

Discursive Constructions and Visual Representations of Syrian Refugees: A Focus on the Media in Turkey

Author

İmge Yıldırım-Şensoy^{1*}

Affiliation

¹Doctoral Program in Media Studies, School of Social Sciences, Yeditepe University Graduate,
Istanbul, 34755, Turkey

*To whom correspondence should be addressed; E-mail: imge.yildirim@yeditepe.edu.tr

Preprint

Abstract

This study explores the discursive construction and media representations of Syrian refugees in relation to wider politics of nationalism and contested narratives of national identity in Turkey. For this purpose, frontpage coverage of 5 national dailies that were selected based on circulation size, target readership and ideological orientation were analyzed using Discourse-Historical Approach. News items and accompanying visuals sampled from *Cumhuriyet*, *Yeni Akit*, *Hürriyet*, *Sözcü* and *Sabah* were subjected to analysis through a set of paradigms that this study develops. These paradigms are Humanitarian, Religious, Economic, Socio-cultural and Demographic, Citizenship and Rights, respectively. Under each paradigm, associated subthemes of media framing with regard to the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are scrutinized. This research argues that media discourse on refugees cannot be separated from the broader social and political context and different narratives of who ‘we’ are. Media discourses of inclusion and exclusion that are intertwined; sometimes feeding each other and sometimes rejecting each other and are deeply interwoven with contemporary politics create meaning at social level regarding the representation of “Syrian refuge”.

Keywords: Discourse; media representation; national identity; Syrian refugees

INTRODUCTION

The world is undoubtedly going through a dramatic change, a change characterized by growing human mobility of different kinds, driven through different channels, and motivated by different stimuli, most notably by the desire to take shelter in a safer and more prosperous world. In connection with this, migration and refugee policies and discourse over immigrants and refugees are likely to play a greater role than before in world politics, particularly in domestic politics of most migration-receiving countries. Today, we are going through an era marked by an increasing polarization and discourse of distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ particularly in relation to immigration.

Paradoxically, the more migratory the world has become, the more restrictive measures against migration have emerged. Borders, be them in the form of a concrete wall or steel slats, continue to separate the world – ‘us’ and ‘them’ - virtually and metaphorically. However, it is doubtful whether border walls will ever deter migration. As long as the wars, terror and violence continue, so will the migration from conflictual zones to relatively safe countries. This, expectedly, will cause refugees and immigrants to be more widely covered by the media and the issue of representation will, therefore, become more important in terms of constructing ‘us’, those inside the borders, vis-a-vis ‘them’, those outsiders.

Media, in the broadest sense, plays a crucial role in the formation of the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983). Media is a tool which assists the production, dissemination and legitimation of ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). It is a site where hegemonic discourses of nationalism and national identity are reiterated and confirmed as well as contested and challenged. Media contributes to the construction of the national identity through the production and circulation of narratives and images which highlight and spotlight ‘significant others’ (Triandafyllidou, 1998). Therefore, the media is the major bearer of ‘banal nationalism’, to borrow from Billig (1995), which reproduces the national identity on a day-to-day basis in the most mundane fashion.

Media can act either as a conveyor of hegemonic political discourse or as a site where it is disputed or challenged by the public discourse. Whatever the case is, it is a fact that the media is the key source of information for the general public regarding Syrian refugees. Therefore, it is of great importance to understand how the media outlets represent the Syrian refugees to

shape the public opinion on the issue. At its core level, this study is built upon the concept of ‘imagined communities’. It is, therefore, acknowledged that the media help construct an identity of ‘us’ with some shared characteristics by differentiating ‘them’ or ‘others’. The national identity is re-imagined and re-constructed through the representations of ‘others’.

What determines the representations of ‘others’ -Syrian refugees in this context- is a discourse over national identity. In other words, this study argues that the representations of Syrian refugees rely on nationalism. However, the concept of nationalism adopted here is much different from the traditional understanding of nationalism as a site of explicitly expressed ideas based on the total exclusion of ‘others’. Anderson’s (1983) work reveals that nationalisms can be most usefully explored not as explicitly expressed political ideologies held by individuals but as part of large cultural systems. In a similar vein, Billig (1995) argues that nationalism is pervasive and ubiquitous. In this sense, Billig’s (1995) notion of ‘banal nationalism’ is instrumental in making sense of nationalism underlying the media representations of Syrian refugees.

Basic parameters of Turkish national identity have been reformulated in the last decades (Dönmez, 2015; Saraçoğlu & Demirkol, 2015; Uzer, 2018; White, 2013). A discursive battle has been waged over the constitutive elements of national identity, and the media has become the main battlefield of this political and ideological confrontation. Discourse over Syrian refugees, as this thesis argues, is very much framed within this context. In other words, the stance towards Syrian refugees has become quite related to the rivalry between the two national identities for hegemony. The representation of Syrian refugees in the media is very much dependent on the nature of ‘imagined community’; how and who ‘we’ imagine ‘us’ to be, which brings forward the research question of this study.

The present study seeks to contribute to the field of media and communications by illuminating how the print media in Turkey have discursively constructed accounts of Syrian refugees. Drawing on the media content covering almost a ten-year time period, this research aims to reveal categories of representation and is expected to be revealing in terms of enabling an understanding of the complex and often ambiguous media representations of Syrian refugees in Turkey. The main research question that is posed in this study is “How do the print media in Turkey construct their accounts of Syrian refugees in relation to different narratives of national identity?”

The process of imagining a nation is a dynamic re-production of a national self-identity in relation to the ‘other’. This imagined shared identity, in other words, how ‘we’ imagine ‘us’, is entwined with how ‘we’ imagine ‘them’ and who ‘we’ imagine ‘them’ to be. Nationalist discourse seeks to promote uniformity within the community while relying on a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which are neither natural nor unchanging categories but are rather contingent and open to reconfiguration and contestation. Defining the imagined community of ‘us’ can turn into a political struggle over who ‘we’ are as is the case in contemporary Turkey. It is from this vantage point that this study explores different narratives of who ‘we’ are in relation to who ‘they’ are.

In order to achieve a thorough understanding on the issue, this research adopts Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) to explore the data collected from the selected newspapers. Five mainstream newspapers were chosen to collect data from are *Cumhuriyet*, *Yeni Akit*, *Hürriyet*, *Sözcü* and *Sabah*. As of March 2020, the top-3 best-selling newspapers in Turkey are respectively: *Sözcü*, *Sabah*, and *Hürriyet* (Tirajlar, 2020). In addition to the top-selling newspapers, *Yeni Akit* and *Cumhuriyet* were selected for this study. *Yeni Akit* is an Islamist newspaper that can be considered influential even though its circulation is not that striking. *Cumhuriyet*, one of the oldest newspapers in the country, is renowned for promoting secular views. Data was collected from the print editions –and not from the online websites of the newspapers- published in almost a ten-year time period, starting with the arrival of Syrian refugees in April 2011 till the end of March 2020, when the mass march of refugees to Edirne to cross over to Greece made the headlines for some time. Albeit not virtually, the march to Edirne symbolically represents the ‘return’ of refugees, which was another reason to choose March 2020 as the ending point for data collection.

RESULTS

Drawn and decontextualized from Kuhn’s (1962) notion of the paradigm, focusing on its certain aspects and significations, I offer the term paradigm in understanding and defining the shifting perspectives, discourse, perception, and representations of the Syrian refugees within the limits of the current study.

I have distinguished five main paradigms at the intersections of the public, political and media debate on Syrian refugees in Turkey which are as follows: humanitarian, religious, economic, socio-cultural and demographic, and citizenship and rights. All these five aspects are relevant

and contribute to, and engage with different standpoints, discourses, and narratives of different parties including policy makers, political parties, NGOs, media, and the wider public.

Three major sources helped identify these paradigms. At the bottom, there lies an overview of primary and secondary sources: scholarly work, reports by NGOs, public opinion polls and surveys, and official statements and policy responses. An overall review of these sources informed me about the major themes, areas, and aspects of the refugee debate in Turkey.

On top this, Wodak's (2008) list of the most common 'topoi' in debates about immigration provided a guideline. Wodak (2008) defines 'topoi' as: "content-related warrants" or 'conclusion rules' which connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim" (p. 63). Reisigl (2018) gives a similar definition of term, as it is understood in Discourse-Historical Approach: "content-related argumentation schemes" (p. 52). Defined as such, Wodak (2008) lists the most common 'topoi' in debates about immigration as in the following:

1. Usefulness, advantage
2. Uselessness, disadvantage
3. Definition, name-interpretation
4. Danger and threat
5. Humanitarianism
6. Justice
7. Responsibility
8. Burdening, weighting
9. Finances
10. Reality
11. Numbers
12. Law and right
13. History
14. Culture
15. Abuse (p. 64)

Wodak and others inquired these 'topoi' in a number of studies that rely on different units of analysis ranging from election campaigns, parliamentary debates, policy documents, and media

coverage (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Pelinka, 2002; Wodak & van Dijk, 2000). In Wodak's (2008, p. 64) account, while most of the above-listed 'topoi' are used to legitimize exclusion of migrants, for example, by presenting them an economic burden, cultural threat or abusers of social welfare benefits, some are used in anti-discriminatory discourses (e.g., Justice).

