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STEREOTYPING, VICTIMIZATION AND DEPOLITICIZATION IN THE REPRESENTATIONS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES¹

*Müzeyyen PANDIR**

Abstract

This paper studies the representational constructions of the image of Syrian refugee in newspaper photographs and discusses the processes in which the Syrian refugee is victimized, stereotyped and depoliticized through representation. It analyses Syrian refugee photographs published between 2011 and 2015 in five Turkish newspapers. Working within visual sociological and constructivist perspectives, and synthesizing content and visual analyses, the study first dwells upon the universal "ideal victim" profile mentioned in victimology studies, then reveals that the image of Syrian refugee is predominantly constructed as "victim" in the analyzed newspaper photographs. The study elaborates that refugees' victimhood is represented through different themes of suffering, which appear around the themes of poverty, displacement, the need, and loss and pain. Then the victimization of the refugee is problematized and discussed under two main arguments. The first argument discusses that the prevalence of the victim discourse in Syrian refugee photographs is achieved through the technique of stereotyping, which reproduces the universal image of the refugee as weak and vulnerable, regardless of time and context. The second argument discusses that victimization works as a device for depoliticization, which imagines the refugee only as weak and powerless rather than a subject with political agency who produces action and results. The paper concludes that victimization and depoliticization produce a disparity between the lived experiences of the refugee (who has survived a war) and the representations of the refugee (who is a powerless war victim).

Keywords: *Refugees, Representation, Photographs, Stereotyping, Victimization.*

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* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Işık Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Bölümü, ORCID: 0000-0003-1590-4689, muzeyyen.pandir@isikun.edu.tr

SURİYELİ MÜLTECİ TEMSİLLERİNDE STEREOTİPLEŞTİRME, MAĞDURLAŞTIRMA VE DEPOLİTİZE ETME²

Öz

Bu çalışma, gazete fotoğraflarında Suriyeli mülteci imgesinin temsil üzerinden inşasını sorgulamaktadır ve Suriyeli mülteciyi mağdurlaştırma, stereotipleştirme ve depolitize etme süreçlerini tartışmaktadır. İncelemeye, 2011 ve 2015 yılları arasında beş ulusal gazetede yayınlanmış Suriyeli mülteci fotoğrafları dâhil edilmiştir. Görsel sosyoloji ve inşacılık yaklaşımları içerisinde, içerik analizi ve görsel analizi birleştiren çalışma, önce viktomoloji çalışmalarındaki “ideal mağdur” profilinden bahsetmekte, sonra da incelenen fotoğraflarda Suriyeli mülteci imgesinin baskın bir şekilde “mağdur” olarak inşa edilme şekillerini ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca mülteci mağduriyetinin acı çekme ile alakalı çeşitli temalar üzerinden temsil edildiğini saptamıştır. Bu temsil temaları yoksulluk, yerinden edilmişlik, yardım, acı ve kayıp olarak belirlenmiştir. Çalışma daha sonra mültecinin mağdurlaştırılmasını iki argüman altında sorunsallaştırmakta ve tartışmaktadır. İlki, Suriyeli mülteci temsillerinde mağduriyet söyleminin hâkimiyetinin stereotipleştirme tekniği ile sağlandığını, böylece zayıf ve güçsüz mülteci imgesinin zamandan ve mekândan kopuk bir şekilde yeniden üretildiğini açıklamaktadır. İkinci tartışma ise mağdurlaştırmanın mülteciyi depolitize ettiğine değinmektedir, yani mağdurlaştırma ile mültecinin siyasi eylem ve sonuç üretme yetisinden yoksun zayıf ve güçsüz bir subje olarak tasavvur edilmesini eleştirmektedir. Sonuç olarak, mağduriyet ve depolitizasyon, yaşanmış mülteci deneyimleri ile (hayatta kalmayı başarmış mülteci), mülteci temsilleri (güçsüz savaş mağduru) arasında tutarsızlık yaratmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mülteciler, Temsil, Fotoğraflar, Stereotipleştirme, Mağdurlaştırma.

