that she began working for a Kurdish language based media outlet after wishing to learn how to write in her mother tongue. "I spoke well, but I didn't know how to write, like many Kurds. Because we didn't have such an opportunity at school. [...] I learned so much in that one year" (P8).

Participants often emphasized the mutual support among the workers of Kurdish media outlets. Participant 3, who worked for a women-centric Kurdish media outlet, states: "Our solidarity with each other was more based on the principle of comradeship. In other words, the slogan 'a woman is a woman's home' was really finding a place" (P3). Some participants also highlighted the cooperative atmosphere among the workers of Kurdish media outlets in overcoming financial challenges. Participant 2, who had a full-employment with salary, recalled volunteering with other Kurdish media outlets during periods of staff shortages. Participant 9 emphasized the motivation that encourages journalists to take part in Kurdish media outlets despite the low income:

> "Journalism, especially journalism in the Kurdish press, is not money. It is all based on volunteerism. You are doing what the people put on your shoulders in an honorable way. I don't think Kurdish journalists make money because they work for the bare minimum. We used to say that even if we could only feed ourselves, we are okay with it." (P9)

While Participant 10 mentioned receiving financial support from her parents, Participant 8 recalled the closure of Kurdish media outlets in 2016 *(discussed in 1.4. The Role of Kurdish Media in Turkey)* and its ongoing effects on journalists: "They didn't only shut down the media outlets, they also tried to tame the people with hunger. Just like that in a night so many journalists lost their jobs and still struggles" (P8).

3.2. Gender and Journalism

Gender-based challenges often arose while practicing journalism in Turkey. While many Kurdish journalists mentioned experiencing equal gender treatment within Kurdish media outlets, all participants reported facing gender-based harassment from security forces, some from mainstream media workers, and, in some cases, from news resources in Western cities.

3.2.1. Gender Dynamics Across Media Outlets

When asked, "Can you tell me about the gender dynamics at your workplace?" The majority of the journalists answered the question by focusing on the hierarchy. Several participants noted the rare existence of hierarchy in Kurdish media outlets. Participant 7 stated:

> "Even though I was a newly hired editor, no one would interfere with the news on my page.[...]. At most, maybe your coworkers would take the lead to improve you technically from time to time. There really was editorial independence." (P7)

Similarly, Participant 6 recalled her experience as "I never felt excluded, judged, felt like the 'other', or a hierarchy as a woman." For Participant 4, who worked as an editor in the politics section, male ideas were often taken into more consideration at her workplace.

> "In relation to deciding what news to publish on the front page, male colleagues' ideas matter the most. I was working on the political page, and I told my colleagues not to share a news piece without getting more updates on it, but they said 'no' because you know how they have 'men understand the politics better.'" (P4)

Participant 2 stated a lack of gender-based discrimination among her coworkers. "I honestly never experienced any gender differentiation at the workplace, never even questioned up until your question, but I think because we trust each other very much and because of that, did not differentiate" (P2).

Although not many participants had experience of working for mainstream and progressive media outlets, 3 participants expressed their drastically different experiences in comparison to those who worked for Kurdish media outlets. Participant 11, faced

manipulation for years while working for a branch of a media outlet based in the United States.

> "My coworker introduced himself as my boss. He would make me do his work, and he would say, 'You would lose your job if you don't do it.' We were actually in the same position with him.[...]. I remember him posting my news on his social media and never crediting me or publishing my translations with his name." (P11)

Participant 9, who used to work for a state-run news agency, stated gender-based harassment as:

> "I was exposed to their ugly behavior, hitting on women. One of them was in love with me, and he would hit on me every day. I wouldn't want to see him. It was uncomfortable. But you have to. And you can't break away. As soon as you break away from them, you're alone. You can't reach the news sources." (P9)

Another journalist, who was previously jailed before working for a progressive media outlet, emphasized the gender-based discrimination in her workplace, where male journalists were primarily assigned to cover politics, protests, or court proceedings. (P5) She further commented: "There was a perception that women journalists could not defend themselves in situations where intervention might be necessary. You know the mindset, men can solve all kinds of problems" (P5).

3.2.2. Working in the Field as Female Journalists

Participants who worked in both Western and Kurdish cities often experienced gender-based discrimination from mainstream media workers and security forces. Participant 6 shared her first encounter with a camera person who worked for mainstream media in a Western city:

> "As soon as I arrived, they said, 'Are you from the Kurdish press?' I mean, as soon as they see a woman with a camera, 'she is from the Kurdish press.' Otherwise, no other organization would send a female cameraperson to a protest." (P6)

Adding that almost 90% of the camerapersons were male where they would try to crash or push her while trying to record the event (P6). Participant 3 recalled an incident where her coworker was verbally harassed by a male reporter in the field. "He said, 'You carry the

camera as if you held a watermelon.'" Similarly, Participant 11 described gender-based objectification while working in the field in a Western city. She recounted an incident in which she experienced physical violence:

> "A cameraman grabbed me by the shoulders and threw me to make room for himself. [...]. It's as if they are the only ones who have the right to cover that news. He couldn't attack other men, but he attacked me because I am a woman." (P11)

Participant 5, who worked in a western city, recalled harassment by a news resource during an interview where he would stare into her eyes, scan her body, and flirt with her. When asked about support or security measures they would take, all the journalists answered with a similar response: trying to protect each other or stop covering the event and moving to a safer area. Participant 13 specified partnering with a male coworker as a safety measure when covering news in extreme religious neighbourhoods.

3.2.2.1. Limitations on Appearance and Behaviour

Journalists often paid attention to their outfits and behavior when reporting from the field. The conflicts between the Kurdish youth movement and the security forces in Kurdish cities built a dangerous work environment for the journalists. Participants who reported from these cities often dressed casually and avoided make-up to act freely during social events and conflicts. Participant 3 mentioned paying attention to the culture and the society norms as "I tried to dress in a way that could be accepted by the society or the environment as well" (P3). Participant 5, who worked in a western city, mentioned receiving rejection from her news sources when wearing a dress. "An old man told me, 'You are walking around like that, what interview can I give you?' I was wearing a short dress, although it wasn't revealing my body much" (P5). Further adding that she was employed by a progressive media outlet, and her employer asked her to dress a certain way: "He would say 'look more presentable, wear make-up, dress up and don't look like a boy'" (P5). Journalists also mentioned following events related to deaths during conflict time. A majority of them mentioned paying extra attention to their appearance during the related news coverage.

> "For example, piercings, tattoos, long nails, colored makeup, light hair, blow-dried hair, all of these things may be understandable in the West or in other regions, but

> not in Kurdistan because your news source is the one who has lost a child, someone whose son is in prison, someone who has lost their father. So if you are going to have a dialogue with a mother, she may see you as her daughter who is in prison, or in the mountains, or martyred, or whatever. Therefore, it is necessary to eliminate all of these factors so that she can feel comfortable with you." (P1)

Acting masculine or not laughing loudly were some of the behaviors female journalists had to perform to be able to work in the field. Participant 11 recalled that she would be serious and not smile at boys to avoid misunderstanding. Similarly, Participant 2 added that she would be very careful to not gain attention by laughing loudly. As a frequent smoker, she recalled paying attention to the way she smoked if there were people or security forces around (P2). She also recalled acting sympathetic at military checkpoints to be able to pass through.

