

SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF WOMEN REFUGEES IN PUBLIC IMAGINATION: UNDERREPRESENTATION AND DEPERSONALISATION

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DOI: 10.31834/ortadoguvegoc.1188207

Makale Türü / Article Types: Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Geliş Tarihi / Received: 12 Ekim/ 12 October 2022

Kabul Tarihi / Accepted: 28 Aralık / 28 December 2022

Yayın Tarihi / Published: 30 Aralık / December 2022

Yayın Sezonu / Pub Season: Aralık / December

Atıf / Cite: Pandir, M. (2022). Social Exclusion of Women Refugees in Public Imagination: Underrepresentation and Depersonalisation. Ortadođu ve Göç, 12(2). ss. 260-284.

İntihal / Plagiarism: Bu makale, en az iki hakem tarafından incelendi ve intihal içermediği teyit edildi. / This article has been reviewed by at least two referees and checked via a plagiarism detector.

Abstract

This paper studies the news images of Syrian women refugees and the representational practices employed in them to question how these portraying practices position women refugees, and how they actually act as ways of socially excluding them in the host community. Analysed are the newspaper photographs of Syrian women refugees published in top-selling four Turkish newspapers in 2015. Using a content analysis fed by visual analysis, the ways of visually portraying women refugees is studied by investigating the representational elements and practices in the images, which are subject, theme, camera distance, camera angle and location. The findings reveal that Syrian women refugees are underrepresented and in the rare cases of their appearance, the way they are portrayed position them as distant, passive and depersonalised subjects as part of the masses. The underrepresentation and depersonalisation of women refugees, who are among the vulnerable women group 1) erase the individual life stories and varied lived experiences of women refugees from public imagination and deny the female refugee agency, 2) prevent the emergence of the public talk on the women refugee problems, which in turn 3) prevent the formation of a social understanding and empathy towards women refugees. Thus, it is argued that the ways in which Syrian women refugees are portrayed in the media act as barriers for their social inclusion.

Keywords: Representation, Women Refugees, Syrians, Social Inclusion, Social Exclusion, News Photographs.

KAMU TAHAYYÜLÜNDE KADIN MÜLTECİLERİN TOPLUMSAL DIŞLANMASI: YETERSİZ TEMSİL VE KİŞİLİKSİZLEŞTİRME

Öz

Bu çalışma, Suriyeli kadın mülteci haber görsellerini ve görsellerde kullanılan temsil pratiklerinin kadın mültecileri nasıl konumlandığını, ve bu temsil pratiklerinin kadın mültecilerin toplumsal dışlanmasına yönelik işleyişlerini ele almaktadır. Çalışmada, 2015 yılında en çok okunan dört Türk gazetesinde yayınlanan Suriyeli kadın mülteci fotoğrafları incelenmektedir. İçerik analizi ve görsel analiz yöntemleri kullanılarak görsellerdeki temsil öğeleri - özne, tema, kamera uzaklığı, kamera açısı, yer/meکان - incelenmiş ve kadın mültecilerin görselleştirilme şekilleri ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları, Suriyeli kadın mültecilerin yetersiz temsil edildiğini ve temsil edildikleri nadir anlarda da temsil edilme şekillerinin onları uzak, pasif, ve kitleler arasında kişiliksizleştirilmiş özneler olarak konumlandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Kırılgan kadın grubu içerisinde yer alan kadın mültecilerin yetersiz temsili ve kişiliksizleştirilmesi, 1) kadın mültecilerin bireysel hayat hikayelerini ve çeşitli yaşam deneyimlerini kamunun tahayyülünden silmekte ve kadın mülteci eylemliliğini reddetmekte, 2) kadın mültecilerin karşılaştıkları sorunların kamusal alanda tartışılmasını önlemekte, bunun sonucunda da 3) kadın mültecilere yönelik toplumsal anlayış ve empati oluşumunu engellemektedir. Bu açıdan çalışma, Suriyeli mülteci kadınların temsil şekillerinin toplumsal kabulleri için bir engel teşkil ettiğini savunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Temsil, Kadın Mülteciler, Suriyeliler, Sosyal İçerme, Sosyal Dışlama, Haber Fotoğrafları.