INTRODUCTION

In the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention refugee is defined as someone who is outside their country of nationality and is unable to return their country due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The refugee in this definition is at the same time a victim, for victim is someone who suffers from direct or indirect harm. Strobl (2004) proposes a classification of victimization. Thinking of this classification along with the experiences of Syrian refugees, Syrian refugees can be classified as victim for they i) suffer from direct harm and damage caused by war and conflict (direct victimization) and ii) suffer from the effects of conflict, displacement, loss of loved ones or loss of property even if they have not been the target of a direct offence (indirect victimization).

Such classifications of victimhood are sensible as well as they are social constructs. The status of victimhood is a social construct because public perceptions

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on who is a victim are influenced by societal and cultural norms. Those who endorse dominant cultural values and lifestyles receive sympathy from public more easily, in comparison to the groups who oppose them. Secondly, ideas about who is a victim are open to manipulations by the media, since how the media represent people and their point of view influence our perceptions of them. Therefore, the status of victim is not guaranteed for every “genuine victim”, but it depends on several factors.

Being perceived as victim is important for those people who need physical and emotional support from public and (non)governmental institutions. The studies looking at refugee representations in general (Johnson, 2011) and in the context of Syrian refugees in Turkish press (Efe et al. 2018; Erdoğan, 2015) note that representations of refugees as helpless people are used to raise public support for the humanitarian actions and governmental policies concerning refugees. On the other hand, as it will be discussed in this paper, portraying refugees solely as victims of war and conflict is problematical for this signifies refugees as powerless people and denies their capacity for human agency. Refugees are not only victims but they are people who have taken actions to survive conflicts and have succeeded in reaching safer places. In this respect, media discourses and depictions of refugees as victims have double actions: while they work to justify the support to refugees, they disregard these people’s real capacity to act and produce results for themselves.

This study does not perceive Syrian refugees as victims; rather, by examining Syrian refugee photographs, it explores the specific ways in which the refugee identity is constructed as victim in visual representation. It examines the press photographs in the most popular national newspapers in Turkey between the years 2011-2015. The methodologies adopted combine a content analysis approach with an interpretative visual analysis examining a number of themes in the photographs. The paper has four sections. The first section considers the question who is a victim and then focuses on the media representations of refugees, also drawing on the role of representation in constructing identity. The second section explains the method of analysis conducted in analyzing the contents of Syrian refugee photographs. The third section reveals the findings of the research regarding the themes in the press photographs of Syrian refugees, focusing mainly on the theme of suffering / victimhood, as this is observed to be the prevalent theme in the overall data. Finally, the paper draws some conclusions in relation to the stereotyping, victimizing and depoliticizing in the representation of Syrian refugees.

REPRESENTING THE “IDEAL VICTIM” AND REFUGEES

In the academic literature on refugees and asylum seekers it is commonly noted that refugees and asylum seekers are portrayed as victims in textual and visual representations (Johnson, 2011; Malkki, 1996; Mannik, 2012). Victimhood is actually a legal status and its criteria are defined in international and national laws. However, meeting these criteria do not always guarantee a public recognition of the victim status. In public perception, some victims attract more sympathy and

attention. Greer (2007: 22) writes that in covering crimes, natural disasters and events, media attention tend to focus on the stories of the “ideal victims” who receive more public sympathy, whereas the stories of “other” victims receive little media attention and coverage. Who is an ideal victim then?

Studies in victimology (Greer, 2007; Strobl, 2004) identifies an “ideal victim” profile. Ideal victim is someone who is perceived as weak, vulnerable, defenseless and helpless in the eyes of the public and easily receives sympathy and compassion when hit by a crime or a misfortune (Greer, 2007: 22). Women, children and elderly people are mostly associated with these characteristics, thus they have better chances of being recognized as victim when they suffer from a direct or indirect harm. On the other hand, other social groups (young men) and people from marginalized social positions (the homeless, drug users and prostitutes) may have difficulties achieving the victim status and receiving societal sympathy even when they are genuine victims (Fattah, 2003, cited in Strobl 2004).