I adjusted and adapted Wodak's list of 'topoi' to the Turkish context and research purpose, grouping some items under a more general entry, eliminating some and adding new ones. An important note here should be made about the difference between 'topoi' in Wodak's account and paradigms that this research develops. In Wodak's account (2018, p. 64), 'topoi' may either be used to justify exclusion or oppose discrimination, so she treats discourses of inclusion and exclusion separately under different 'topoi'. In this regard, 'paradigms' that this research employs are different from what Wodak refers to by 'topoi'. The word paradigm is loosely borrowed from Kuhn (1962) and employed in this research to refer to discourse hubs or focal points of the refugee debate in Turkey. Discourses that depart from these hubs are not merely inclusive or merely exclusionary. To put it another way, discourses of both inclusion and exclusion as well as those that oscillate between inclusion and exclusion may come forward under the same paradigm. To give an example, operating within the religious paradigm, the discourse of religious brotherhood is inclusive as far as the Sunni Muslims are concerned but exclusionary towards Alevis or non-Muslim refugees.

The paradigms elaborated below meet at a point of concurrency between politics, policies, public opinion and perception and the media. They frame the debate - be it taking place in official and institutional arenas like the Parliament, or on TV channels and newspaper columns or in everyday life and settings- and determines our thinking -the way we make sense of 'us' and 'them'- about Syrian refugees in Turkey. These different aspects of the issue of Syrian refugees in Turkey form the basis of categorization of the news reports under analysis. This study will first present the paradigms of the public / political debate on refugees, and then show how they relate to the media discourse on refugees.

Humanitarian Paradigm

The discourse of humanitarianism is often accompanied by a rhetoric of 'hospitality', which serves a distinction between 'us' and 'them' as 'hosts' and 'guests'. According to Yücebaşı (2015, pp. 38-39), the notion of traditional hospitality is a 'myth' that cultivates in the

articulation of ‘us’ as hosts -respectful, tolerant, embracing and compassionate - towards the guests and as a community of insiders not only distinct from but also superior to ‘them’ -those who need to maintain and respect the boundaries that set them apart.

Rejecting the claims that Turkey pursued a sectarian agenda on the issue of Syrian conflict and refugees, Davutoğlu (2013) says; “If the ruler were a Muslim who oppressed Christians in Syria, we would equally be against him/her. As a matter of fact, there is no discrimination made in either the refugee policy that we implement or the humanitarian aid that we provide” (p. 860). Contrary to this assertion, there is evidence to suggest that both in discourse and in practice selectivity was entailed in the admission and governance of Syrian refugees (Korkut, 2016; Togrul Koca, 2015). According to Korkut (2016, p. 1), the government favors refugees who have “religiously, ethnically and politically acceptable backgrounds” to the Islamist ideology that it subscribes to. Likewise, İçduygu et al. (2017, p. 459) argue that the discourse of the government draws on a ‘selective humanitarianism’ which favors cultural and religious ties over rights.

Approaching the issue of Syrian refugees through the lens of humanitarianism, often reinforced by a backdrop of traditional notion of hospitality, relates to the articulation of ‘we’ and ‘they’ in two interrelated ways. On the one hand, inasmuch as it entails the victimization of refugees, humanitarianism relies on a distinction between ‘we’ -the saviors, and guardians endowed with morality and virtues of benevolence, compassion and generosity- and ‘they’ -the victims and sufferers that lack the necessary material means as well as the competence to survive and live in dignified conditions. On the other hand, inasmuch as it draws on the rhetoric of hospitality, humanitarianism establishes a distinction between ‘we’ -the magnanimous and tolerant hosts- and ‘they’, the guests whose stay, temporary in nature, is out of courtesy and goodwill of ‘us’ - for which ‘they’ should pay due respect and gratitude-, and the outsiders who need to be aware of and retain the place they are given so as not to be seen as intruders. In this sense, humanitarianism is inextricably embedded in the way ‘we’ imagine ‘us’ in relation to or as opposed to ‘they’, though the term itself may seem to involve equity and sameness. As such, it is particularly relevant to Derrida’s (2000) notion of ‘hostipitality’, which refers to the inherent presence of hostility in hospitality. In Derrida’s (2000) terms, hospitality already involves having the power to set the boundaries of the space or place offered to the ‘other’, which implies that both inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics are at work in the act of welcoming.

Religious Paradigm

Particularly in its first years of existence, the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) officials deployed the analogy of ‘*ensar*’ and ‘*muhacir*’ from the Islamic history to refer to the Syrian migration to Turkey. According to Karakaya Polat (2018) the purpose of using this analogy is twofold for the JDP actors, they “not only touch upon the emotions and religious beliefs of their conservative constituency but also attempt discursively to construct a society according to their own imagination” (p. 7). Likewise, Kloos (2016, pp. 547-550) argues that the religiously oriented discourse towards Syrian refugees is revealing in terms of how the national identity is redefined with a major reference to the shared religion, more specifically the Sunni creed, in accordance with the neo-Ottomanist outlook.

There is here an ostensibly exclusionary distinction at work; a distinction between Sunni Muslims and non-Sunni (Alawites and/or Alevis). In line with the vision of neo-Ottomanism, Sunni background makes the desired quality of both the Turkish society and Syrian refugees.

Economic Paradigm

Naturally, the debate centered around economic aspects and impact of Syrian refugees produces two opposing views on whether the refugees are more of a benefit or a burden for the country. On the one hand side, the government’s discourse has shifted from that of humanitarianism with an emphasis on hospitality and religious solidarity to one that highlights the economic benefits of Syrian refugees (İçduygu et al., 2017, p. 471). The dominant political discourse that portrays Syrian refugees as ‘victims’ and ‘guests’ has recently been replaced by one that delineates them, in a selective manner, as ‘enterprising subjectivities’ (Gürsel, 2017, p. 134). On the other hand, the discourse of ‘economic burden’ comes forward and finds appeal among the wider public (Kirişçi, 2014).

Sociocultural and Demographic Paradigm

One of the major frames that shape the public debate about Syrian refugees is that of ‘demographic threat’ (Memişoğlu & Ilgit, 2016, p. 9). As Bozdağ (2020, p. 723) observe, the potential shift in the country’s demographics causing a ‘Syrian minority’ to emerge frequently comes forward in relation to arguments against granting citizenship to Syrians.

Demographic and population-related concerns are often interwoven with cultural and identity-related ones. From their fieldwork in İzmir, Saraçoğlu and Bélanger (2019) observe that Syrian population density in the city is considered an “alarming sign of the Arabization and Islamization of urban life” (p. 375).

As opposed to the discourse of ‘cultural threat’ that holds a high ground in public discussion, the government’s discourse underlines ‘cultural proximity’ of Syrian refugees to Turkish people. This discourse of cultural affinity is built mainly around the notion of shared religion of Sunni Islam, and at times reinforced by references to the common Ottoman past and shared values, which presents Syrian refugees as ‘religious brethren’, ‘fellow Muslims’, ‘guests’, ‘*muhacir*’, ‘neighbors’, ‘God’s entrust’, ‘part of *ummah*’ -all of which, in differing degrees, relate to cultural, religious, and historical links (Aksel & İçduygu, 2018; Karakaya Polat, 2018; Kloos, 2016; Sert & Daniş, 2021; Yanaşmayan et al., 2019).

Citizenship and Rights Paradigm

Frustrated over the poor quality of services they receive, the amount of taxes they have to pay, difficulties they face finding employment, the low wages they are paid, their eroding purchasing power, and the growing security issues in the country, a considerable part of Turkish people from all over the political spectrum think and feel as if they were downgraded to the status of second class citizens vis-a-vis Syrian refugees, whom they believe to be enjoying exclusive rights, economic and material benefits, and privileges in services and facilities (Erdoğan & Semerci, 2018).

On the government’s side, there recently seems to be a careful avoidance of an emphasis on the issue of citizenship, and the option of return seems to be more frequently voiced (İçduygu & Nimer, 2020). There is an implicit practice of selective approach based on the qualifications, economic and cultural capital of Syrian refugees (Koser Akcapar & Şimşek, 2018; Sert & Daniş, 2021).