> "I've been blocked so many times on my way to get to the news. I had to get to the news to be able to deliver the news, so I was kind of trying everything. If I look sympathetic, maybe they won't notice me. I honestly feel so disgusted talking about this." (P2)

Participant 1 mentioned making efforts to hide her femininity. "My hair was always braided or tied to eliminate attention to my femininity. I think people would think that I was a male when they first met me" (P1). Adding that she would often receive comments like 'You behaved so rough, like a man' from her coworkers when reporting from places like a "*kahvehane"* (a teahouse for men), where she would act masculine (P1). Participant 6 recalled acting masculine to protect herself in case of gender-based discrimination from her news resources.

3.3. Ethnicity and Intersectionality

Besides gender related issues, participants often mentioned the intertwined nature of their ethnic identity with the media outlets they worked for, with many stating that Kurdish media outlets and their workers were trusted by the Kurdish community. However, they also faced challenges from security forces, mainstream media workers, and opposition groups such as far-right nationalists and extremist Islamists.

3.3.1. Role of Kurdish Identity

All the journalists who worked for Kurdish media outlets in the Kurdish cities emphasized the presence of local trust for them because of shared ethnic identity. Participant 2 focused on the misrepresentation of Kurds in mainstream media and stated: "They want to talk to the ones that can understand them, their problems and deliver the truth" (P2). While Participant 1 mentioned a lack of ethnic discrimination in Kurdish cities, Participant 8 also outlined the respect for Kurdish journalists among the Kurdish population: "There is more respect. Your self-confidence is also higher there. Because it is a community that I belong to" (P8). Participant 4 discusses how criminalization by the state of Kurdish media outlets and workers, as well as negative framing of them in mainstream media, caused challenges for Kurdish journalists to reach news sources:

> "Because the media outlets we work for were criminalized by the state, a woman journalist who worked for a Turkish media outlet could reach out to news sources much more easily. They could be a few steps ahead of us. Let's say we both go to follow a press statement, I would get ready to have problems but the doors would be open to them already." (P4)

Several participants mentioned that security forces were the major challenge for them in continuing their work. Participant 2 states: "I don't think it is all about my journalism work. I am Kurdish, I am a journalist, and I am a Kurdish woman journalist" (P2). Further adding that she would hide her SD cards to prevent them from being confiscated which is something Participant 3 mentioned as well. Participant 13 mentioned being targeted by the security forces because of her courage:

> "As a Kurdish woman, the fact that you showed courage in the field and were doing this work was seen as a problem. The fact that you dared to do such a thing, that you were writing the truth. We were subjected to so many threats, harassment, arrests, and despite that, the fact that you were doing this work, that you were working in a Kurdish institution, was a problem for them." (P13)

Participant 12, who was sent for a task to northern Turkey, recalled being warned by the fixer not to talk about her Kurdish identity.

> "The fixer told us not to mention you are Kurdish or the media outlet you work for. He said, 'They (locals) wouldn't welcome you. They wouldn't want to meet you or do interviews or share information. Don't tell them you are Kurdish.'" (P12)

All the 3 participants who had Alevi Kurdish background have had experiences of ethnic and religious discrimination. Participant 12 mentioned that she was targeted by the police officers: "I am Kurdish, Alevi, and a woman. The police officers would easily throw sexist swears every time I passed the checkpoint" (P12). Similarly, Participant 5 recalled her dialog with a prison guard after imprisonment for reporting on a student protest.

> "'You are Kurdish, from X city, Alevi, and a journalist, is that right? And you are not ashamed to', because I was a student at a university at the time, 'took money', a scholarship from the government." (P5)

Further adding that not only her gender but her multiple identities make life even harder to live in Turkey, enough to count as "other" (P5). Something that Participant 7 mentioned as well.

3.4. Experiences of Harassment and Violence in Turkey

Almost all the journalists were subjected to some form of harassment, abuse, torture, or violence because of their gender and ethnic identities while practicing journalism in Turkey. Many held security forces accountable while some pointed to male media workers and news resources. Participant 4 stated that she was called a *"terrorist"* by a district governor after reporting on the news about him.

> "It was a horrible experience; I wanted to erase it from my mind. He called the outlet and told them that he wanted to speak to me. Then, we had an argument, and he called me 'Terrorist. We know who you are.'" (P4)

Two journalists mentioned being attacked by opposition groups during demonstrations. (P6; P3). Participant 3 stated that she and her coworkers were attacked by members of HUDA PAR (Free Cause Party), a Sunni Islamist political party, where one of her colleagues was stabbed 8 times, and she experienced a 40% loss of vision in one of her eyes, after getting constant hits on her face and head. Adding that although the incident happened in the presence of security forces, they did not intervene; instead they made fun

of them at the hospital while taking their testimonies. “There were already two armored vehicles around the corner for the protesters. When we were attacked there, they watched. They did not intervene at all” (P3). Similarly Participant 6 indicated being attacked by a far-right wing extremist group: “They know that Kurdish women journalists mainly work for the Kurdish media outlets, they would directly attack you. In Kurdish cities police attacked me, in Metropolis fascists and cops” (P6).

3.4.1. State-Based Violence, Police as Perpetrators

Participants often hold security forces accountable for the attacks they face, emphasizing becoming targets in the work field. Participant 4 mentioned that “In recent years, it has become normal to get detained, arrested or be subjected to violence.” For Participant 12, her gender, profession, and being critical were some of the main reasons to be targeted. “They were trying to stop us from following the news. They were preventing us from getting the footage” (P12). Participant 2, who mainly worked in a Kurdish city, mentioned that she never faced any attacks coming from civilians, but experienced harassment, threats, and physical attacks from the security forces. Participant 3 points out the reasons given by the security forces;

> “The order part always caught my attention. ‘We take orders.’ So, you get orders to beat. You get orders to insult. You get orders to use violence. Even in case of harassment and rape, they will say, ‘That was the order.’ (P3)

3.4.1.1. Verbal and Physical Harassment in the Field

Several participants mentioned observing changes in the behavior of security forces depending on the political climate. “Every time the language of politics hardened, the attitude of the police hardened accordingly” (P6). Verbal harassment was another common attack faced by the Kurdish female journalists. Participant 3 shared her encounter with a police officer while reporting on a protest:

> “I was trying to hold the camera high to get some footage. He turned and yelled at me, ‘What are you doing here with dough in your hands!’ (an insult to humiliate women who try to work in “manly” jobs). He says ‘Go to your home and take care of your child’ or sexist insults, sexist swearings. Especially towards us, women.” (P3)

Participant 2 said that she was often verbally harassed by police officers: “You are a beautiful woman; what are you doing here?” Although several journalists mentioned facing physical abuse by the security forces, they avoided sharing the details, except Participant 12: “The police barricade was right behind me, and a cop physically abused me with his helmet. When I reacted, their superiors did not do anything or even condemn him” (P12). Being attacked by police officers during demonstrations was an experience that was often raised during the interviews. Some journalists mentioned that they would be the direct target of police officers in case of intervention during protests. “There were so many journalists around, but I was shot directly in the leg with a rubber bullet” (P6). Participant 8 shared her experience as:

> “The cops seriously tried to kill us during the Kobani protests. They threw a tear gas capsule into our car, shut the door, and didn’t let us get out. They tried to suffocate us inside that vehicle with that gas.” (P8)

Another journalist mentioned that she was chased and hit by a police car on her way home after reporting from a protest (P11). “I was walking on the sidewalk and a police car hit me. Then they approached me as if it was a mistake and said, ‘Let’s take you home.’ I was in shock.” Further adding that “none of this was a coincidence; they were always trying to get information from me” (P12). Subjected to similar harassment, Participant 3 stated that the violence was motivated by hatred towards Kurds and minorities.