The above arguments suggest that to be socially recognized as victim in the eyes of the public, i) self-presentation (as weak, helpless and sad), and ii) social factors such as gender (women) and age (children and elderly people) are important features. Strobl (2004) perceives self-presentation as a more important factor and explains this point through the example that public tends to show more sympathy to a helpless and sad victim than an angry victim. Positive self-presentation of a victim may also be reinforced through traditional gender roles such as being a mother and a housewife because these roles please the societal norms, thus facilitate the recognition of the victim status.

Victimhood is also an important theme in the context of talks on refugees. Refugees are a group universally represented and perceived as victims. Mannik (2012) writes that refugees are represented as weak and vulnerable victims in need of help, as well as threats for society. Malkki (1996) elaborates that refugees are commonly portrayed as victims, but they are also *expected* to look like victims via torn clothes and visible wounds in their bodies, to be recognized as legitimate victims in the eyes of the public. They are not recognized as “real refugees” when they are not seen visually suffering. The repetition of such characteristics in representation reinforces the preferred characteristics of the refugee in public perception and this consequently essentializes the refugee as victim – they are associated with torn clothes and desperate looks. This is also an effect of stereotyping refugees. Stereotyping is a representational practice through which a social group is represented via a few generalized characteristics, without the recognition of individual differences within the group members (Schaefer, 2012: 239). In this respect, stereotypical representations of refugees reproduce the images of refugees as victims, regardless of time and place, reducing the refugee image to the image of victim.

Another effect of the stereotypical media images is that they do not establish information about the conditions which force people to migrate, but they produce

dehistoricized images of people (Mannik, 2012). Dehistoricized images do not reflect the particular conditions that differentiate people or groups from another; rather, they produce typical, standardized, ahistorical representations which occur similarly throughout times. In this way, dehistoricizing maintains the prevalence of some discourses over others. In the case of refugees, stereotyping and dehistoricizing maintain the dominance of victim discourse in representations.

Looking at the academic studies on refugees in Turkey, we can say that the number of these studies have been in rise particularly with the rising numbers of Syrian refugees in the country. Various studies develop different focal points. Earlier studies pointed at the problems and confusions regarding the use of the political terms such as immigrant, refugee, asylum and illegal in the context of Syrian refugee crisis (Kolukırık, 2009; Demir & Erdal, 2010; Çakır, 2013). Other studies which share similar concerns with this paper focus on the form of representations of Syrian refugees in the national and local newspaper contents. Although these studies vary in terms of the scope and duration of the analyses they conduct, there are some common arguments and suggestions that emerge out of them. One of those arguments is that the form of representing Syrian refugees in Turkish newspapers is little less different than the international press. That is because these studies suggest that Syrian refugee images in Turkish newspapers have a dual and ambivalent nature; refugees are either represented within the theme of victim as poor people in need of help or within the theme of threat as people bringing in problems (Erdoğan, 2015; Sunata & Yıldız, 2018). Yet the studies also make a distinction that the portrayals of Syrian refugees as victim are overwhelmingly higher than their portrayals as threat (Doğanay & Keneş, 2016; Erdoğan, 2015). It is also argued that the newspapers' positive or negative attitudes toward refugees are influenced by their political and ideological positions (Sunata & Yıldız, 2018; Efe, 2015; Erdoğan, 2015; Yaylacı & Karakuş, 2015). These studies commonly suggest that the newspapers with a critical position towards the government use the Syrian refugee issue as an instrument to criticize government policies, approaching the issue as an economic or security problem, whereas newspapers supporting the government and its policies discuss the refugee issue within a humanist and emotional discourse and so justify government's inclusive policies towards refugees. The problem about dehistoricizing migrants/refugees in media images which Mannik (2012) pointed at is also repeated for the case of Turkish media. Çakır (2013) argues that media discussions on refugees focus on the problems caused by refugee crisis, without considering the economic, political and historical conditions causing it. This approach, which disregards the historical and particular conditions of Syrian refugees, is one of the reasons why and how Turkish newspapers produce the similar discourses noted for the international press around the discussions and representations of Syrian refugees.