DISCUSSION

Coding of the news items was done using MAXQDA qualitative analysis software. The compiled frontpages of newspapers (in JPEG format) were uploaded to MAXQDA and coding was done manually in two steps. The initial coding of the data involved macro-level coding. In Discourse Historical Approach, discourse is linked to a macro-topic; macro-topic relevancy is among the constituent components of discourse (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 89). The analysis of textual content then “depends on the macro-topics of a discourse” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 114). As part of the first dimension Wodak mentions, initial data coding was done to categorize the compiled news articles into macro-topics. These macro-topics were previously identified and elaborated as ‘paradigms’. More specifically, after a pilot coding was conducted on a randomly selected set of news articles to see their inclusiveness and operability as macro-topics of media discourse, news articles were initially coded according to the five paradigms that were distinguished as the main axes of the public and political debate on Syrian refugees in Turkey. To put it differently, I treated the five paradigms distinguished previously as the macro-topics of the media discourse on Syrian refugees and categorized each item accordingly. This was done both for the purpose of using a priori codes to help guide the thematic macro coding process and integrating wider socio-political context later into analysis which is what DHA is concerned with (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 93). To expand their inclusiveness of the news under analysis, the paradigms appeared as macro-topics of the newspaper coverage under slightly different names as shown in Table 1. Table 2 shows the breakdown of each newspaper’s coverage in my selected corpus of analysis.

Macro-Topic 1: Humanitarianism and Hospitality

Exploring media and policy discourses of immigration in Canadian context, Vukov (2003) concludes that two constantly mediated narratives of immigration contribute to Canadians’ common-sense imagining of themselves as a nation: “on the one hand, a celebratory welcoming nation generous to the immigrants and refugees it desires and, on the other, an insecure panicked nation that must protect itself against outside threats that would abuse its tolerance” (p. 347). This seems appropriate for the Turkish context as well. The analysis of the news articles drawn upon a humanitarian perspective shows they tend to position refugees either as victims that need ‘our’ support and solidarity or as overstaying and undesirable guests that push the limits of ‘our’

hospitality and tolerance. In this sense, humanitarianism is an axis which is on one end linked to compassion and intolerance on the other end.

Sub-topic 1a: The Charitable / Humanitarian Host versus the Needy Guest / Victim

Themes of solidarity and welcoming guests relate to a humanitarian discourse which is drawn upon the ethical and humane duty to help the vulnerable. Such news reports predominantly frame Syrian refugees as victims; desperate and innocent people who are seeking safety and protection from war and atrocity and who ought to be saved by ‘us’, in a similar way to the European media coverage of Syrian refugees around the time of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 as observed by several researchers (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Dykstra, 2016; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017).

A narrative of the savior, victims and villains intersects through the news reports analyzed under this sub-theme. Sometimes the triangle is complete, and all the three characters are present in the news story, and sometimes one is missing; either a savior-victim dichotomy or a victim-villain contrast is narrated. What is common to all the news reports analyzed here is that Syrian refugees are portrayed as victims. Who the saviors are and who the villains are subject to interpretations, and in general depends on who is framed as ‘we’. In other words, who the Syrian refugees are victimized by and who they are saved by is a matter of political judgement and perspective as well as context.

Victims are one but may come under different names. Different phrases depending on the perspective, and actors involved in the news story are used to refer to Syrian refugees. Victimhood of refugees is intensified through phrases like ‘Syrian innocents’ (*Sabah*, January 10, 2017), ‘the oppressed Syrians’ (*Yeni Akit*, October 15, 2016), and ‘civilians fleeing clashes’ (*Hürriyet*, April 5, 2013; *Cumhuriyet*, September 6, 2018). The most commonly used verb to refer to refugees’ victimhood is ‘flee’. Syrians are ‘fleeing civil war’ (*Hürriyet*, November 14, 2013); ‘fleeing violence’ (*Cumhuriyet*, May 1, 2011), ‘fleeing internal turmoil’ (*Sözcü*, April 8, 2012), ‘fleeing massacre’ (*Yeni Akit*, June 17, 2011), ‘fleeing lynching’ (*Cumhuriyet*, August 16, 2014), ‘fleeing death’ (*Sözcü*, June 15, 2015), ‘fleeing imperialists’ war’ (*Yeni Akit*, March 9, 2015), ‘fleeing clashes’ (*Sabah*, June 18, 2015) and ‘fleeing oppression’ (*Yeni Akit*, June 19, 2011).

Villains are diverse and many and may appear under different names even though they actually refer to the same character. In most of the cases, villains come from external sources: the EU,

European countries, the West, the UN, foreign NGOs and such. This is especially true for *Sabah* and *Yeni Akit*, the two pro-government newspapers which intensify the humanitarian aid provided by the government, government agencies and NGOs close to the government by vilifying the West in general, and European countries or organizations in particular. This is part of promoting an image of Turkey as a humanitarian and benevolent country (Cevik & Sevin, 2017). Another source of external villains is Syria: Syrian regime in general, and Bashar Assad in particular, and armed groups in Syria. This group of villains, despite being common to all the newspapers, are either intensified or mitigated depending again on political judgement.

The internal sources of villains, on the other hand, are derived from the political and ideological line of the newspaper and signify those that are positioned against that line. In this sense, they are the outsiders of the imagined ‘we’ that the political positioning of the newspaper envisages. For example, for *Yeni Akit*, which has the widest array of such villains among all the other selected newspapers, basically any social or political group that are at odds with the Islamist-nationalist imagination of the nation may appear as villains that, in one way or another, victimize Syrian refugees (Saraçoğlu, 2018).

When it comes to saviors, from one point of view, they are diverse characters: Turkey, Turkish people, locals, Muslim fellows / *Ensar*, Turkish philanthropists, the government, President Erdoğan himself, government agencies, Turkish army / soldiers, Turkey-based NGOs and civil society organizations, and such. From another point of view, they are the different faces of the same character: ‘we’, in the banal sense of the word, people who live on the same territory, under the same flag, and read the newspapers that daily remind them of “their national place in a world of nations” (Billig, 1995, p. 8). From this point of view, praise for or reference to lifesaving or life-enhancing efforts, activities and actors contributes to a narrative of ‘us’, members of the same community, vis-à-vis refugees. This is ‘us’ versus ‘them’, the natives versus the refugees.

The most recurring metaphorical expression used in the news reports analyzed here is ‘*kucak açmak*’ (literally meaning ‘opening a lap’; close in meaning to ‘embrace’ and ‘opening arms’). The use of this expression reinforces the image of Turkey, Turkish people or the government as supportive, protective, caring and compassionate saviors of refugees. Below is an example:

Gaziantep **embraced** the mayor and the famous lawyer, both of whom are Turkish-friendly and who fled the civil war in Syria. (*Sabah*, May 5, 2013).

*İkisi de Türk dostu olan ve Suriye'deki iç savaştan kaçan belediye başkanı ve ile ünlü avukata Gaziantep **kucak açtı**.*

Sub-topic 1b: The Tolerant Host versus the Ungrateful / Overstaying / Unwanted Guest

The Turkish word 'sığınma', meaning 'to seek or take shelter', is used in different contexts, all referring to a victim seeking shelter and protection. There is another word derived from the same root as 'sığınma' but carries a heavily derogatory meaning; 'sığıntı' (close in meaning to 'freeloader'), which refers to someone who is unwelcome to stay where they are, and whose presence is deemed redundant (TDK, 2022). It is someone, for example, sheltered under the roof of a house but never considered a true member of the household, mostly despised because of their weakness and inability to sustain a living on their own, expected to be content with what they are offered and not to ask more. Some of the news articles analyzed under this sub-theme, despite never using the word, evoke a perception of Syrian refugees as such. On the one hand, it is acknowledged that they are refugees, or guests that need 'our' support; on the other hand, they are addressed as demanding and impertinent guests -sometimes to the extent of being ungrateful- that abuse 'our' good-will and tolerance, or menace the well-being of 'us', the true owners of the country. Some of the news articles analyzed under this sub-theme, on the other hand, mark Syrian refugees as overstaying people, whose return to their country is for the benefit of both sides. It was previously mentioned that 'kucak açmak' (embrace, open arms) was the most commonly used expression to intensify the image of Turkey, Turkish people or the government as supportive and compassionate saviors of needy refugees. This metaphorical phrase is replaced with 'kapıları açmak' (open the gate) in the news reports by pro-government newspapers *Sabah* and *Yeni Akit* analyzed here under this sub-theme.

Sub-topic 1c: Humane Turkey versus Inhumane West / Europe

Yanaşmayan et al. (2019) argue that the issue of Syrian refugees has become a parcel of the government's civilizationist populist discourse revolving around the rhetoric of Turkey's moral superiority over the West. In a similar vein, Karakaya Polat (2018) argues that the issue has become one of the defining elements of the JDP's identity and is especially instrumental for the party to present itself as morally superior to both its domestic opponents and Western countries. This finds reflection in the coverage of pro-government newspapers as well, particularly of *Yeni Akit*.