3.4.1.2. Arbitrary Detention and Custody

Frequent detentions and custody were some of the techniques that were practiced by the security forces to prevent journalists from practicing their work. Journalists often mentioned that police officers would hold them for long periods of time at checkpoints. Participant 2 recalled being called a “terrorist” by security forces who checked her ID card while reporting from a Kurdish city with her Turkish fellow journalists (P2).

> “The cops checked our IDs and saw my fellows were Turkish and I was Kurdish. He pointed a long-barreled gun at my chest, turned to them and asked, ‘What are you doing with this terrorist? Why don’t you guys go and photograph other beautiful cities? Don’t you understand these are terrorists?’” (P2)

Participant 4 and 6 mentioned that their press ID wouldn't be recognized by the police officers and they would be arbitrarily held at check points.

3.4.1.2.1. Threats of Death and Rape

Some participants reported being threatened with rape and death by security forces. Participant 12 recalled receiving a death threat after being held in arbitrary custody.

> "One of the cops knew the neighborhood where I was born and grew up. He gave the name of a graveyard that was close to there and said, 'If you continue working in this city, your end will be that graveyard; leave this town.'" (P12)

Similarly, Participant 9 mentioned that she began receiving death and rape threats by JITEM (Gendarmerie Intelligence Organization), an organization known for kidnapping and killing civilians in Kurdish cities in the 90s, after she quit working for a state-run news agency: "They would say 'We'll rape you. You won't be able to face people.' I am a woman and they were targeting me for my womanhood" (P9). While Participant 12 mentioned a similar experience but did not want to share the details because of emotional challenges, Participant 8 said that facing rape, detention and being sexually abused during detention have always been threats for Kurdish media workers (P8).

3.4.1.2.2. Torture and Strip Search

Torture during custody was another form of violence journalists experienced while practicing journalism. Participant 7 mentioned that she was tortured while in custody after security forces raided the media outlet she worked in and held them in a detention car for 8 hours.

> "I was sitting on the ground, and a cop was jumping on my feet with his boots. He was hitting my genitalia. He was beating my nose with *"tespih"* (a string of beads, used by men). On our way to the police center he was saying that he was going to rape us." (P7)

Participant 7 further recalled suffering a major fit of asthma during the police raid where she was pushed downstairs. She mentioned that while her coworkers were asking for water, a police officer yelled out, *"Let her die!"* (P7). Another journalist mentioned that she was taken to custody after a work trip from Iraqi Kurdistan, where she was beaten up violently:

“The second I asked why I was taken to custody, they started to beat me. Then, they took me to the counter-terrorism center. I was beaten so hard” (P8).

Strip search, which is considered as “inhuman or degrading treatment” under European human rights law (Mavronicola & Webster, 2023), was another violence some journalists experienced during custody. Facing strip search multiple times, Participant 8 outlined an occasion that she was affected by most.

> “They checked from my vagina to the entire body, everywhere. They were forcing me. [...]. I was stripped naked, and there were male police officers too in the room, not only female officers.” (P8)

Adding that she was blindfolded while taken to interrogation after the search.

> “The moment they were taking me through the corridors with my folded eyes was the worst; I was so afraid. I didn’t know what they were going to do to me, especially after that strip search.” (P8)

She mentioned that she was released after 3 days without charges, and the police officers justified their treatment as a *“misunderstanding”* (P8). Participant 11 was another journalist who experienced a partial strip search while under custody.

> “They took me to a bathroom in a hotel that they were staying in. Then, a woman police officer came in and made me get partially naked. I was subjected to a partial strip search. Then she asked me to get out of the room while I was still naked. There were so many cops and soldiers outside.” (P12)

Adding that after she left the room, she found herself in the middle of an armed conflict and was verbally abused by the police officers (P12). Previously jailed Participant 4 mentioned that her mother would be subjected to strip searches every time she went to visit her in the jail (P4).

3.4.1.2.3. Forced to Become Informant

Two journalists mentioned that they were pressured to become informants by the Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MİT (The National Intelligence Organization), and police officers.

Participant 12, who was working in a Kurdish city, recalled the last time she was taken into custody:

> "I would be taken to custody every 2 to 3 months; it was like a chronic situation. In the last custody, I was interrogated by MIT in a locked room. At that time, they offered me to become an informant for them. When I didn't accept it, they threatened me as, 'If you don't accept, something bad might happen to you in the streets. We might kidnap and rape you. You might go to jail for years just because you are doing journalism.'" (P12)

She mentioned that she filed a complaint with a human rights organisation in case something bad happened to her (P12). Participant 9 was another journalist who was approached by police officers to share footage that she received from locals. They threatened her with violence if she refused. She mentioned that she began receiving unknown calls and death threats after that day that made her leave in fear up until she got jailed for a photo of a protester who was being tortured by a police officer (P9).

3.4.2. Online Harassment and Targeting of Family Members

Gender-based threats or death threats often emerged after several participants posted their work or opinions on social media platforms, mainly X (formerly Twitter). Participant 13 states that, "When a woman posts her opinion or a critical news article, she is much more subjected to sexist insults and slanders." Adding that she was often subjected to gender-based insults and received death threats for posting her news articles.

> "Because you are a woman, you are immediately hit below the belt. Saying that to a man may not affect him much, but when you are a woman, it affects you a lot. Those comments had such a negative effect on me." (P13)

Further adding that her family's well-being was threatened when people online shared her parent's home address: "'We know where they are. You keep writing and so on.' These kinds of things happened. I was very scared at the time" (P13). Similarly Participant 3 received death threats after posting news coverage about a woman who was sexually abused by a police officer.