The aforementioned studies explore Syrian refugee representations in news texts and mainly deal with the use of language. This paper aims to make a contribution to the literature by exploring the photographic representations of Syrian

refugees in Turkish newspapers and make a case about the possible consequences of visual refugee representations for the people they represent.

Another point that needs to be raised at this moment concerns the question why representations of refugees matter. Representation is a key component in construction of identity and public perception. Thinking in terms of the process of socialization (through which we learn about the society and the world we live in), media is an important actor that forms our understandings of people and the social world we live in. From the perspective of constructivist studies, meaning is constructed in discourse and representation (Hall, 1997). Media representations (textual and visual) play an influential part in constructing social identities and the meanings attributed to them. However, previous works in media studies tell us that representations of groups and the construction of social identities and the meanings they produce are not neutral or objective but political; they are formed within power relations in society and they serve the needs of the interest groups (Hall, 1992; Van Dijk 1991). According to this, the meanings and values attributed to groups in representations construct the social reality about them and influence if these groups are perceived negatively or positively in society (Van Dijk, 1991: 226). In this way, the meanings in representations take part in forming and maintaining power relations (such as forming the positions of domination-subordination, superiority-inferiority) between groups (men-women, white-black, west-east, us-them). Therefore, as Hall (1992: 318) states, representations matter because they produce consequences for the people they represent and for the people who produce them.

When the represented people are vulnerable groups like refugees and asylum seekers, the way they are represented becomes even more important as it influences how society engages with them (Johnson, 2011). As mentioned above, the images of refugees as victim have an effect of reinforcing public support and humanitarian actions towards them; but when the images show refugees as troublemakers and spongers they reinforce prejudices and hatred toward them. Negative representations also increase the risk of being denied a socially accepted victim status (Strobl, 2004).

Visual representations (moving images and photographs) are particularly important in today's visually dominated modern societies. Stories are selected and produced as media events on the basis of their visual effectiveness. News about victims not only feature the image of the victim, but also present the sufferings of the surviving family members or the loved ones to increase the dramatic effect of the story. In this way, stories of the victims are turned into "appealing visual products" to seem attractive to media readers and viewers (Chermak 1995 in Greer, 2007: 29). The photograph of the Syrian baby Aylan Kurdi is a good example to consider how the whole story of Syrian refugees was communicated to the world through one photograph of an "ideal victim". The effect of the image of Aylan's dead body lying on the beach was so powerful that it received intense media attention throughout the world and was reproduced endless times in various media channels. Western politicians included Aylan's story in their speeches, considered the conditions of

Syrian refugees and introduced actions and policies to help them (although the effectiveness and duration of these policies are disputable). The photograph served beyond Aylan's story and became an iconic image of Syrian refugee crisis.

The powerful effects of Aylan's photograph show that visual representations are important and instrumental in i) making us understand social reality in certain ways (is the refugee crisis a humanitarian or a security issue?), ii) generating public perceptions of people (are refugees victims or threats?), and iii) mobilizing collective and political actions toward them (should we help them or export them?). Within this constructivist perspective, this study explores the visual representations of Syrian refugees, examines the emergence of a number of themes and meanings that have been prevalent in constructing the image of Syrian refugee as victim in press photography.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 2172 Syrian refugee photographs are collected from the top-selling five Turkish newspapers (Hürriyet, Sabah, Posta, Sözcü, and Zaman). All photographs were published during March 2011 and December 2015. This is the time period covering the start of the war in Syria and the start of the research project. The collected and analyzed photographs are the ones accompanying news items about "Syrian refugees" and "Syrian asylum seekers". The research questions for this paper are formulated as: 1) What are the emerging themes and topics in representing Syrian refugees as victim? 2) What is the profile of the ideal victim in the examined photographs?