Introduction

One of the problems of humanity today concerns people forcibly displaced due to war and persecution. What is named as the “Syrian refugee crisis” in the international arena began in 2011 with the displacement of Syrians fleeing the civil war in their countries. It was reported that more than 5.6 million Syrians had to leave their country and became refugees, while more than 3.6 million of them (more than 65%) remained in Turkey (UNHCR, 2022). Ensuring the wellbeing and inclusion of such a big group in society and facilitating their social acceptance and inclusion among local communities are fundamental for maintaining social peace in society. Among many other social and political tools such as implementing the right policies and social activities, media representations are also significant elements in the processes of constructing public opinion about refugees which would help towards their social acceptance and inclusion.

Many of the studies on the representation of refugees explore the themes and topics in representations to understand how the refugee problem is framed and discussed (Pickering, 2000; Nyers, 2006; Johnson, 2011; Erdoğan, 2015; Doğanay and Keneş, 2016a; Efe, 2019). Fewer of them focus on how other vulnerable groups within refugee communities, such as women, are further victimised through representation (Doğanay, 2016b; Mert Elmas and Paksoy, 2020; Narlı et al. 2020; Narlı and Özaşçılar, 2021). And much less of them consider the specific representational practices employed in portraying women refugees, which some studies did for refugee groups in general (Malkki, 1997; Mannik, 2012; Bleiker et al., 2013; Greenwood and Thomson, 2019). This article aims to make a contribution to the second and third group of studies, by studying the ways of visualising Syrian women

refugees in Turkish newspaper photographs in 2015, when the number of Syrian refugees peaked in Turkey. Building on a previous research about the photographic representations of Syrian refugees (Pandir, 2019), this analysis focuses on Syrian women in the photographs and specifically investigates which representational practices are employed and how they construct a public image and perception of Syrian women refugees. Finally, the paper discusses in which ways this constructed perception works through the social exclusion of women refugees in the hosting society.

Considering that media representations are tools for initiating social acceptance among and between social groups, it is important that representations should provide support for a positive public perception of refugees. Refugee representations matter not only for the wellbeing of refugees but also for the social peace in the hosting society. Therefore, this study, informed by the literature on refugee studies and the politics of representation, aims to question how media functions positively and/or negatively towards the social inclusion of refugees.

The paper briefly summarises the studies on representations of (women) refugees in the media, introduces the methodology conducted in the analysis, and then discusses the findings about the representation of Syrian women refugees in newspaper photographs. The paper concludes by considering whether media representations facilitate women refugees' inclusion or act as barriers in front of their inclusion in the host community.

1. Framing Refugees in the Media

Identity, including refugee identity, is constructed partly in media representations. Correspondingly, the rise of negative

and positive opinions and attitudes towards asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants in society are also associated with the media coverage of new migrants and refugees (Breen et al., 2006). Literature focusing on the media coverage of migrants and refugees largely repeat that refugees are predominantly represented as victims and/or threats (Breen et al., 2006; Mannik, 2012; Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017; Amores et al., 2019). The differences among these studies appear in their discussion of in which specific ways refugees are portrayed as victims and/or threats.

Breen et al. (2006), for example, reveals several negative and positive frames used in covering asylum seekers and refugees in Irish print media. The negative frames act to “other” these groups and they represent them as 1) illegitimate (not genuine refugees) and threat to the social order, 2) threat to the so-called homogeneity of the nation and local communities, 3) morally and physically contaminating the Irish body, 4) economic threat to the national prosperity, 5) a criminal threat to the safety of the people. On the other hand, the positive frames used in covering asylum seekers and refugees challenge the us and them divide and 1) represent them as contributors to the society, 2) show them support by challenging racist discourses, and 3) show them a humanly interest, by telling individual refugee stories to evoke a sympathetic reaction among the readers.

Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017) reiterate the similar arguments about positive coverage of refugees, in their analysis of visual representation of Syrian refugees in European media during the time of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015. They argue that Syrian refugees are visualised in news images in various forms (associated with survival, empathy and charity, threat, hospitality, and self-reflexivity), to mobilise a moral responsibility towards these vulnerable people among the

public. Nevertheless, they argue that these representations fail to humanise Syrian refugees because they fail “to portray them as human beings with lives that are worth sharing” (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017).

The question of how refugees can be humanised in visual representation is considered in an earlier study by Bleiker et al. (2013). In their study of the refugee photographs in Australian media, they demonstrate that refugees are represented as medium or large groups, through a focus on boats, and from distance. This visual framing and the absence of images that depict individual refugees with recognisable facial features associate refugees not with a humanitarian responsibility but cover them as a threat to national security. Thus, these portrayals dehumanise refugees and do not support a humanitarian political response towards them.

About the representation of women refugees in the media, studies commonly point at the problem of underrepresentation (Amores et al., 2020) and marginalisation of refugee women (Alhayek, 2014), as it happens to be the case for the representation of women in general (Ross and Carter, 2011; Humprecht and Esser, 2017; Global Media Monitoring Project, 2020, p. 5). In their study of the representation of women refugees in five western European countries between 2013 and 2017, Amores et al. (2020) reveal the differences in the portrayals of male and female refugees. They demonstrate that male refugees are represented as a burden or threat to society more than female refugees. This is a negative representation but portrays males as active subjects. Female refugees, on the other hand, are underrepresented in comparison to male refugees, and when they are portrayed in the media, they appear as inoffensive, vulnerable and submissive subjects. The authors conclude that through underrepresentation and through more passive

frames, female refugees are represented in secondary roles, which contributes to the symbolic annihilation of women by the media.

Underrepresentation leads to the marginalisation of women refugees too, as it causes the invisibility of women refugee voices in the media. Alhayek (2014) discusses this issue by studying women refugee portrayals in social media and she makes a case that social media promotes the stereotypical understandings of Syrian refugee women in the global media. Social and the mainstream global media marginalise Syrian refugee women's voices by not covering the realities and perspectives of these women, also excluding the voices of the activist groups directly working with them.

Being informed by the aforementioned studies, this study is concerned with the question how Syrian refugee women are represented in Turkish media, and to what extent the representational practices employed in portraying them (de)personalise and (de)humanise them.

2. Methodology

News photographs are commonly perceived by the readers as documenting reality (Bock, 2017). However, more than being records of reality, refugee photographs are the records of how the photographers decide to photograph refugees and how the newspaper editors decide to contextualise the refugee issue. As Berger writes: "Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from infinity of other possible sights ... The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject" (Berger, 1972, p. 10). It is within this perspective that this paper questions how the photographers' decisions on portraying women refugees and the visual elements in the

photographs construct an identity for Syrian women refugees and influence our perception of them.

2.1. Data Set

The paper analyses the news photographs of Syrian woman refugees published in four Turkish newspapers (Hürriyet, Posta, Sabah, and Sözcü) in 2015. The newspapers are chosen because they are the ones with the top circulation figures and they have a greater potential to reach wider audiences and influence the public perception on refugees. The analysed time period, 2015, marks the highest peak of Syrian refugees entering Turkey, after 2014 (Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, 2022). Due to the increased levels of refugee arrivals, the topic was on the country's agenda and the media's attention was on the topic too. Considering the dense refugee representations during this time period, it will provide us with adequate data to analyse refugee women's portrayals. Photographs are selected for the analysis because they are important as they are the first point of information about the subject-matter of the news. Images call attention of the readers to the information shared and make them spend time reading the text (Bock, 2017). In other words, images in general form an understanding of the subject on their own or contribute to the understanding of the news text by acting as a visual information.

For the analysis of women refugee representations, all the photographs accompanying news items about "Syrian(s)", "Syrian refugee(s)" and "Syrian asylum seeker(s)" are collected and analysed. The total number of these photographs is 882. The number of photographs that portray only women refugees are less than this number, however all the 882 refugee photographs are investigated to be able to

make comparisons between the portrayals of women refugees and other refugee actors.