> "They direct messages and say, 'You are enemies of the police, you are enemies of the state, you are making fake news,' whatever. There are also those who send

> photos of yellow bags (a corpse bag used by the Turkish army) in the comments and say that 'this will be the end of you.' There is no political dimension, but just because a cop is the subject, they lynch you with the understanding that you are defaming the police." (P3)

Participant 7, who is an Alevi Kurdish journalist, emphasized receiving death threats that are related to her Alevi background. Known as the Dersim massacre, from 1937 to 1938, thousands of Alevi Kurds were killed or forced to be displaced by the Turkish military due to their "ethnicity and religious background within a predominantly Sunni Muslim state" (Al-Ali & Tas, 2017, p.3). The journalist recalled the threats she received as:

> "'We had to kill you too. We shouldn't have left anyone alive in Dersim. You are ungrateful. You got an education in this country and became a journalist, but you don't know its value. You all deserve yellow bags (corpse bags),' they said." (P7)

Echoing similar experiences, Participant 11 mentioned that she is scared of using social media accounts because of receiving death and rape threats after a news piece she tweeted on X.

> "The post was viewed by around 1 million users. My account was getting so many complaints and thousands of threats through direct messages. Someone told me that 'we will give you to ÖSO (Free Syrian Army) and watch how they rape you.' So many sexist attacks. Another one said, 'Fuck you and your news. We will find your address; your turn is coming soon.'" (P11)

Further adding that her social media accounts are restricted in Turkey because of the government regulations (P11). Several mentioned quitting social media platforms due to fear and threats. Participant 8 indicated deleting her social media account while passing through checkpoints.

> "I was always concerned when passing through the police and military checkpoints. I used to delete my social media accounts and posts. Then, I would re-upload them. I think I felt safer in my own way, but there is no such thing." (P8)

3.4.3. Arbitrary Legal Prosecution

All but one of the journalists who participated in this research mentioned facing trials as a result of their work. Membership in a terrorist organization and propaganda of a terrorist

group are the main accusations that often emerged during the interviews. While Participant 5 was jailed for more than half a decade due to accusations of belonging to a terrorist group, Participant 7 reported having 3 cases of accusations of making propaganda for a terrorist group and was facing almost a decade of jail time. Some participants have already been in jail because of similar accusations, with ongoing cases still open against them. Participant 3's statement sums up what the majority said:

> "I have been a journalist for 12 years. In 12 years, I have had 17 investigations. Nine of these turned into lawsuits. I was detained 7 times, I was called to testify at the police station many times, I was sentenced in many cases, I was acquitted in many of them." (P3)

Further adding that it is her identities that are being judged: "My Kurdish identity, my identity as a woman and my defense of the truth are on trial. [...]. The aim was not to judge my work, but to judge what I stood for and what I was" (P3). Participant 7 who was tortured while in custody mentioned that she filed a police complaint but was not taken seriously and the police opened a counter case claiming that they were the ones that were tortured. "They said that they were victimised. Our criminal complaint was never taken into account. Can you imagine?" (P7). Similarly, Participant 8 was found guilty after filing a police complaint.

> "They dragged me down from the 7th floor all the way down by pulling my hair. I still have some damage, and part of my hair does not grow. Then I filed a complaint against the police officer, but they found me guilty and fined me. I could hardly pay that money, and then I never tried to file any complaints against them again." (P8)

Other journalists also mentioned avoiding filing complaints against police officers in cases of violence due to the lack of an independent justice system. Yet several journalists mentioned applying self-censorship to avoid trials because of their work.

3.5. Forced to Exile

Arbitrary custody, violence, torture, trials, safety, and lack of trust in the judiciary system forced all the participants to leave Turkey to seek safety in Europe. Several participants mentioned that their lawyer warned them to leave the country before the court decision. Participant 2 reflected on her family's concerns for her safety.

> "They (police officers) were raiding my house. I was being followed. I had no peace in the area where I lived. I didn't feel safe. I actually believed that I could cope with it, but my family was very worried." (P2)

Journalists had limited time fleeing Turkey, some not even having enough time to bid farewell to their family members. Several participants mentioned the court's travel ban and, because of this, were forced to take dangerous roads that were determined by the smugglers. Participant 4 states:

> "The smugglers called me the next day and said, 'We are leaving tonight.' We left suddenly. I walked for 7-8 hours. We were two women and two smugglers. It really scared me as a woman with two strangers. If they kill you there or if you drown in that river, no one will know. Things like this happen all the time." (P4)

Taking dangerous routes to safety is not an end to danger. Their families who were left behind still face pressure from security forces. Participant 3, mentioned that while she was in X country her family's house was raided by security forces and they were asked about her whereabouts.

> "The police had been to the house several times while I was still there and the last time they told my family. 'We know where she stays in X. It won't take us an hour to find her, but she should come.' Both because of this and on the same day, the gendarmerie reached me and started sending me messages like 'we know where you are.' Frankly, I was worried about my safety because of this." (P3)

Participant 9 reflects on the challenges Kurdish media workers face in Turkey as;

> "Because we are Kurdish and because we reflect the truth, they used to try to discipline us by killing us. Now, they try to sideline us by arresting and exiling us, interfering with our work and preventing us." (P9)

It took 2 months for Participant 12 to get to France whereas Participant 6 traveled to 7 different countries before she was caught in Switzerland without a visa. Participant 13 was caught in Bulgaria after trying to smuggle to Europe at her first attempt and was deported back to Turkey where she was sent to jail.

3.5.1. Exile as a Limbo: Challenges in Host Countries

Exile is commonly understood as a gateway to physical safety. However there are many challenges that come with it. Linguistics, adaptation, cultural, psychological, and emotional challenges are some of the difficulties experienced by all the participants in this research. For many, exile is a limbo where they thought of going back, even if it meant getting jailed. Exiled in Switzerland, participant 8 reflected: "I said I might get jailed for ten years in Turkey, but I can't live here like this. My friends stopped me from going back" (P8). Participant 7, who has major health issues and is exiled in France, shares a similar experience:

> "Maybe it would have been better if I had been jailed in Turkey. This exile, refugee process brought me to that point. [...]. I think the trauma of exile is worse than the traumas I faced in Turkey." (P7)

Participant 9, a young mother exiled in Germany with her 2 children, discusses the emotional distress associated with exile.

> "I feel like I am getting insane. Knowing that I won't be able to go back to the place I was born or not be able to see my mother. Even if I die I don't mind anymore. [...]. I didn't kill anyone. All I did was take a picture with my camera, and now I am accused of being a member of a terrorist organization. Can you believe this? It is a comedy." (P9)

Lacking a sense of belonging is another challenge journalists have mentioned commonly. For Participant 4, *"exile is a limbo,"* whereas Participant 4 called her experience a "burden of living between the two countries." Similarly, Participant 13 states: "I have a deep feeling of emptiness. My mind, my thoughts, all my presence is still there (Turkey)." Participants often used powerful phrases such as *"starting from zero"* or *"like a baby."* Participant 10 calls her experience *"double displacement,"* having first been displaced with her family to a western city in Turkey and now being exiled alone to a different country. This marks their experiences of interruption in their personal and professional lives. Participant 1 stated her frustration with having to restart from scratch ground up after having built a full career and life for herself in her homeland. Participant 13 emphasized on the lack of recognition of her profession in exile.