Representations are cultural and political constructions, which are formed in a particular historical context. While being informed that the news on Syrian refugees are formed by the newspapers' political positions, this study is set to explore the popular discourse on the issue, thus decided to study the images of Syrian refugees in the most circulated five newspapers, for the reason that these representations reach wider audiences. Therefore, the criteria in selecting the newspapers had been their circulation figures, to identify the most frequently produced images and meanings in Syrian refugee photographs. Nevertheless it may be useful to briefly note the political positions of the newspapers during the studied time period. Hürriyet and Posta belonged to Doğan Group, who held critical positions to the Justice and Development Party (JDP) and to the government from a secularist and Kemalist position during 2011 and 2015; however it is known that the group's critical position could not remain stable as it needed to improve its relationship with the government when it had troubles with paying the high tax loan that it was penalized with in 2009. Similarly Zaman's position shifted in time too; it supported the JDP and the government from an Islamist position up until 2014 before the Gülen Group broke up with the JDP, then it took a critical position to the government still holding an Islamist position. Sözcü kept a critical stance to the government and its policies from a Kemalist and nationalist perspective, while Sabah

openly supported the government and JDP. It is seen that the positions of the newspapers shift according to the changing conditions and needs. Nevertheless we can generalize that during 2011-2015 *Sözcü* was the only newspaper which held a continuous critical position to the government.

Considering this unbalanced and changing political positions included in the data set, this study sets its focus as examining the most commonly appearing themes in Syrian refugee photographs in these most circulated Turkish newspapers. To achieve these aims, the study conducts content analysis as described by Philip Bell (2001) and interprets the contents of the photographs following Roland Barthes' (1980) approach to study images. Barthes' semiotic approach uses some key concepts such as sign, signifier, signified and myth. According to this, each photograph examined in this paper is a "sign" that communicates a meaning. For Barthes (1980), any sign is composed of a form and a meaning. He calls the form a "signifier" that is what we see in the photograph, and "signified" is the meaning or the idea that is associated with this form. Barthes explained that the simple and the obvious meaning which the signifier and the signified produce together is "denotation" (for example, identifying in an image that the little person with torn clothes is a child refugee). But Barthes added that signs have wider, cultural meanings which he called "connotation". Connotative meaning is interpreted by considering the sign within the context of values, ideas and beliefs of the culture and also the historical and social conditions in which it is produced (for example, interpreting that the use of the image of a child refugee produces the connotations of innocence and victimization). Finally, Barthes argued that the combination of denotation and connotation produces "myth", which is the dominant ideologies of the time and works to defend the interests of the groups in power (for example, an image of a Syrian child refugee in difficult living conditions may work to produce the myth that the society has a responsibility to open the door to those innocent victims who fled Syrian war, which is an idea that supports the government policy towards Syria refugees). This study is informed by these concepts and approach while interpreting the contents and themes of the refugee photographs.

For the content analysis Bell's (2001) instructions are followed. First the representational elements to be examined in the photographs are identified as coding categories (variables) and their contents (values) are coded on a coding table, which was prepared on MS Excel spreadsheet. For instance, to code the themes featured in the images of Syrian refugees, theme is indicated as a coding category and during the analysis "poverty", "displacement", "humanitarian aid" etc. are found to be their values. These coding categories and values are initially specified with reference to the literatures on conducting content analysis (Bell, 2001; Parry, 2010) and refugee representations (Bleiker et al. 2013; Donald, 2011; Mannik, 2012). They are first tried on a preliminary analysis, then revised and expanded according to the observed findings. Once the coding of each image is completed, the codings are counted in Excel spreadsheet and frequency counts of each category are revealed.

The coding schema investigated various categories in the photographs. Due to the purpose of this paper, here the findings concerning the categories of themes, topics (subject-matters), subjects, and emotions will be revealed, but particularly focusing on the themes that portray refugees as victims because these photographs make the majority of all the data. Exploring themes and topics in refugee photographs is important as they determine the general meanings, values and feelings produced around the image of the refugee. The findings are explained in the following section.

REPRESENTING SYRIAN REFUGEES AS “VICTIM”: THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF SUFFERING

Themes and Subject-Matters

The findings below reveal how victimhood and suffering are represented in the photographs of Syrian refugees. In this paper victim is defined as someone who suffers from direct or indirect victimization (Strobl, 2004). Direct victimization refers to direct forms of harm, damage and suffering caused by war and conflict. Indirect victimization covers suffering from the effects of conflict, displacement, loss of loved ones, or loss of property.