The research questions for this paper are formulated as: Who are the main subjects/actors in Syrian refugee photographs? How are Syrian women refugees represented? Around which themes and subjects-matters are they represented? Which representational practices are used to (de)personalise and (de)humanise them? What possible effects do the representations have for the construction of Syrian women refugee identity and their social inclusion?

2.2. Method of Analysis

The content of each photograph is examined using a content analysis method described by Philip Bell (2001) and a visual analysis inspired by Bleiker et al. (2013). The latter has been particularly informing about the reading of the representational practices such as the use of camera angle, positioning the subject in the visual and their effect for the people represented in the visual.

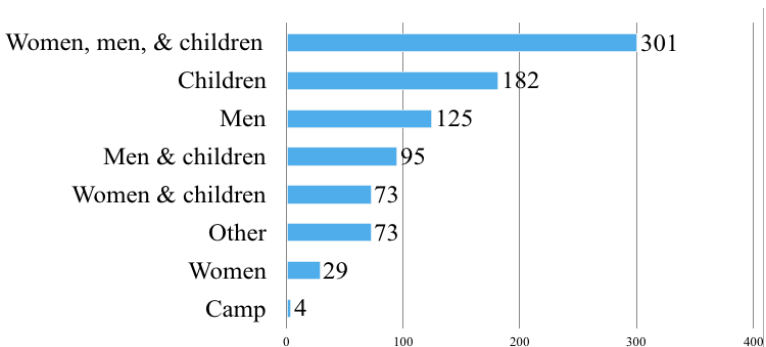
For the content analysis, elements and features that would be examined in the photographs to be able to answer the research questions are decided. The representational elements that are surveyed in this paper are subjects/actors, themes and topics, the number of people in the photograph, camera distance, camera angle, and location. Then, on an MS Excel sheet, a coding table is prepared and these elements are added on the table as coding categories. The photographs are surveyed searching the values of these elements and they are coded on the coding table. The coding of the elements are then counted and evaluated to interpret the meanings and perceptions they produce about the represented subjects.

3. Findings

3.1. Who Are Represented and Made Visible in the Photographs, Around Which Themes?

One of the main questions asked to the analysed 882 photographs concerns the main subjects represented in the photographs. The consideration of who appears the most in the visuals reveals who is made visible or invisible in representation and whose problems are covered the most. It is seen that the main subjects in the photographs are refugee children. The total number of photographs in which children are photographed alone (n: 182, 20.63%), with men (n: 95, 10.77%) or with women (n: 73, 8.27%) is 350 (39.68%). After children, the mixed group photographs which feature women, men and children together take the second place (n: 301, 34.12%). The importance of these group photographs is that they represent refugees as a general category, without focusing on the gender or age specific experiences, circumstances or problems of refugees. The third most represented subjects are men. With men-only (n: 125, 14.17%) and men-with-children (n: 95, 10.77%) photographs, men appear in 220 (24,94%) photographs (Table 1).

Table 1: Subjects in Syrian refugee photographs



Refugee women are underrepresented in the photographs, in comparison to children and men. The total number of photographs which feature only women refugees is 29 (3.28%). In 73 photographs women are seen with children (8.27%). Refugee men's photographs are four times more than refugee women's photographs and women's portrayals increase when they are with children. This indicates that newspapers attribute more space to draw attention to children and men related issues, while women refugees are made invisible by the newspapers, and they are made visible only through their traditional roles as mothers. The underrepresentation of women by the media is not a new finding since media in general underrepresent women; however, it was expected that the vulnerability of the refugees would be represented through children and women, who are commonly represented as "ideal victims" and preferred to portray vulnerable situations by the media (Greer, 2007).