The way the *Yeni Akit* portrays the West in general, and the EU or European countries in particular, through refugee-related matters pretty much contributes to the rhetoric of ‘clash of civilizations’, similar to what Ertuğrul (2012) observes for the foreign policy discourse of the JDP with regard to Turkey-EU relations. In this framework, the wrongdoings by European countries or other Western actors with regards to refugees relate to the civilizational identity. Or the other way round, benevolence or generosity of Turkey towards refugees stems from its distinctive civilizational identity. Western / European Christian civilization on one hand, and the Ottoman / Islamic civilization on the other hand. The former lacks humanity, high morals like truthfulness, honesty, sympathy and compassion towards others despite the claims for being the cradle of civilization, democracy and human rights while the latter is embracing, tolerant, caring and thus humane.

Although *Sabah* also contributes to the ‘inhumane West’ construct with a few examples, the newspaper does not seem to take it to a civilizational context but keeps it in ethical and political terms. The newspaper points to Europe’s avoiding responsibility, not taking conscientious and humane actions, and falling behind Turkey in humanitarianism generally through echoing or copying the words of President Erdoğan.

In her analysis of the news stories by Anadolu Agency (AA), Özdora Akşak (2019) finds that the news outlet typically uses two perspectives with regards to praise; external praise for what Turkey has done for refugees and self-praise by Turkish authorities, with the former occurring almost twice as frequently as the latter (p. 10). This is also consistent with the findings of this research; self-praise and external praise have a considerable share in the corpus, and contribute particularly to the construct of ‘humane’ Turkey vis-à-vis ‘inhumane’ West.

Sub-topic 1d: ‘Our’ All-encompassing Humanitarianism vs. ‘Their’ Selective

Humanitarianism

The government is criticized for following a selective humanitarianism; adopting a preferential treatment of refugees based on religious, ethnic and political terms (İçduygu et al., 2017; Korkut, 2016; Togrul Koca, 2015). Rejecting such allegations, the former Foreign Minister Davutoğlu (2013), for example, said Turkey pursued an all-encompassing approach: “there is no discrimination made in either the refugee policy that we implement or the humanitarian aid that we provide” (p. 860).

The news reports coded under this sub-theme concern these opposing views. The pro-government *Sabah* and *Yeni Akit*, in tune with the government's discourse, portray an image of Turkey that provides humanitarian aid to all Syrian refugees regardless of ethnic or religious background. The anti-government *Cumhuriyet* and *Sözcü*, report the allegations of selective humanitarianism, albeit from different perspectives. The case of *Hürriyet* is noteworthy here. Findings suggest that the newspaper's coverage was more in tune with the pro-government camp even before the newspaper changed hands and its pro-government stance became apparent.

News items reporting the case of Syrian Kurds fleeing ISIS contain noteworthy examples for comparable analysis. On September 20, 2014, all the selected newspapers covered the issue on their frontpage; *Sözcü* and *Cumhuriyet*, from a perspective that highlights preferential treatment, and *Yeni Akit* and *Sabah* highlighting Turkey's embracing attitude, not mentioning the border closing or the long wait.

In *Sabah*'s account, Turkey saved and embraced the Kurds fleeing Kobane; Turkey is the 'door to life' (*yaşama açılan kapı*) for Kurds, whose thankful voice speaks through the headline: 'If Turkey hadn't let us in, we'd have all died' (*Türkiye almаса hepimiz ölürdük*). In *Yeni Akit*'s account, there is no mention of 'Kurds'; the incoming are 'Syrian citizens'; they were 'embraced' by Turkey, aided by soldiers and authorities. For *Hürriyet*, Kurdish refugees from Kobane are welcomed with 'Turkey's warm and considerate care' (*Türkiye'nin sıcak, özenli ilgisiyle karşılanıyor*) right after they pass the border. From the way *Cumhuriyet* sees it, Syrian Kurds fleeing the terror of ISIS were kept waiting at the border, in the minefield, 'hungry, thirsty and helpless' (*aç, susuz ve çaresiz olarak*) for 24 hours. Through the eyes of *Sözcü*, while the border was immediately opened for the ones fleeing from Assad, Syrian Kurds fleeing 'religious ISIS' (*dinci IŞİD*) were kept waiting at the border, and '24 hours later, they came to mercy' (*24 saat sonra insafa geldiler*).

Macro-topic 2: Religion

The government adopts a religious discourse drawing on the analogy of '*ensar*' and '*muhacir*', which involves an ostensibly exclusionary distinction; a distinction between Sunni Muslims and non-Sunnis, particularly Alevis. In tune with the vision of neo-Ottomanism, Sunni background makes the desired quality of both the Turkish society and Syrian refugees through

this perspective. The rhetoric of ‘ensar’ and ‘muhacir’ finds its reflection particularly in the coverage of *Yeni Akit* whereas Alevis are almost exclusive to the coverage of *Cumhuriyet*.

Sub-topic 2: ‘Our’ Religious Solidarity: *Muhacirs* versus Alevi Victims

The analogy of ‘ensar’ and ‘muhacir’, in *Yeni Akit*’s coverage, is generally accompanied by the use of the word ‘*kucaklaşma*’ (embrace), which is different from the previously mentioned ‘*kucak açmak*’ as the former involves reciprocity; the two sides mutually embrace each other. Another word is ‘*kardeşlik*’ (brotherhood or sisterhood), which describes a relationship on common grounds, either of kinship ties or shared values. Although the Turkish word ‘*kardeşlik*’ is gender-neutral, the use of the word is more akin to ‘brotherhood’. These lexical choices, coupled with the use of ‘ensar’ and ‘muhacir’, convey the meaning that ‘we’ embrace them because ‘they’ are our Muslim brothers, likewise, ‘they’ take shelter in and embrace ‘us’ because we are their Muslim brothers. Outsiders of this relatedness are not close enough to embrace ‘us’ or to be embraced by ‘us’ - an implication perhaps most emblematically reflected on the front page of *Yeni Akit* (October 7, 2014) which displays the image of two men dressed in Muslim outfits embracing each other, under the headline that says ‘Brotherhood has no boundaries’ (*Kardeşlikte sınır yok*). Examples by *Yeni Akit* show how issues related to Syrian refugees, who are defined only and simply as Muslims (Sunnis), become instrumental in disseminating Islamist viewpoints and confronting the opponents (e.g., feminists, seculars) of this ideological line.

When it comes to the news report by *Cumhuriyet* coded under this sub-theme, it is the only newspaper that reports about problems faced by Alevi refugees, at least on its front-page. In one of the examples, *Cumhuriyet* (September 2, 2013) reports that a group of Alevi Turkmens who received death threats in Turkey had to take shelter in a *cemevi* (Alevi house of worship). In another example by *Cumhuriyet* (October 7, 2013), there is a comparison between Islamists and Alevi Syrians: ‘Al Nusra in camps, Alevis on streets’ (*El Nusra kampta Aleviler sokakta*). The item reports that ‘Alevi Syrians in Turkey prefer living on the streets to staying in camps where radical Islamists stay’ (*Türkiye’deki Suriyeli Aleviler sokaklarda yaşamayı radikal İslamcuların bulunduğu kamplarda kalmaya tercih ediyor*) because of the fear of death and rape. Frontpage coverage of the other selected newspapers (*Sözcü*, *Yeni Akit* and *Sabah*) did not have any items that mention Alevi Syrian refugees.

Macro-topic 3: Demographics & Culture

‘Demographic threat’ is among the major frames that shape the public debate about Syrian refugees (Memişoğlu & Ilgit, 2016). Potential shift in the country’s demographics causing a ‘Syrian minority’ to emerge frequently comes forward particularly in relation to arguments against granting citizenship to Syrians (Bozdağ, 2020). Such concerns are most overtly voiced in the frontpage coverage of *Sözcü*. Below are some examples of the headlines reflecting these concerns:

What will you do if the number of Syrians in Turkey reaches 6 million and they ask us for ‘autonomy’ 10 years later?

Türkiye’de Suriyeli sayısı 6 milyon olursa ve bunlar 10 yıl sonra bizden ‘özerklik’ isterse ne yapacaksınız? (Sözcü, March 9, 2016)

There are 3 million Syrians in Turkey... What if Assad wants to come and hold a rally?

Türkiye’de 3 milyon Suriyeli var... Esad gelip miting yapmak isterse ne olacak? (Sözcü, March 8, 2017)

Demographic and population-related themes are often interwoven with cultural and identity-related ones. Threat and closeness are two distinct themes to be found within this paradigm. Cultural and demographic threat versus cultural closeness. In this sense, Syrian refugees may either be viewed and represented as ‘people dissimilar to us’ or ‘people like us’.

Sub-topic 3a: Mannerly Citizens versus Vulgar Syrians Flooding the Beaches

The presence of Syrian men on beaches, and their act of smoking water pipes becomes emblematic for their uncivilized attitudes on social media posts (Özdüzen et al., 2020, p. 14). Previous research on news media also informs that derogatory references to the perceived cultural traits of Syrians, and discriminatory metaphors that portray Syrians as ‘filthy’, ‘disruptive of local order’, and ‘culturally backward’ are common (Cantek & Soykan, 2018, pp.13-17; Doğanay & Çoban Keneş, 2016, pp. 175-177). The corpus yielded similar examples of news items particularly from the frontpage coverage of *Sözcü* and *Hürriyet*.