> "I say I'm a journalist. Everyone looks at me very strangely. It means nothing here. No matter how good you have done in your own society, no matter how reputable you are, it means nothing here. That's very hard for me." (P13)

For Participant 12, exile at first was like an open-air prison: "I was thinking at the time that this is a kind of prison. You can just walk freely on the street, but you don't belong here. You are not a part of this place" (P12).

3.5.1.1. Language Barriers and Disrupted Profession

Lack of speaking the language was a major challenge all the participants emphasized. Several participants stated that they lacked adaptation due to difficulties in learning to speak new languages. Participant 1, who keeps track of the news agenda in Turkey, mentioned that she is unable to concentrate on her language school. "I can't get away from there. After all, my reality is there, and I'm here, and I can't concentrate" (P1). Participant 7, who has major health issues and frequent doctor visits, described linguistic challenges as captivity.

> "Another captivity begins here. The main reason for this imprisonment is language. Especially for a journalist, it is really a terrible thing. Not knowing the language is a scary thing, I had a very difficult time, and I still do." (P7)

While participants 2 and 12 emphasized the integration challenges due to lack of language, Participant 4 shared her concern about livelihood and, therefore, quit school and started working. Participants 8 and 10, exiled in Switzerland, outlined learning challenges during their stay in refugee camps. "I felt that I was forced to communicate only with people who I spoke the same language with" (P10). Participant 9 stated difficulties, including for her children, where they couldn't make friends because of the language.

Language is the major barrier for Kurdish female journalists to continue pursuing their profession. The majority of the participants indicated a lack of possibility to work for local media outlets in host countries because of language issues. While some journalists revealed working for diaspora Kurdish media outlets, others outlined working in service industries or similar areas. For example, Participant 10 works for a restaurant and Participant 4 is employed by a car factory while also working as a translator in her native language for a

Kurdish media outlet. Participant 2 stated a lack of opportunities in the local media outlets for newcomers.

Three journalists mentioned continuing to work for diaspora Kurdish media outlets where Participant 13 expressed her passion for journalism as "I was doing journalism even when I was in prison. I will never give up here" (P13). Similarly, Participant 3 mentioned that the reason she went into exile was to continue journalism, the other option being in the prison.

> "I didn't want to spend 4-5 years inside (prison) with limited opportunities when I could do my profession outside or look at the sky more freely at work. That's why I came to Belgium because I believed that I could do more outside" (P3)

Only two journalists revealed having experience of working for local media organizations. Participant 6, who is exiled in Switzerland, indicated that she works as a freelance radio contributor and photographer. Participant 11 mentioned having work experience in a media outlet in London, then quitting because of discrimination.

> "I worked for an outlet for 7 months. Not even a day someone said 'How are you doing? How is everything?' I think because I came from the Middle East, they saw me as exotic." (P11)

3.5.1.2. Mental Well-Being

Mental health challenges are another major issue faced by Kurdish female journalists in exile. Several participants stated that they became aware of their mental well-being in exile and lacked understanding of the traumatic effects of the events while practicing journalism due to rapid agenda change in Turkey. Participant 2 stated her experience as:

> "Looking back, I realize how much I was affected. I don't remember thinking about anything in detail during those days. Everything was going very naturally for me. It was very natural in an unnatural environment. [...]. When I met with the psychologist, I realized that what I had experienced in Turkey had manifested as trauma and led me to an anxiety disorder. In those days, I didn't take what I went through seriously." (P2)

Indicating similar experiences, Participant 11 revealed living in survival mode in Turkey and, because of this, was unable to think of its psychological effects: "Here, that survival

mode is gone. The mechanism that I clung to is gone. And then depression and psychological problems start. I have been in therapy for about 4 years" (P11).

Participant 6 also stated being disturbed by *"a passive lifestyle"* in exile which gave her too much time to think (P6). Participant 1, who had already had insomnia issues in Turkey, mentioned worsening conditions in exile, therefore requiring medication.

3.5.1.3. Homesickness and Lack of Socialization

Homesickness, feelings of isolation, loneliness, and lack of socializing are some of the challenges that often arose during the interviews. All the journalists mentioned feeling homesick and missing their family members, friends, loved ones, or homelands. Participant 9, who lost her father in the near past, expressed her feelings as:

> "I miss my home. I miss visiting my father's graveyard, touching the soil. Some words become meaningless or powerless to express that pain. It's a really painful thing to be in exile." (P9)

Lack of union with loved ones and presence during important days also challenges participants to focus on their lives in exile. Participant 2 states: "Not being able to go back, knowing that you cannot go when something happens to someone you love, weighs heavily. I still fear the loss of loved ones while I am here" (P2).

The feelings of loneliness and isolation were other challenges participants outlined. Only two journalists stated that they had family members around them, while the rest indicated they were living alone. Participant 11 recalled her experience as: "I had a very big family and social circle. But suddenly you come to a country, and you have no friends" (P2). Participant 2 shared the challenges of making new friends, even with those coming from Turkey: "There are many people from Turkey here. When they hear that I am Kurdish, they immediately put distance. When they hear that I am a journalist, they marginalize me" (P2). Similarly Participant 4 emphasized the difficulty with becoming friends with her German coworkers. "I have good relations with my coworkers, but they never want to meet outside work. I haven't been able to make new friends" (P4).

3.5.1.4. Safety Concerns in Host Countries

When asked about their safety in exile, different feedback arose from participants. While the majority mentioned feeling safe as women, some raised safety concerns regarding their ethnic, immigrant, and professional backgrounds. Participant 8 expressed her feelings: "There is no more fear of if someone is going to come to arrest me while I sleep. I sleep in peace here and don't wear those ridiculous tracksuits anymore" (P8). Echoing similar experiences related to safety, Participants 5 and 13 outlined living with remaining traumas due to gender-based harassment they experienced in Turkey. Participant 5 recalled an incident where a male stranger followed her before dawn while on her way to work in Turkey: "I am still experiencing traumas here. When it gets dark, I turn around every once in a while to see if someone is following me" (P5). Similarly, Participant 13 shared a traumatic effect of an event where her coworker was taken by the police officers arbitrarily and questioned while returning home from work in a dark street. Adding that, she still looks behind her while passing through a dark street. Participant 7, who was suggested to see a psychologist due to her mental well-being, refused to take any session due to safety concerns.

> "A French psychologist, unfortunately, cannot understand your problems. Because you are not in the same life. You cannot trust a Turkish psychologist either because you are a Kurdish political refugee. You cannot predict what might happen to you." (P7)

3.5.1.4.1 Rise of the Far-Right and Turkish Proxies in Germany

Three participants residing in Germany mentioned safety concerns due to the rise of far-right parties in Europe. Participant 5, who is in the process of seeking asylum, emphasized the uncertainty of her future with her fiancé, who is also a Kurdish journalist:

> "I don't feel safe in a sense where the rise of the far-right is getting stronger in the world and here, too. For example, what will I face after seeking asylum? Will I be sent back? Will my asylum be rejected? In this sense, I feel insecure and afraid." (P5)

Similarly, Participant 4 added hiding her identity from Turkish people in the diaspora, especially those who have an extreme Islamist background.