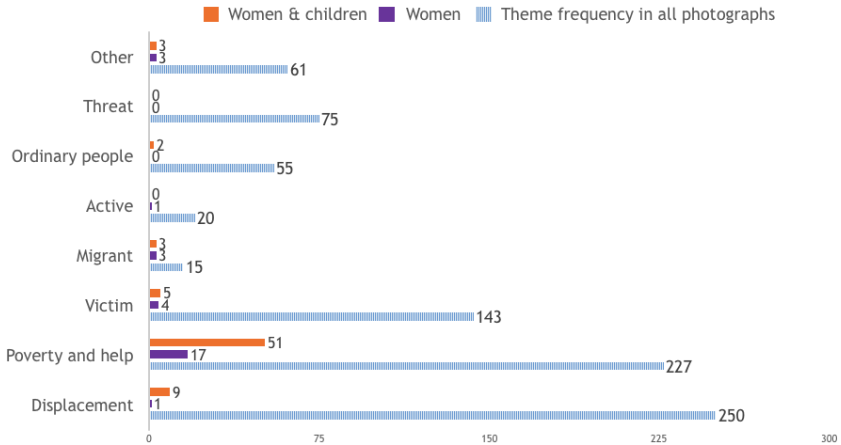
Another question concerns which themes and topics are covered in Syrian refugee photographs and around which themes women are represented the most (Table 2). Since they are mostly portrayed with children, these photographs are included in the analysis too. In the photographs published in 2015, the most recurring theme is displacement (n: 250, 28.24%). 2015 is one of the years with the highest number of Syrians entering Turkey, therefore the majority of the visuals depict Syrians on the move, leaving their living places or crossing the borders in mixed groups of young and old people. Although the majority of displacement photographs portray Syrians in groups (n: 160, 64%), still women are almost invisible in comparison to men and children. There is only one photograph focusing on women and 9 photographs focusing on women with children; while there are 25 photographs

focusing on men and 21 photographs focusing on men with children.

In which photographs do women appear, then? In 29 photographs that feature women as the main subject, almost half of them (n: 15) feature the theme of poverty. The photographs depicting poverty show the refugees in difficult living conditions and the lack of basic needs such as food and shelter. Moreover, in the 73 photographs of women with children, more than half of them represent the theme of poverty (n: 33). In all 882 photographs, the theme of poverty is the second recurring theme (n: 227, 25.73%) after displacement, therefore it is no surprise that women are represented around the theme of poverty.

The third and fourth recurring themes in the analysed photographs of Syrian refugees are found to be victimhood (n: 143, 16.21%) and threat (n: 75, 8.5%). This finding demonstrates that Turkish media promotes the stereotypical refugee image, which is represented in international media. However, the same finding is not relevant for Syrian women refugees. While women refugees are portrayed as poor, they rarely appear as victims or threats. Victimhood is portrayed through the images of refugees who have lost their lives, who are in pain or who have just survived a boat tragedy. In 143 victim photographs, 56 of them feature children, 28 of them feature men with children, and 17 of them feature men alone. Only 4 victim photographs feature women, and 5 of them feature women with children. And among the 75 threat photographs, which feature refugees causing disorder, there is no portrayal of women refugees as a threat (Table 2).

Tablo 2: Syrian women refugees and the themes observed in the photographs



The studies which explore women refugee representations in news texts argue that women refugees are made news when they are dead or killed, or when they are involved in prostitution, rape, or in marriage as a second wife, as well as they appear in relation to poverty (Doğanay and Çoban, 2016b, pp. 274-289). Although this study of the photographs published in 2015 has not observed the appearance of negative representations around prostitution, rape or second wife themes, this may be due to the difference between representations in text and visuals, or it may be an effect of the year of 2015, in which displacement and forced migration had been a more urgent topic at the time.

Not to be stereotyped as a victim and/or threat in photographs may seem to be an example of positive representation. Stereotypical victim portrayals pacify the subjects and reduce them to the image of incapable desperate people in need of our help; while threat portrayals position the refugee as a threat for social order, blame them for crimes, and aim for the

exclusion of the subject from society. However, the absence of Syrian women images in these themes is not for a good reason. The underrepresentation of women in the photographs reach such a great level that even in the stereotypical representations they are not seen. They are even underrepresented in their traditional roles as mothers. As they are made invisible, their coping mechanisms with problems related to poverty, housing, education, cohesion, exclusion and their efforts for themselves and for their families are made invisible too. Women are not seen in an active role, their more positive and productive actions are not represented. In other words, these photographic representations do not represent the female agency and women's capacity to produce actions and results, and they make refugee women invisible in public imagination.