If the most emblematic image of the ‘vulgar Syrians’ construct is bearded men, their most emblematic activities are barbecue picnics and group fun by the seaside. Syrians having fun at the beach in Florya make noise and disturb others, turn the place into a dump site, picnicking

and having barbecue (*Sözcü*, July 9, 2016). They ‘invade’ the beaches in Mudanya, setting up makeshift tents (*Sözcü*, June 9, 2019). These items also involve a comparison, either implicitly or explicitly, between the lives and conditions of Syrians and those of Turkish people. ‘Life in Turkey is easy for Syrians’ (*Türkiye’de hayat Suriyeli’ye rahat*) says *Sözcü*, implying Turkish people experience difficulties while Syrians have laid-back fun at the beach. More overtly, Syrians staying in makeshift tents in Mudanya lead a life of pleasure ‘while our children are martyred’ (*Bizim çocuklarımız şehit olurken Suriyeliler sefa içinde yaşayamaz*). Even if it is for shelter, Syrians’ presence at the beach shows that they live in pleasure.

Sub-topic 3b: People like ‘us’

The government’s discourse underlines ‘cultural proximity’ of Syrian refugees to Turkish people. This discourse of cultural affinity is built mainly around the notion of shared religion of Sunni Islam, and at times reinforced by references to the common Ottoman past and shared values (Aksel & İçduygu, 2018; Karakaya Polat, 2018; Kloos, 2016; Sert & Daniş, 2021; Yanaşmayan et al., 2019). In this sense, Syrian refugees are actually like ‘us’ because we have a common religion and history and share a geography. A news article by *Yeni Akit* (July 8, 2016) epitomizes this view: ‘Syrians are the people of this geography’ (*Suriyeliler bu coğrafyanın insanı*). Seen through this lens, Syrians are among the peoples -like us- of the Muslim geography, once ruled by the Ottoman.

A pattern of featuring refugees through their relationship with symbols of national and cultural identification or aligning them with such symbols can be observed in the coverage of *Sabah*, particularly when reporting personal stories. For example, a six-year-old Syrian boy moves the emotions of everyone by singing the national anthem (*Sabah*, April 20, 2014). ‘Mahmud is our hero, our *Hızır*’ says the survivor of the 2020 Elazığ earthquake, rescued by a Syrian refugee named Mahmud (*Sabah*, January 27, 2020). A Syrian girl wears a necklace with a crescent and a star, which she says symbolizes hope (*Sabah*, November 8, 2018). It is not only that they are like ‘us’, but they also feel part of and act like ‘us’.

It is noteworthy that while *Hürriyet* is one of the two newspapers (alongside *Sözcü*) that contribute most to the construct of bearded, vulgar and disruptive Syrians as discussed earlier, it is also the newspaper that features success stories, personal stories, cultural events, and media practices of the refugee community more than any other selected newspapers. The refugee image portrayed through these items -both textual and visual-wise- is quite different from the

previously discussed ones (Needy Victims, Ungrateful Guests and Vulgars). These refugees all have a modern look and lead a modern way of life. Seen through this lens, the less they look like refugees, the more they look like ‘us’, and the closer they get to become part of ‘us’.

What comes forward from these stories by *Hürriyet* is that a modern lifestyle brings Syrian refugees closer to the people of Turkey, closer to ‘us’. From the perspective of *Cumhuriyet*, what brings Syrian refugees and Turkish society closer together is not necessarily a modern lifestyle or a modern look, but rather challenges that they both have to cope with.

Macro-topic 4: Economics & Finances

The debate centered around economic aspects and impact of Syrian refugees produces two opposing views on whether the refugees are more of a benefit or a burden for the country. Findings suggest that the latter is far more salient in the overall media discourse. Examples from both the pro-government and the anti-government camps show that the issue of migration and Syrian refugees is treated more often as a burden particularly through news items reporting on the amount of government spending.

Expenditures on refugees and the overall impact on the economy are, more often than not, a matter of ‘cost’, ‘burden’, ‘bill’, and ‘balance sheet’, and expressed in figures. The difference here, with regards to the coverage of the government spending, between the pro-government *Sabah* and *Yeni Akit* and anti-government *Cumhuriyet* and *Sözcü* is that figures generally do not make the headline of the news item in the coverage of the former while examples from the latter reveal that cost calculations, total sums, and figures are intensified; presented in the headline or appear as the main subject of the news items. Below presented headlines from *Hürriyet* involve a critical undertone regarding the amount of government spending:

We spent 200 million liras for the camps

Kamplar için 200 milyon lira harcadık (Hürriyet, July 24, 2012)

The balance sheet of Syria: 900 million lira

Suriye bilançosu: 900 milyon lira (Hürriyet, December 21, 2013)

Previously discussed contrast between Turkey and the West / Europe (Humane Turkey versus Inhuman West) is also relevant to the economic paradigm. The framing of government spending in the frontpage coverage of pro-government newspapers generally comes with a comparison to the financial support allocated by Western / European actors, in a manner that creates an

antagonism of generous Turkey versus the selfish West, which will be discussed under the relevant sub-theme.

The final sub-theme that will be discussed under the macro-theme of economics and finances concerns labor market conditions. News items that will be discussed under this sub-theme deal with the exploitation of Syrian refugees in the labor market and reveal that refugees serve as a cheap labor force. Examples of such are predominantly from the coverage of *Cumhuriyet*, and from *Hürriyet* as well.

Sub-topic 4a: The Burden-Laden Citizen versus the Burden-Free Refugee

News that presents Syrian refugees as a threat on economic grounds, as outsiders who exploit the country's resources, enjoy economic privileges, and thus impede the prosperity of Turkish people are predominantly relevant to the coverage of *Sözcü*, and to a lesser extent that of *Hürriyet*, and in one example that of *Cumhuriyet*.

When President Erdoğan announced that Syrian refugees may be accommodated in unoccupied apartments built by the Housing Development Administration of Turkey (TOKİ), this prompted criticism from the opposition, including Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the NMP which later allied with the ruling JDP. Bahçeli's critical words, reported by *Hürriyet* (July 13, 2016), are as follows: 'If there were TOKİ houses to be given to Syrians, why were they denied from the genuine children of this nation? (*Suriyelilere verilecek TOKİ evleri var idiyse bu milletin asil evlatlarından niye esirgenmiştir?*). Nationals of the homeland versus refugees; the former are denied from what they genuinely deserve while the latter are bestowed with what truly does not belong to them.

Sözcü (July 12, 2016) takes the comparison to a further level: 'Syrians who fled the war in their homeland' versus 'families of *our* children who shed their blood for the homeland'. According to the article, the government uses every means available for Syrians but disregards the families of martyrs most of whom do not complain and raise their voices although they live in ramshackle houses in poverty because they do not want to be a burden on the state.

Claims of economic gains enjoyed by Syrian refugees are often brought forward by *Sözcü*, more often than any other selected newspaper. Below are some of the headlines from the newspaper that spotlight such claims:

They handed out 400 dollar credit cards to refugees

Mültecilere 400'er dolarlık kredi kartları dağıtmışlar (*Sözcü*, May 15, 2012)

Jobs and money will be given to those coming from Syria

Suriye'den gelenlere iş ve para verilecek (Sözcü, July 22, 2012)

Shopping cards for asylum seekers

Sığınmacıya alışveriş kartı (Sözcü, October 15, 2012)

As opposed to the comparative lens that places citizens and refugees on two opposing sides as economically burdened and unburdened, a noteworthy example from *Cumhuriyet* (December 31, 2014) equates the two sides on the same plane, on the basis of their economic and material deprivation. 'Some in the street, some in the tent' (*Kimi sokakta kimi çadırda*) reads the headline of the news item.

Sub-topic 4b: Generous Turkey versus the Selfish West

News articles categorized here under this sub-theme can be considered complementary to the previously examined 'Humane Turkey versus Inhumane West' construct. A great deal of the news that contributes to the image of 'generous Turkey' comes under headlines that repeat President Erdoğan's words addressing European countries and cautioning them about the possibility of 'opening the gates' if they do not assume more financial burden. Below presented extract from *Sabah* reporting Erdoğan's words is an example:

Refugees will end up at Europe's gate

Some say I am the richest in the world. No, you are not number 1 in the world.

Turkey is number one in the world in terms of providing support to underdeveloped countries relative to national income

Mülteciler Avrupa Kapısına Dayanır

Bazıları dünyanın en zenginiyim diyor. Hayır dünyada 1 numara değilsin. Milli gelire oranla az gelişmiş ülkelere destek vermek noktasında dünyanın bir numarası Türkiyedir. (Sabah, February 20, 2019).