> “There are a lot of Turks here, and the Nazis have been probably the most fearless after World War II. The rise of the AfD is also evident here. Lately, I am more anxious. I live in an area where there are so many supporters of the Turkish government. I try not to build a relationship with them and hide my identity. There is a different mass here that defends to the death. They might be considered radical Islamists. For example, there were so many who joined ISIS from this region. In that sense, I stay away, and as I said, I feel anxious. Because I don’t know what I will encounter.” (P4)

Participant 2 recalled having fear due to stories about Kurdish journalists being followed and threatened by some Turkish people.

3.5.1.4.2 Discrimination in Switzerland

Discrimination emerged as a significant challenge for some participants exiled in Switzerland. Participants 10 and 6 shared experiences that outlined the persistence of xenophobia and social exclusion. “Once someone said something like this. ‘You live off our taxes.’ I told him to stop playing the role of war in my country and I won't come. It wasn’t my choice” (P10). Further adding another discriminative encounter working in a bar.

> “A customer said something, and I didn't understand. My German is not so bad, but I didn't understand. He said, ‘If you don’t know my language, leave my country.’ He said that to my face. I was very affected. When I came home, I couldn’t sleep until the morning. It bothered me a lot.” (P10)

Another journalist mentioned realizing forms of discrimination only after learning the language, therefore causing her to feel unsafe. (P6)

3.5.1.4.3 Gender Vulnerability in France and The UK

Participant 12 reflected on the experience of being perceived as vulnerable due to her status as an exiled woman.

> “Especially as a woman, I don’t feel safe. You are a foreign woman and you are open and available to be used. For example, since I came here after I learned the language, I can’t develop friendships with men. I want to, but I can’t. Because what they expect from you is either to be a couple, to be lovers, or to spend a night together. In other words, to get something from you in terms of sexuality. Because you are a foreigner here, and you are vulnerable.” (P7)

Participant 11, recalled her experience of being physically attacked by her male coworker in London, later seeking help in a police station, only to then be asked for a date by the police officer.

> "The police harassed me because I'm an immigrant. He asked me two questions. Is my family here? Do I have a boyfriend? To find out if I am alone here or not. If he sees me vulnerable or not. That's the whole point." (P11)

After this incident in London, she moved to Scotland.

3.6. Motivation, Coping and Resistance Mechanisms

Participants were also asked about their coping mechanisms and motivation to overcome the challenges. Some mentioned going back to school, while others indicated spending online time with their distanced friends, making hobbies, or working harder for the diaspora Kurdish media outlets to keep themselves busy. While Participant 6 gained new hobbies, Participant 7 mentioned receiving online emotional support from her distanced friends. Some participants chose to go back to school to either gain new knowledge or expertise in their journalism career. Participant 1 started working towards her dream job "I want to start from the very beginning and study cinema. [...]. It was my dream, it didn't happen there, maybe it will happen here" (P1). Similarly, Participant 11 established a social support circle at school while studying her master's: "I felt the support of women the most. I really feel that gratuitous or pure solidarity. But it took me a while to get there, it wasn't easy" (P11). Participant 13 mentioned feeling better when working harder and following Turkey's agenda; Participant 4 also mentioned spending time at the news agency when feeling homesick.

> "I go to the agency when I feel down because that's a familiar environment. It's like my workplace back in Turkey. When I miss my friends or family, I go there. In agency, I feel like I am in a world that I belong to." (P4)

Motivation is one major driving force that helped journalists overcome the challenges faced in Turkey and now in exile. When asked how their motivation was affected by repression and difficulties they experienced, the majority of the journalists mentioned embracing their work even harder. Recalling her experiences in Turkey, Participant 3

indicated a positive increase in her motivation which is similar to what other journalists experienced:

> "Every detention, every attack, every verbal or physical intervention or obstruction really makes you cling tighter to your profession. You say, well, I must be doing the right thing. So, it actually affected me in a very positive way. If I hadn't been subjected to so many attacks, so much pressure, or if I hadn't been living in Kurdistan, if I hadn't been witnessing so many things, maybe I would have given up or quit this profession much earlier." (P3)

3.6.1. Desire to Return Home

During the interview process, news broke from Turkey that the Turkish government and PKK initiated peace negotiations after a call made by the Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan who has been imprisoned in Imrali Island since 1999. The participants were asked if they would want to go back to their homeland in case of peace. Several journalists mentioned feelings of excitement and hope, while others shared their concerns due to former failed peace negotiations. Participant 3 expressed her excitement as: "I can't wait to go back to my homeland. I have limited things to do here, but there I can do more" (P3). Although the peace negotiation increased the feeling of hope for the majority, some participants stated a lack of trust in the Turkish government and, therefore, did not plan to return until there were guaranteed safe conditions for journalists (P13). For some participants, instabilities, economic conditions, and gender-based harassment were some of the reasons to be hesitant to go back. Participant 4 states: "I can live here as a woman on my own, but I don't know if I can do that if I go back, but I still think I would go in the first place" (P4). For an Alevi Kurdish journalist Participant 12 peace negotiations lack promise due to previously failed ones.

In exile, some participants focus on their education to become better individuals for their community, while others *"take a break"* from journalism and wait to return home to continue their profession. Participant 7 is one of them:

> "As someone who has decided this from childhood and has continued on this path with high motivation despite all the difficulties, of course I would return to journalism. And if I can ever go back, I will continue working for Kurdish media." (P7)

Going back to university, Participant 8 outlined her passion for developing her journalism skills to advocate Kurdish journalism from the diaspora and later in Turkey in case of return: “Maybe returning to Kurdistan with an advanced French would bring more to Kurdistan. That is why I can contribute not only to myself but also to the society for which I feel responsible” (P8). Further adding that she works on involvement with the United Nations to create projects that documents the repression Kurdish journalists face in Turkey as “I always talk about Kurds as if it were a mission. Because nobody knows us” (P8).

4. DISCUSSION

This research aims to study the challenges and struggles Kurdish female journalists face in exile, paying attention to the ways in which gender and ethnic identities of Kurdish journalists play pivotal roles while practicing their journalistic work in Turkey and their experiences in exile. In addition, this study also aims to bring awareness to the underrepresentation that Kurdish female journalists face in research at an academic level.

The qualitative research gathers data based on interviews with 13 Kurdish female journalists who are currently in exile throughout Europe. For the methodology of this research, snowball sampling along with semi-structured in-depth interviews were utilized to collect data based on participants’ lived experiences. The gathered data was coded and categorized into emerging themes to be analyzed as part of a thematic analysis. Due to privacy concerns, participants’ personal data have been anonymized.