3.2. How Are Syrian Women Refugees Represented in the Photographs?

Investigating the representational practices used in the photographs is important to discuss how they function in constructing an identity and public perception for women refugees. The analysed representational practices concern the number of subjects in the photograph, camera distance, camera angle, and the context/location of the photograph.

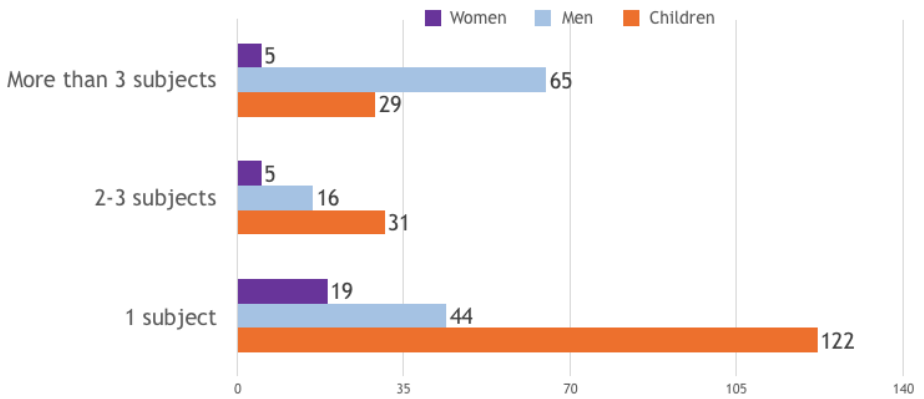
Inspecting the number of represented subjects in the photographs looks into whether the subjects are represented as individuals or as groups. When the photograph represents only one individual or smaller groups of two or three, it becomes possible to portray the individual and facial features that separate people from one another and personalise them (Bleiker et al., 2013). In this way, they are represented not as a homogenous group under a generic term like "Syrians", "refugees", or "women", but through their own personal

characteristics as an individual like “us”. This visual framing associates refugees with a humanitarian challenge. On the other hand, when the photograph represents subjects in medium or large groups, their individual features that separate them from each other become less visible and they are perceived as belonging to the same group of “refugees” or “Syrians”. In this visual framing people are seen as part of masses and it becomes easier to frame them as security threats (Bleiker et al., 2013).

Among 882 photographs published in 2015 in four newspapers, in 70 (7,93%) of them there are no images of refugees. These are the photographs that feature refugees' living places and camps. More than half of the photographs (n: 455, 51.58%) portray Syrian refugees as large groups. 186 (21.08%) of them portray only one refugee, 126 (14.28%) of them portray two refugees, 45 (5.10%) of them portray three refugees. This reveals that more than half of the photographs portray refugees as a mass of people, while 40 percent of them have the potential to personalise and humanise them (Table 3).

Who are those humanised and personalised in the photographs? It is seen that photographs mostly focus on children, featuring them alone (n: 122 out of 186, 65.59%). Men appear alone in 44 photographs (23.65%) and women in 19 photographs (19.21%). This indicates that newspapers pay the least attention to women not only by representing them less frequently, but also not focusing on them while portraying them (Table 3).

Tablo 3: Photos by number of subjects



Personalising and humanising refugees through visual framing is also about the use of the camera angle (distance/positioning) in the photographs (Bell, 2001; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). It is seen that refugees are dominantly photographed from distant (n: 506, 57.36%) and mid-distant camera angles (n: 284, 32.19%). Whereas, the number of close-up shots is only 18 (2.04%) and 11 of these portray children. There are only 2 images of women portrayed from close-up shots. The numbers reveal that refugees, including women, are photographed from distant and mid-distant camera angles. Distant camera angles cannot show the details in the photographs, they do not let us notice the personal features and the differences between refugees, they depersonalise refugees and work to represent them as homogenous groups of people looking similar to each other. On the other hand, close-up shots display the unique facial features and expressions of the refugee, personalise them, and give them agency. It is helpful to discuss the effect of these different representational practices in the photograph (Picture 1).