Sub-topic 4c: Cheap Labor versus Even Cheaper Labor

Poor working conditions and exploitation of Syrian refugees in the labor market is the most salient in the frontpage coverage of *Cumhuriyet*, which covers such content in an empathizing tone. *Hürriyet* also brings up the Syrian laborers in the informal sector, though sometimes what

may be called an alarming tone. The corpus did not yield any items from *Sabah* and *Sözcü* that deal with the position of refugees in the labor market and the problems they face. Only one item from *Yeni Akit* addresses the working conditions of refugees, without framing them as a cheap labor force. This means that Syrian refugees as a cheap labor force are absent in the frontpage coverage of the pro-government newspapers and *Sözcü* as well.

Macro-topic 5: Politics and Rights

As far as the rights granted to Syrian refugees are concerned, citizenship comes forward as the most disputed issue. This is where almost all the discourses so far examined come into force. As with any debate, citizenship debate also comes with supporting and opposing views. Roughly put, the ‘for’ side of the debate is represented by *Hürriyet*, *Sabah* and *Yeni Akit* while *Sözcü* and *Cumhuriyet* take an opposing stand, albeit at varying intensities and voicing different arguments from each other. *Sözcü* is incomparably the most frontally and vehemently opponent to the idea of citizenship by bringing the issue to the fore on its front page several times in a row. *Cumhuriyet* is cautious and addresses political exploitation of refugees by the ruling party. *Hürriyet* finds citizenship celebratory news for refugees and gives far more coverage to the issue than *Sabah* and *Yeni Akit*, which are also supportive of the idea, and denigrate the political opposition for spreading anti-refugee rhetoric. On the government’s side, there recently seems to be a careful avoidance of an emphasis on the issue of citizenship, and the option of return seems to be more frequently voiced (Içduygu & Nimer, 2020; Kaya, 2020). This is somewhat reflected in the coverage of pro-government newspapers. It is noteworthy that citizenship is not a salient topic in the frontpage coverage of *Sabah* and *Yeni Akit*, both of which had quite a few news items addressing citizenship.

Overall, objection to citizenship feeds into an antagonism of ‘ordinary citizens versus privileged citizens-to-be’ whereas support to citizenship delineates refugees as ‘Muslim fellows’ and ‘qualified individuals’.

Sub-topic 5a: Ordinary Citizens versus Privileged Citizens-to-be

With regard to the citizenship debate, that refugees are subject to privileges and benefits compared to Turkish citizens comes forward, particularly in the coverage of *Sözcü*. In addition to economic and material benefits, Syrian refugees enjoy other privileges and rights according to *Sözcü* (July 9, 2019). Rights that Turkish citizens do not have; rights that they did not even

have back in Syria, in their home country, as the article claims under the headline ‘Life in Turkey is easy for Syrians’ (*Türkiye’de hayat Suriye’liye rahat*).

What is common to the coverage of *Sözcü* and *Cumhuriyet* is that both treat the citizenship move as an election investment strategy by the government, particularly with regard to the constitutional referendum that was held in 2017. The difference here regards how the two newspapers relate this election strategy to Syrian refugees. From the perspective of *Sözcü*, refugees appear as readily government supporters. *Cumhuriyet*, on the other hand, highlights the political abuse of refugees by the government.

Sub-topic 5b: ‘Our’ Qualified Muslim Fellows

According to an article by *Yeni Akit* (July 8, 2016), granting citizenship to Syrian refugees is fully supported by academics who make references to Ottoman history, shared geography and common values to justify how rightful the decision is. It is rightful for Syrians to obtain citizenship because they are after all ‘the people of this geography’ (*bu coğrafyanın insanı*). Objection to citizenship, on the other hand, means having a fear of or even hatred of Syrians; ‘Syriaphobia’ (*Suriyefobia*). Likewise, ‘There is a coalition of hatred against Syrians’ (*Suriyelilere karşı nefret koalisyonu var*) says *Sabah* (July 14, 2016), reporting the remarks of then the Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım, who associates objection to citizenship with hate crime, and says refugees will ‘raise the bread of’ Turkey. What comes forward from these examples is that objection to citizenship is equated with hatred (‘phobia’ or ‘hate crime’) towards Syrians. Granting citizenship to Syrians is a positive step because they can contribute to our society (‘raise the bread of this country’), and they are our Muslim brothers (‘people of this geography’). In addition, refugees that will be granted citizenship comprise qualified individuals who are willing to serve for Turkey.

CONCLUSION

An overview of the existing literature on the media representation of Syrian refugees reveals that there is a general tendency to approach representation in positive and negative terms, and a shared tendency to code news content accordingly. Researchers drawing on the data sampled from different time spans, and from different news outlets, of different types either find an overall positive representation (Boztepe, 2017; Cantek & Soykan, 2018; Göker & Keskin, 2015; Onay-Coker, 2019; Paksoy & Şentöregil, 2018; Pandır, Efe, & Paksoy, 2015) of Syrian refugees in media discourse. ‘Positive’ and ‘negative’, first of all, hinder the view of gray areas. ‘Gray’ here is not in the sense of ‘balanced’ or ‘neutral’; not in the sense that existing studies use to code news content other than ‘positive’ or ‘negative’, but in the sense of complexities and intrigues interwoven in discourse.

Approaching discourse and representation through these terms and treating media content in this manner may cause the broader social, political and historic context that discourses are embedded in or produced by to be overlooked, confining discourse to the level of literal interpretations. This is not to say that such a frame of reference is totally invalid, or such categories have no place in matters of representation. It is rather that ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ has limited explanatory power in terms of inclusion and exclusion dynamics that work through discourse. Methodology-wise, Discourse-Historical Approach provides a firm ground to go beyond the limits of dealing with media representation through opposing frames of ‘positive’ versus ‘negative’.

Existing studies that rested on ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ polarities generally overlooked exclusionary facets of discourses produced by pro-government media. For example, in Efe’s (2015, p. 53) account, the discourse of religious brotherhood that he found salient in the coverage of progovernment newspapers is ‘positive’ representation of refugees. In a similar vein, Boztepe (2017, p. 110) treats the ‘brotherhood’ discourse that came prevalent in the broadcast of the progovernment TV channel *Kanal 7* as a ‘positive’ representation. This can be said when the political context or when the implicit exclusionary facet of this discourse is disregarded. The discourse of religious brotherhood, inasmuch as it relies on the fellowship of Muslim / Sunni refugees and natives, contributes to the exclusion of non-Muslim / non-Sunni refugees in the first place. This can be observed in the non-coverage of Alevi refugees by *Yeni Akit* and *Sabah*, the two newspapers that used references to shared history and values and referred to the analogy of ‘*ensar*’ and ‘*muhacir*’. In addition to religious ones, there are

gendered codes at play as well. In this discourse, the refugee figure is predominantly a Sunni ‘brother’ whereas the female refugee is reduced to a suffering Muslim ‘mother’. On a broader political level, the religious discourse of brotherhood contributes to the exclusion of those who do not identify as Sunni or pious Muslims (e.g., Alevis and seculars). In this sense, this discourse is closely related to the way ‘desired’ or ‘ideal’ citizens make sense in the imaginary of the newly formulated national identity.

In addition to this, the issue of Syrian refugees is treated instrumentally by progovernment newspapers to vilify societal groups that are at odds with this new form of national identity. For example, seculars, feminists, leftists and supporters of the main opposition party come to the fore in news coverage of refugees. In this sense, discourses of inclusion towards refugees are intertwined with discourses of exclusion towards other social groups.

Portrayal of refugees as overstaying guests can be found in the coverage of progovernment newspapers, too. Discourses of inclusion and exclusion oscillate between ‘opening arms’ and ‘opening the gates’. Depiction of refugees as economic burden is not less exclusionary in nature than other discourses. Reducing the ‘desired’ refugee to either a Muslim brother, or a qualified individual is not less exclusionary, either given the fact that refugees are diverse in religious background, and most have become cheap labor force.

Anti-government media come to the fore for harboring negative representations in the existing literature. According to Çağlar and Özkır (2014, p. 499), this results from a superficial anti-government stance, and not from a solid ideological-political base. This, first of all, does not explain variations among the different news outlets from the anti-government camp. *Sözcü* and *Cumhuriyet* have clearly different perspectives. Discourses of exclusion in the coverage of *Sözcü* have several grounds ranging from ethnicity-based approach to arguments in economic terms, which cannot be solely explained by a superficial anti-government stance. In addition, such a view presupposes a given relation between anti-government stance and an overall negative representation of refugees. The analysis of newspaper coverage of *Cumhuriyet* shows that this is not the case. Discourses of inclusion particularly towards less advantaged groups such as Alevis and seasonal farm workers are notable in the coverage of the newspaper, which has no parallel in the other selected newspapers.

Representation of Syrian refugees in media relates to wider political dimensions at play, particularly with regard to the reformulation of national identity in recent years. There are

contradictory, counter or perhaps competing views of who 'we' are, which is closely related to how media outlets construct their accounts on Syrian refugees.