In order to depict a coherent understanding of the main themes that arose through this research, it will be important to start by answering the first sub-questions and then move to the main research question. The first research sub-question asked about the reasons why Kurdish female journalists flee Turkey. The findings show that repression, state-based persecution, discrimination, harassment, safety concerns, threats, legal accusations, and a lack of an independent juridical system forced all of the participants to leave Turkey. Although some participants experienced gender and ethnicity-based discrimination from mainstream media workers due to the criminalization of Kurdish ethnicity and their Kurdish media outlets, the primary perpetrators were security forces. Participants were

subjected to arbitrary detention, rape and death threats, and strip searches while practicing journalism. While the role of their gender and ethnicity will be discussed in the next subsections, it is important to highlight the participants' experiences of displacement due to state repression in Kurdish cities and later linguistic challenges and ethnic discrimination faced in Western cities as an outcome of assimilation and Turkification (Aydın, 2019). Being both a victim and witness of state oppression led the majority of participants to become journalists in order to depict the truth and challenge the misrepresentation of the Kurdish minority in mainstream media. This desire is echoed in the work of Aydın (2019), who indicates that "Kurdish media are a field of resistance and '[a]n act in opposition to hegemonic power'" (p. 735) through the concept of Özgür Basın Geleneği (Free Press Tradition) to challenge state-based criminalization of Kurdish identity. All the participants, except one, were taken to trial on charges of membership in a terrorist organization or spreading terrorist propaganda. Analysis from CFWIJ supports this, indicating that Kurdish female journalists were charged with terror-related offenses to be silenced through the juridical system as well as *"excessive force used by the police"* (CFWIJ, 2025). Journalists who were victimized by the state forces are often denied justice in cases where complaints are filed, with scholars (Pukallus et al., 2020) calling the treatment a character of a repressive regime in which "legal institutions become weapons of the state" and "the legal system is compromised in favor of the government" (p. 1446).

The second sub-question aimed to reveal gender-based challenges participants experienced. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the results, it is important to address this question in two parts: first, the gender-based challenges faced in Turkey, and second, the challenges encountered in exile.

In Turkey, Kurdish female journalists often face gender-based harassment at the hands of security forces. They were threatened with rape and death, subjected to strip searches in custody, and frequently harassed both physically and verbally. These experiences reflect Butler's (2014) concept of "bodily vulnerability" and are consistent with research on Turkey, where Erkmen et al. (2022) state that "women frequently suffer gender-based discrimination, harassment, and psychological, economic, physical, sexual, and digital violence, first and foremost from the police" (p. 861). The treatment of security forces is not independent of the political environment. Participants often mentioned increased

violence in police officers' behavior depending on the political rhetoric of the moment. The reason for this was to prevent reporters from covering social events, thus taking them to arbitrary custody or attacking them with tear gas or rubber bullets, aligning with Erkmen et al. (2020) literature as well. Pukallus et al. (2020) also indicate that the attacks from states or state-affiliated actors are behavior to create *"fear"* for journalists.

On the other hand, the patriarchal structure is deeply rooted in Turkey. Supported by an authoritarian patriarchal regime, or as Coşar and Yeğenoğlu (2011) describe it, *"a maleist government" (p. 557)* that imposes a religious-nationalist framework on women's issues. Within this system, men are positioned as powerful, privileged, and authoritative, while women are assigned roles as mothers, caregivers, and responsible for child-rearing based on the Islamic patriarchal norms (Gölge et al., 2016; Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011; Pukallus et al., 2020). Based on this notion, women are expected to remain at home. In line with this expectation, female journalists often faced gender-based harassment; security forces belittled their work and humiliated them by saying they should stay home. In some cases, male journalists from mainstream media and news sources in Western cities reinforced similar attitudes.

Kurdish female journalists who worked in the field had to pay attention to their outfits and behavior to be able to practice their profession. Many had to limit their femininity in the field. This aligns with Butler's (1999) gender performativity, which argues that gender is a performance of repeated acts based on societal norms. While some Kurdish female journalists act sympathetic at military checkpoints to avoid confrontation with security forces, others act masculine to look strong in male-dominant areas, which also aligns with Palmer and Melki's (2016) concept of shape-shifting in war-zone. On the other hand, there was a contrast: journalists who worked for mainstream media were asked to avoid looking *"like a boy"* and look feminine, whereas none of the journalists who worked for Kurdish media outlets were asked to dress a certain way by their employers. Instead, they chose to dress in ways that balance comfort, professionalism, and patriarchal societal norms to minimize potential provocation or threats.

In exile, although explicit cases of gender-based discrimination were limited, some journalists experienced harassment stemming from perceptions of their vulnerability and

immigrant background. This aligns with Butler's (2014) concept of "bodily vulnerability" and Freedman's (2016) findings that refugee women face heightened risks of sexual violence due to such perceived vulnerability.

The third sub-question focused on the ethnic-based challenges faced by the participants. Findings revealed that in Turkey, Kurdish female journalists became targets of security forces because of their ethnicity and the Kurdish media outlets they worked for. Several of them were called *"terrorists,"* a narrative that stems from the broader criminalization of Kurdish identity and Kurdish media organizations (Aydın, 2019). Their ethnicity is also deeply intertwined with the role of the media outlets they work for. Journalists often responded to questions related to ethnicity with a focus on their intertwined identities by stating, "I am Kurdish, I am a journalist, and I am a Kurdish woman journalist." (P2). This self-identification aligns with findings in existing literature that describe *"triple discrimination"* faced by Kurdish female journalists due to *"patriarchal power"* and *"political oppression"* (Erkmen et al., 2022, p. 858*)* which is based on Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality theory. Kurdish female journalists' gender, ethnicity, and profession lead them to face multiple levels of discrimination. The diverse demographics of the participants enrich the research findings, aligning with the participatory approach discussed by Collins et al. (2021). As members of a marginalized group, Kurdish female journalists were often aware of and critical of the social structures shaping their experiences, a perspective that was marked by Feminist Standpoint Theory (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). In cases of Kurdish Alevi journalists, although there were not many, higher levels of discrimination were experienced due to their additional religious minority identity aligning with Al-Ali and Tas's (2017) study.

In exile, journalists in Germany continue having security concerns due to their ethnicity, where some have to hide their ethnicity and avoid disclosing information related to the Kurdish media outlets they worked for. Far-right extremists and ultra-nationalist Islamist Turkish groups in Germany are threats to exiled Kurdish female journalists; as Ataman and Çoban (2023) indicate, even in exile, the threats and pressure resume due to potential attacks from the government's proxies.

As the research question aims to explore the challenges and struggles Kurdish female journalists face in exile, the findings reveal that linguistic barriers, lack of opportunities to practice journalism, homesickness, adaptation difficulties, security concerns, and mental well-being are among the major issues they experience. Journalists face challenges in practicing their profession in host country media outlets due to linguistic barriers. Working for diaspora Kurdish media outlets, freelancing, or working in the service industry are some alternative options for many while some had to *"take a break"* from journalism. Similar patterns reflect in Shahbazyan's (2025) report on the experiences of exiled journalists.

Kurdish female journalists experience challenges to their mental well-being in exile. Many carry traumas related to their experiences in Turkey, which few were able to address due to the relentless nature of their work in the country. Now, in exile with a more passive lifestyle, many participants spend additional time thinking about their experiences, the traumatic events they witnessed, and the emotional impact work and exile have had. Some receive mental health support to overcome these challenges.