İŞİD'in kaybetmesi İYİ PYD'nin kazanması KÖTÜ

✓ İŞİD'in geriletilmesi, Türkiye'nin içinde bulunduğu koalisyonla önemli bir mevzi kazandı. Olusturulacak bir tampon bölgeyle Esad rejiminin zayıflatılması da kısa vadeli kazanımlar arasında.

✓ Türkmen ve Arap nüfusun okarılmasıyla bölgenin Kürtleştirilmesi, Suriye'nin toprak bütünlüğünün bozularak bir Kürt devletinin kurulması ise uzun vadeli endişeler arasında.

ANKARA
Deniz ZAVRUK
S ANLURFA'nın Akçakale şehrinin güneyindeki Tel Abyad kerit, Kürtlerin eline geçti. Frensi İŞİD'den temyizlenen PYD De Burkan el Furat grubu, ANL'nin tam desteğiyle sınığın da rında, Türkiye, İŞİD'in yenilgi sine ve koalisyonun bir hedefine daha yaklaşmasına seviniyor. Birlikte Suriye-Irak sınırından işine koyulma dek bir kordonda Kürtler tarafından ele geçilmesinden rahatsız. Zira Ankara, PYD'nin bölgeyi Türkmen ve Araplardan arındırarak Suriye'nin kuşeyinde bir 'kaki gili' bir devlet kurmasından endişeli.

SİMDİNİN KAZANCI

Tel Abyad'da bir hafta duran kaçıp-maklar, siviller Türkiye sınırına dayanınca Ankara'nın da birinci gündem maddesi haline dönüştü. Ankara'da yapılan güvenlik stratejilerinde, yaşanan gelişmelerin masli okunması ve harici tarafa serilemesi evreleri konuşuldu.



Picture 1: Hürriyet, 17.06.2015

In the bigger photograph on the left, a refugee woman and two kids are seen. It is a mid-distant shot, showing half of their bodies and half of the woman's face is not visible because of the load she is carrying on her head. From her outlook and the headline it is realised that she is a refugee. The smaller photograph on the right is a close-up headshot of the same woman. The camera focuses only on her and although it is a smaller photograph, we can see the details of her face, her facial expression and can make a guess about her emotional condition. She is staring directly into the camera, at us, and it is as if she speaks to us with her eyes. We can interpret this as she is saying something about being a woman, being a mother, being a refugee. Several meanings can be produced from her stare, but the most important point is that: she is a subject with a message and she gains agency in this image. In this way, the smaller photo personalises and humanises the subject, giving her power and impact. We can even empathise with her and her condition. This is a positive representation which gives power to the subject and forms a positive relationship

between the represented subject and the viewer (Bell, 2001). However, as mentioned above, in the whole analysed data, the number of close-up women photographs is just 2. Women refugees are depersonalised in representations and this is a common tendency in all other refugee photographs.

One last representational element to investigate is the location featured in the photographs. Location concerns the place and context in which the women refugees are depicted and this may tell something about whether they are separated from society in the camps, or shown among people as others (Bell, 2001).

It was not able to identify the location in almost 30 percent of all the photographs (n:242, 27.43%). And the majority of the photographs are taken at the borders (n: 358, 40.58%). These are the images that depict refugees as they are walking towards the borders or crossing the borders/sea or the images that picture the borders only. Since displacement is the most featured theme in the photographs, it is no surprise that borders are the main featured location in them. However, featuring borders in refugee representations produce some meanings too. Borders separate nations, people and places. Depicting refugees at the borders signifies them as foreigners, as outsiders and highlights their difference. Although refugee camps appear at a lesser frequency (n:36, 4.08%), they produce a similar meaning to the borders. Camps are temporary accommodation places for refugees, but they are also the places that symbolically and physically separate, distance and exclude refugees from “us”/society. Whereas, portraying refugees in the city (n: 153, 17.34%) and at their living places like home (n: 93, 10.54%) is a more positive practice which brings refugees closer to the common social life, and position them in the same context with us, depicting them more like ordinary people. However, how they are portrayed

in the city is also important. In some of these images refugees are seen sleeping in the street or in public spaces like parks or mosques. Such portrayals in the city position them as disrupting the social order and a problem for the common social life.