It may be argued that Syrian refugees have come to be, borrowing from Triandafyllidou (1998), the new 'internal significant others' for the Turkish national identity that is in the process of reformulation. Triandafyllidou (1998, pp. 600-601) argues that immigrant communities may become internal significant others when they are perceived to pose a threat to the unity of the nation, particularly in cultural and ethnic terms. In Triandafyllidou's account (1998, p. 603), during times of crises, when the national identity is contested, significant others may serve either as scapegoats or as a means for clarifying the boundaries of the nation through fostering the feeling of belongingness among the nationals. I believe this frame perfectly fits the case of Syrians residing in Turkey and argue that all the discourses explored in this study contribute to the construction of Syrians as the new 'internal significant others'.

Syrian refugees is still a relatively new phenomenon in Turkey, not that little time has passed since the onset of migration from Syria but because new dimensions, conflicts and complexities are added to the phenomenon in time. The existing literature, despite having flourished abundantly in recent years, still lacks comprehensive approaches particularly in the field of media studies. That being said, this research is expected to have provided an alternative perspective on the representation of Syrian refugees in the Turkish media that highlighted the multiple paradigms involved and multiple inclusion / exclusion dynamics generated.

Future studies may use the paradigms offered here to study discourses at other sites or levels. For example, considering that it is more than obvious the refugee issue will come to the fore more frequently in the upcoming elections, future research can study political party discourses using these paradigms. Other paradigms may well be added to the ones that this research offers. Recently, gender and security seem to have become prominent themes in refugee debate, particularly after the video footages of mass crossings of the border, and videos of Turkish women in public places secretly filmed by immigrant men flooded on social media. Future studies may look at the intersections of public, political and media discourses by adding gender and security to the five paradigms that this research offers.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

- Aksel, D. B., & İcduygu, A. (2018). *National report on Turkey: Patterns of politicization on refugees and policy responses* (No. 10). CEASEVAL Research on the common European asylum system. November 2018. Accessed June 15, 2022. http://ceaseval.eu/publications/10_Aksel_Icduygu_TurkeyNationalReport_WP5.pdf
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (2006th ed.). Verso.
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*. Sage.
- Bozdağ, Ç. (2020). Bottom-up nationalism and discrimination on social media: An analysis of the citizenship debate about refugees in Turkey. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(5), 712–730. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549419869354>
- Boztepe, V. (2017). Televizyon haberlerinde Suriyeli mültecilerin temsili. *Ilef Dergisi*, 4(1), 91–122.
- Çağlar, İ., & Özkır, Y. (2014). Suriyeli mültecilerin Türkiye basınında temsili. *Ortadoğu Yıllığı*, 487–501.
- Cantek, F., & Soykan, C. (2018). *Representation of refugees in the media in the AKP era*. Hâlâ Gazeteciyiz-Media Report-7. October 2018. Accessed June 15, 2022. <https://halagazeteciyiz.net/2018/12/25/akp-doneminde-medyada-multeci-temsili/>
- Cevik, S., & Sevin, E. (2017). A quest for soft power: Turkey and the Syrian refugee crisis. *Journal of Communication Management*, 21(4), 399–410. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-04-2017-0042>
- Chouliaraki, L., & Stolic, T. (2017). Rethinking media responsibility in the refugee ‘crisis’: a visual typology of European news. *Media, Culture and Society*, 39(8), 1162–1177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717726163>
- Davutoğlu, A. (2013). Turkey’s humanitarian diplomacy: Objectives, challenges and prospects. *Nationalities Papers*, 41(6), 865–870. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.857299>
- Derrida, J. (2000). HOSTIPITALITY. *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 5(3), 3-18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09697250020034706>
- Doğanay, Ü., & Çoban Keneş, H. (2016). Yazılı basında Suriyeli ‘mülteciler’: Ayrımcı söylemlerin rasyonel ve duygusal gerekçelerinin inşası. *Mülkiye Dergisi*, 40(1), 143–184.

- Dönmez, R. Ö. (2015). Nationalism in Turkey under Justice and Development Party Rule: The logic of masculinist protection. *Turkish Studies*, 16(4), 554–571. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2015.1075398>
- Dykstra, T. A. (2016). Assemblages of Syrian suffering: Rhetorical formations of refugees in Western media. *Discourse & Society*, 4(1(7)), 31–48.
- Efe, İ. (2015). *Türk basınında Suriyeli sığınmacılar*. SETA.
- Erdoğan, E., & Semerci, P. U. (2018). Attitudes towards Syrians in Turkey-2017. In *German-Marshall Fund-Discussion on Turkish Perceptions of Syrian Refugees*. March 12, 2018. Accessed June 15, 2022. <https://goc.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2018/03/12/turkish-perceptions-of-syrian-refugees-20180312.pdf>
- Ertuğrul, K. (2012). AKP's neo-conservatism and politics of otherness in Europe-Turkey relations. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 46, 157–186. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0896634600001540>
- Georgiou, M., & Zaborowski, R. (2017). *Media coverage of the “refugee crisis”: A cross-European perspective*. Council of Europe Report. (No. DG1 (2017) 03). March 2017. Accessed June 15, 2022. <https://edoc.coe.int/en/refugees/7367-media-coverage-of-the-refugee-crisis-a-cross-european-perspective.html>
- Göker, G., & Keskin, S. (2015). Haber medyası ve mülteciler : Suriyeli mültecilerin Türk yazılı basınındaki temsili. *İletişim Kuram ve Araştırma Dergisi*, 41, 229-256.
- Guedes Bailey, O., & Harindranath, R. (2005). Racialized “othering”: The representation of asylum seekers in news media. In S. Allen (Ed.), *Journalism: critical issues* (pp. 274–286). <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Gürsel, D. (2017). The Emergence of the enterprising refugee discourse and differential inclusion in Turkey's changing migration politics. *Movements Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies*, 3(2), 133–146.
- Hobsbawm, E. J., & Ranger, T. (Eds.). (1983). *The invention of tradition* (2000th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- İçduygu, A., & Nimer, M. (2020). The politics of return: exploring the future of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(3), 415–433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2019.1675503>
- İçduygu, A., Ustubici, A., Aral, İ., & Ayar, B. (2017). Legitimising settlement of refugees:

- Unpacking humanitarianism from a comparative perspective. *Geografie*, 122(4), 449–475.
- Karakaya Polat, R. (2018). Religious solidarity, historical mission and moral superiority: construction of external and internal ‘others’ in AKP’s discourses on Syrian refugees in Turkey. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 15(5), 500–516. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2018.1500925>
- Kaya, A. (2020). *Reception: Turkey Country Report* (No. 37). RESPOND. Global Migration: Consequences and Responses. February 2020. Accessed March 15, 2022. <https://respondmigration.com/wp-blog/refugee-reception-policies-practices-responses-turkey-country-report>
- Kirişçi, K. (2014). *Syrian refugees and Turkey’s challenges: Going beyond hospitality*. Brookings. May 2024. Accessed June 15, 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Syrian-Refugees-and-Turkeys-Challenges-May-14-2014.pdf>
- Kloos, S. (2016). The neo-Ottoman turn in Turkey’s refugee reception discourse. *Alternatif Politika*, 8(3), 536–561.
- Korkut, U. (2016). Pragmatism, moral responsibility or policy change: The Syrian refugee crisis and selective humanitarianism in the Turkish refugee regime. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 4(2), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-015-0020-9>
- Koser Akcapar, S., & Şimşek, D. (2018). The politics of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A question of inclusion and exclusion through citizenship. *Social Inclusion*, 6(1), 176–187. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v6i1.1323>
- Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (4th Edition). The University of Chicago Press.
- Memişoğlu, F., & Ilgit, A. (2016). Syrian refugees in Turkey: Multifaceted challenges, diverse players and ambiguous policies. *Mediterranean Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2016.1189479>
- Onay-Coker, D. (2019). The representation of Syrian refugees in Turkey: A critical discourse analysis of three newspapers. *Continuum*, 33(3), 369–385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2019.1587740>
- Özdora Akşak, E. (2019). Discursive construction of Syrian refugees in shaping international public opinion: Turkey’s public diplomacy efforts. *Discourse and Communication*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481319893769>