Homesickness is another major challenge of adaptation in host countries. Journalists often lack a sense of belonging because of cultural differences and long for their homeland and loved ones, making the adaptation period difficult. For many, exile is a limbo where they live between the two countries and lack a sense of belonging. These feelings are echoed by a study on exile by O'Loughlin and Schafraad (2016), which indicates that exiled journalists are *"caught between two worlds"*: their homelands and their host country. To cope, journalists who work for diaspora Kurdish media outlets describe visiting the workplace to spend time with co-workers whom they share common language, identity, and culture with to relieve homesickness, as well as furthering their education and connecting digitally with family in Turkey. However, some remain highly motivated to continue developing their journalistic skills, with the hope of becoming more proficient in their profession in case one day they return to their homeland.

For some journalists, security concerns resume even in exile. In Germany, the rise of far-right extremism and the presence of ultranationalist Islamist Turkish groups such as Ülkü Ocakları (Idealist Hearths), also known as Grey Wolves, a group banned by the EU

(Ozcelik, 2021) continue to pose threats. In Switzerland, journalists reported experiencing discrimination due to their immigrant background, while in France and the UK, they were perceived as vulnerable because of their gender and immigrant identity. Online threats and harassment aimed at silencing participants both in Turkey and in exile, were also a concern for many journalists. Aligning with Erkmen et al. (2022), journalists were targets of "hate speech and insults with a patriarchal and misogynistic tone seeking to intimidate and demoralize them." (p. 866)

CONCLUSION

Legal persecution, repression from the patriarchal authoritarian regime, state-based violence, ethnic discrimination, and security concerns force Kurdish female journalists to leave Turkey to seek safety outside of the country. Exiled around Europe, Kurdish female journalists face challenges in continuing journalism in host country media. For some, diaspora Kurdish media outlets are advocacy platforms to continue their journalism work beyond the borders of Turkey. Other participants chose to "take a break" from journalism to focus on their education and overcome linguistic and adaptation challenges. Homesickness, isolation, linguistic barriers, and lack of opportunities are the main challenges Kurdish female journalists experience in exile. A major challenge is mental well-being. The effects of traumatic events that journalists reported on in Turkey still emotionally challenge them. Reporting from dangerous conflict areas in Kurdish cities, and being subjected to rape and death threats not only during custody but also online, have created mental health and other barriers to cultural, linguistic, and social adaptation in host countries. In Germany, the rise of far-right and ultranationalist Islamist Turkish groups creates security concerns. In Switzerland, some face xenophobia due to their immigrant background. In France and the U.K., some are seen as vulnerable because of their gender and immigrant identities.

This research utilizes Butler's (1999) theoretical work on gender performativity and Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality framework to examine how gender, ethnicity, and professional identity intersect in the context of an authoritarian regime such as Turkey and the challenges they pose to Kurdish female journalists while practicing journalism and while in exile. Although there are some reports on press freedom in Turkey (RSF, 2025),

attacks on women journalists (CFWIJ, 2025), or safety of women journalists in Turkey (Erkmen et al., 2022), there is a gap in specific research that focuses on the experiences of exiled Kurdish female journalists. This study aims to add nuance to existing literature regarding press freedom in Turkey and spark a discussion around state repression faced by ethnic media workers, particularly Kurds in Turkey and in exile. Further aims are to inform international media organizations and journalism support groups about the ethnic and gender-based challenges Kurdish female journalists face in Turkey and exile and also suggest improvements for countries such as Germany, Switzerland, France, and the UK based on cases of safety concerns and discrimination that were described during the interviews. Furthermore, this research describes an urgent need for the protection of ethnic media outlets in authoritarian regimes, their workers, and improvements to policies in relation to press freedom.

This research comes with some limitations. The study is based on one ethnic identity from a specific country, which may affect the generalization of the results to broader populations. Moreover, the sampling includes participants from some parts of Europe; a broader sampling of more countries would obtain a broader perspective. Although the Kurdish language was the mother tongue of the participants, interviews were conducted in Turkish due to assimilation-based communication challenges and later transcribed into English. Two different software and the researcher's linguistic knowledge have been utilized during this process, yet there may be minor interpretation issues during data analysis. The sensitivity of the subject also brought some limitations where participants felt uncomfortable with disclosing full events related to sexual harassment, violence, and abuse. For this reason, a broader, more in-depth research study, ideally conducted by a researcher trained with traumatized subjects, is recommended for future research. Although this research aimed to provide in-depth insight into intersectional challenges, the researcher intentionally avoided delving into explicit details of violence, rape, and death threats to prevent re-traumatization of the participants. In cases of emotional breakdown, the researcher provided additional time and, in some cases, a relevant personal story to help participants feel more comfortable. Conducting in-person interviews is also recommended, as it would enable researchers to move effectively, observe, and provide immediate support, thus navigating the situations better. Kurdish female journalists who had employment experiences with mainstream media outlets had significant differences based

on expected gender norms from their employer than those who worked for the Kurdish media outlets. A comparative study of these groups could contribute to the academic literature.

SHRNUTÍ

Tato práce zkoumá zkušenosti kurdských novinářek v exilu, které uprchly z Turecka kvůli právnímu pronásledování, patriarchálnímu autoritářství, etnické diskriminaci a ohrožení jejich bezpečnosti. Na základě kvalitativních polostrukturovaných rozhovorů s novinářkami, které nyní žijí po celé Evropě, studie ilustruje, jak státní etnická a genderová represe donutila mnoho kurdských novinářek k exilu, kde i nadále čelí novým výzvám. V hostitelských zemích se účastnice snaží pokračovat ve své profesionální práci v místních médiích, přičemž narážejí na jazykové bariéry, omezené příležitosti a potíže s kulturní adaptací. Některé z nich nacházejí pocit sounáležitosti prostřednictvím kurdských médií v diaspoře a využívají žurnalistiku jako prostředek k prosazování svých zájmů, zatímco jiné se rozhodly „udělat si pauzu“ ve své kariéře, aby mohly pokračovat ve vzdělávání a adaptovat se na život v hostitelské zemi.

Opakujícím se tématem jsou výzvy související s duševním zdravím. Trauma z reportování v konfliktních zónách spolu se zkušenostmi s vězněním, znásilněním, výhrůžkami smrtí a online obtěžováním nadále ovlivňují respondentky v exilu. Zjištění ukazují, že exil neznamená konec obav o bezpečnost. V zemích jako Německo, Francie, Švýcarsko a Velká Británie se objevují nové výzvy, jako je xenofobie, krajně pravicový extremismus a genderová marginalizace. Tato studie přispívá k výzkumu genderu a etnicity v žurnalistice a migraci tím, že zdůrazňuje problémy, dopad intersekcionálních identit a odolnost kurdských novinářek v exilu. Zdůrazňuje potřebu povědomí o výzvách, kterým čelí kurdské novinářky v Turecku a v exilu. Jejím cílem je vyvolat diskusi na toto téma a zároveň poskytnout dokumentaci pro mezinárodní mediální organizace i akademickou sféru.

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