Speaking about where Syrian women refugees are photographed the most is difficult due to their overall low appearance (n: 29). The frequency results in no particular location becoming more meaningful than the other. The most featured locations are the city (n: 7, 24.13%), camp (n: 5, 17.24%) and border (n: 4, 13.79%). When the images of women with children are added (n: 102), only slight differences emerge: City (n: 20, 19.60%), border (n: 19, 18.62%), camp (n: 15, 14.70%), home (n: 6, 5.88%) and n/a (42, 41.17%). Overall, women refugees are mostly portrayed at the borders and in camps (33.32%), sharing different social places and spaces with us, which constructs them as a different and separate social group from us.

Conclusion

While studying the media representation of Syrian women refugees, the analysis considered the photographs of women with the overall Syrian refugee photographs, in order to provide a comparative framework. However, the paper will be concluded focusing on Syrian women refugees.

The two main conclusions drawn from the analysis above point at the underrepresentation and depersonalisation of Syrian women refugees in the images. Regarding the first argument, it must be noted that a visual analysis of Syrian women refugee photographs was difficult because of the lack of data. Syrian women find so little space in the newspapers and there is so little data about them that it becomes almost impossible or not meaningful to make comments about the

way they are portrayed. Nevertheless, this is the most important finding about their representation: they are underrepresented, and almost invisible in the newspapers.

When they are portrayed, Syrian women refugees appear the most in association with the theme of poverty, to represent the deprivation of the refugee. There was no portrayal of Syrian women refugees as threats. This finding fits with the previous studies (Amores et al., 2020) and it seems to be a positive finding initially. However, the absence of portrayals of Syrian women as threats is also linked to their underrepresentation. Their invisibility reaches such a great level that Syrian women are not portrayed even in stereotypical refugee images.

The invisibility of women refugees in the media is an important problem because as they are made invisible, all the other stories about them are also made invisible to the public. Stories such as their coping mechanisms with daily problems, their positive roles in building new lives for themselves and for their families, the efforts they make for cohesion and integration, and other individual stories which may require the public's attention and so on. Making their actions and survival skills invisible in the media means erasing them from the public imagination. This is an act of erasing the female refugee agency and their productive roles in public space, which constructs the refugee women as passive and submissive. When the stories and perspectives of the refugee women are not told, opportunities to raise awareness and sympathies for their conditions among the public are also erased. Therefore, their invisibility in the media acts as a barrier in front of their social inclusion.

Considering the second conclusion drawn from the findings, analysing the practices of representing Syrian women (also

Syrian refugees) has revealed that Syrian women refugees are distantly portrayed, within large groups of refugees, not as individuals. This representation practice encourages to perceive them as a generic group such as “refugees” or “Syrians” and prevents the personalisation and humanisation of Syrian women refugees. It fails to portray them, their lives and their struggles as worthy just like any other human being. Therefore, depersonalisation also works as a barrier for their social acceptance, affecting their inclusion negatively.

Overall, studying the representational practices applied in Syrian women refugee photographs, this paper discusses that the choices made in photographing refugees portray these people in ways which do not encourage us to establish an identification, empathy or a relationship with the represented people. On the contrary, the photographs portray refugees as outsiders with specific needs and highlight their difference from “us”, positing them as an outgroup or Other. To facilitate the social acceptance and inclusion of refugees, it is necessary to increase the ethical and positive representation of this vulnerable group which would raise an awareness about their conditions and their stories. Such an awareness is crucial not only for the wellbeing of the refugees but also for maintaining social understanding and social peace among groups in society.

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