- Özdüzen, O., Korkut, U., & Özdüzen, C. (2020). ‘Refugees are not welcome’: Digital racism, online place-making and the evolving categorization of Syrians in Turkey. *New Media and Society*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820956341>
- Paksoy, A. F., & Şentöregil, M. (2018). Türk basınında Suriyeli sığınmacılar: İlk beş yılın analizi (2011-2015). *Selçuk İletişim*, 11(1), 237–256. <https://doi.org/10.18094/josc.344498>
- Pandır, M., Efe, İ., & Paksoy, A. F. (2015). Türk basınında Suriyeli sığınmacı temsili üzerine bir içerik analizi. *Marmara İletişim Dergisi*, 24, 1–26.
- Reisigl, M. (2018). The Discourse Historical Approach. In J. Flowerdew & J. E. Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical discourse studies* (pp. 44–59). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315739342>
- Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2001). *Discourse and discrimination*. Routledge.
- Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2009). The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 87–121). Sage.
- Saraçoğlu, C. (2018). The Syrian conflict and the crisis of Islamist nationalism in Turkey. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 16(4), 17–26.
- Saraçoğlu, C., & Bélanger, D. (2019). Loss and xenophobia in the city: contextualizing anti-Syrian sentiments in Izmir, Turkey. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 53(4), 363–383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2019.1615779>
- Saraçoğlu, C., & Demirkol, Ö. (2015). Nationalism and foreign policy discourse in Turkey under the AKP Rule: Geography, history and national identity. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(3), 301–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2014.947152>
- Sert, D., & Danış, D. (2021). Framing Syrians in Turkey: State control and no crisis Discourse. *International Migration*, 59(1), 197–214. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12753>
- TDK. (2022). Sığıntı. Accessed February 15, 2022. <https://sozluk.gov.tr/>
- Tirajlar. (2020). March 8, 2020. Accessed May 5, 2020. <https://www.gazeteciler.com/tirajlar>
- Togral Koca, B. (2015). Deconstructing Turkey’s “open door” policy towards refugees from Syria. *Migration Letters*, 12(3), 209–225.
- Triandafyllidou, A. (1998). National identity and “the other.” *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 21(4), 593–612. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468759508579310>
- Uzer, U. (2018). Glorification of the past as a political tool: Ottoman history in contemporary Turkish politics. *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 9(4), 339–357.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2018.1539063>

- Vukov, T. (2003). Imagining communities through immigration policies: Governmental regulation, media spectacles and the affective politics of national borders. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(3), 335–353.
- White, J. (2014). *Muslim nationalism and the new Turks*. Princeton University Press.
- Wodak, R. (2008). “Us” and “Them”: Inclusion and exclusion-discrimination via discourse. In G. Delanty, R. Wodak, & P. Jones (Eds.), *Identity, belonging and migration* (pp. 54–77). Liverpool University Press.
- Wodak, R., & Pelinka, A. (2002). *The Haider phenomenon in Austria*. Routledge.
- Wodak, R., & van Dijk, T. (Eds.). (2000). *Racism at the top: Parliamentary discourses on ethnic issues in six European states*. Drava.
- Yanařmayan, Z., Üstübeci, A., & Kařlı, Z. (2019). Under the shadow of civilizationist populist discourses: Political debates on refugees in Turkey. *New Diversities*, 21(2), 37–51.
- Yücebař, M. (2015). Gaziantep yerel basınında Suriyeli imgesi: Yeni tařranın yeni suskunları: Suriyeliler. *Birikim*, 311, 38–47.
- 2 milyon kiři daha Türkiye'ye gelebilir [2 million more people can come to Turkey]. (2018, September 6). *Cumhuriyet*.
- El Nusra kampta Aleviler sokakta [Al Nusra in camp, Alevi on the street]. (2013, October 7). *Cumhuriyet*.
- Kara bir leke daha istemiyoruz: Linçten kaçan Suriyelileri saklayan aile [We don't want another stain: Family hiding Syrians fleeing lynch]. (2014, August 14). *Cumhuriyet*.
- Kimi sokakta kimi çadırda [Some on the street, some in tents]. (2014, December 31) *Cumhuriyet*.
- Suriyeliler için sınırda çadırkent: Şiddetten kaçtılar [Tent city at the border for Syrians: They fled violence]. (2011, May 1). *Cumhuriyet*.
- Suriyelilerin hali periřan: İstanbul'da Cemevine sığındılar [Syrians are desperate: They took shelter in Cemevi in Istanbul]. (2013, September 2). *Cumhuriyet*.
- Esad askerine Hatay'da řifa [Healing for Assad soldier in Hatay]. (2013, April 5). *Hürriyet*.
- Kamplar için 200 Milyon Lira harcadık [We spent 200 million Liras for camps]. (2012, July 24) *Hürriyet*.
- Konut vardı da niye esirgedin [If there was housing, why did you withhold it?]. (2016, July 13). *Hürriyet*.

- Suriye bilançosu: 900 milyon Lira [The balance sheet of Syria: 900 million Liras]. (2013, December 21). *Hürriyet*.
- Suriye FM: Türkiye'den 5 radyo yayında [Syria FM: 5 Radios on air from Turkey. (2013, November 14). *Hürriyet*.
- Batı darbeciye sahip çıkıyor [The West takes care of coup plotters]. (2017, January 10). *Sabah*.
- Dönen Suriyeli'ye eve kadar eşlik [Accompanying home the returning Syrian]. (2018, November 8). *Sabah*.
- Geri dönüşte etnik ayırım [Ethnic discrimination on return]. (2015, June 18). *Sabah*.
- İşte kara gün dostluğu bu [Foul-weather friendship]. (2013, May 5). *Sabah*.
- Mahmud bizim kahramanımız [Mahmud is our hero]. (2020, January 27). *Sabah*.
- Mülteciler Avrupa kapısına dayanır [Refugees will end up at Europe's gate]. (2019, February 20). *Sabah*.
- Ömer kampın en sevilen çocuğu oldu [Ömer became the most loved child of the camp]. (2014, April 20). *Sabah*.
- Türkiye almasa hepimiz ölürdük: Sabah Kobanili mültecilerin kampına girdi [If Turkey hadn't let us in, we'd have all died]. (2014, October, 25). *Sabah*.
- Bizim çocuklarımız şehit olurken Suriyeliler sefa içinde yaşayamaz [While our children are martyred Syrians can't lead a life of pleasure]. (2019, June 9). *Sözcü*.
- Bu nasıl vicdan böyle! [What kind of conscience is this!]. (2015, June 15). *Sözcü*.
- Mültecilere 400'er Dolarlık kredi kartları dağıtmışlar [They handed out 400-dollar credit cards to refugees]. (2012, May 15). *Sözcü*.
- Sığınmacıya alışveriş kartı [Shopping card for asylum seekers]. (2012, October 15). *Sözcü*.
- Suriye'den gelenlere iş ve para verilecek [Jobs and money will be given to those coming from Syria]. (2012, July 22). *Sözcü*.
- Suriyeliler, Türkiye'nin yaptığı kampı beğenmedi [Syrians disfavored Turkey's camp]. (2012, April 8). *Sözcü*.
- TOKİ evlerini Suriyeliler yerine şehit ailelerin verin [Give TOKİ houses to the families of martyrs instead of Syrians]. (2016, July 12). *Sözcü*.
- Türkiye'de 3 milyon Suriyeli var.. Esad gelip miting yapmak isterse ne olacak? [There are 3 million Syrians in Turkey. What if Assad wants to come and hold a rally here?]. (2017,

March 8). *Sözcü*.

Türkiye'de hayat Suriyeliye rahat [Life in Turkey is easy for Syrians]. (2016, July 9). *Sözcü*.

Türkiye'de Suriyeli sayısı 6 milyon olursa ve bunlar 10 yıl sonra bizden 'özerklik' isterse ne yapacaksınız? [What will you do if the number of Syrians in Turkey reaches 6 million and they ask us for 'autonomy' 10 years later?]. (2016, March 9). *Sözcü*.

Avrupa'nın maskesini düşürdük [We unmasked Europe]. (2015, March 9). *Yeni Akit*.

Boynuyoğun'dan ilk görüntüler [First images from Boynuyoğun]. (2011, June 19). *Yeni Akit*.

Kardeşlikte sınır yok [No limits in brotherhood]. (2014, October 4). *Yeni Akit*.

Krizde umut Türkiye [Turkey is the hope amidst the crisis]. (2011, June 17). *Yeni Akit*.

Suriyeli çocukların sınıfları cıvıl cıvıl [Classes of Syrian kids are cheerful]. (2016, October 15).

Yeni Akit.

Suriyeliler bu coğrafyanın insanı [Syrians are the people of this geography]. (2016, July 8).

Yeni Akit.

Table 1

Paradigms of Public-Political Debate vs. Macro-Topics of Newspaper Coverage

Paradigms of Public/Political Debate (Chapter 4)	Macro-Topics of Newspaper Coverage
Humanitarian	Humanitarianism & Hospitality
Religious	Religion
Economic	Economics & Finances
Socio-cultural & Demographic	Culture & Demographics
Citizenship & Rights	Politics & Rights

Table 2

Breakdown of each newspaper's coverage in the selected corpus of analysis

Newspaper	The Number of News Items
<i>Sabah</i>	46
<i>Cumhuriyet</i>	57
<i>Yeni Akit</i>	61
<i>Sözcü</i>	70
<i>Hürriyet</i>	84

NOTE: This preprint reports new research that has not been certified by peer review and should not be used as established information without consulting multiple experts in the field.

TOTAL 318

Preprint