One of the most striking findings in Syrian refugee photographs is the focus on refugees' suffering and victimhood. It is observed that while photographs seem to represent diverse experiences of refugees around a variety of themes, the majority of these are experiences of suffering caused by war and displacement. This means that these are actually different manifestations of suffering and victimhood experienced by refugees. Therefore, the content analysis reveals that Syrian refugees are predominantly represented as victim, around the theme of suffering or victimhood. On the other hand, suffering is such a general theme that it is manifested through other themes. According to this, refugees are represented as victim through the themes of poverty (n: 592, 27%), displacement (n: 444, 21%), the need (or humanitarian aid) (n: 245, 11%) and loss and pain (n: 239, 11%).

Each of these themes can be considered as a general theme on their own. The reason that I consider them as a sub-theme under the general theme of suffering is that each of them depict different forms of pain and suffering under different conditions. For instance, when it is poverty or the movement of displaced people seen in the visual, these are actually the depictions of refugees suffering from the difficult conditions caused by the war in Syria. Therefore, suffering is accepted as a recurring general theme in the photographs and each sub-theme comprises representations of different forms of suffering experienced by Syrian refugees.

The photographs of poverty, displacement, and the need depict the difficult refugee experiences caused by war and displacement, thus they are the depictions of indirect victimization. The photographs portraying loss and pain, on the other hand, include depictions of dead bodies and the refugees mourning for their losses. These

are the depictions of direct victimization. Altogether, the photographs of (direct and indirect) suffering make the 70 percent of all the examined photographs in the data; this is 1520 photographs out of 2172. This shows that suffering or victimhood is the prevalent theme in Syrian refugee photographs (see Table 1).

Table 1: The Themes on Suffering (Victimhood) in the Photographs of Syrian Refugees

Themes on suffering	No. of photographs	% of photographs
Poverty	592	27%
Displacement	444	21%
The need	245	11%
Loss and pain	239	11%
Total	1520 (out of 2172)	70%

The most frequently represented cause of suffering in the whole data is poverty (27%, n: 592). The photographs of poverty feature the main topics of women and children (n: 284) and the difficult living conditions (n: 272). These groups of photographs show refugees living in camps, in deteriorated places, or waiting despairingly with children in public places (streets, parks, mosques). These states of poverty and deprivation are frequently represented through images of children (n: 363). It is not surprising that being innocent subjects, children are chosen as the ideal victims to depict the tragic consequences of war and displacement (see image 1).

Image 1: A Photograph of Suffering depicting Poverty.



Source: Zaman, 24.08.2013.

The second most represented cause of suffering is displacement (21%, n: 444), which portrays the movements of refugees from one place to another. In this group of photographs there are the images of young and old Syrians fleeing to Europe by boat (n: 196) or walking to the borders carrying their possessions (n: 194). The subjects in these photographs are the crowds of people who had to abandon their homes and take a difficult voyage to save their lives. In this respect, these photographs of displacement depict the indirect victimization of the refugee (see image 2). However, they have an ambivalent feature too. The images of groups of people crossing the borders also signify refugees as “floods” of foreign and “illegal” people. The naming “illegal refugee” appears the most under this theme; nevertheless the frequency is low. In all the data of 2172 images, the naming illegal refugee appears for 49 times in photo captions and 32 of them appear under the theme of displacement (see image 3). Although illegality is a common theme in the media discourses of refugees and asylum seekers (Horsiti, 2007; Matthews & Brown, 2012; O’Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007), the Turkish newspapers’ support to the government’s open-door policy prevents the frequent use of the negative term illegal refugee.

Image 2: A Photograph of Suffering depicting Displacement



Source: Sabah, 20.09.2014.

Image 3: A Photograph of Suffering depicting Displacement, Using the Naming “Illegals” in the Caption



Source: Sözcü, 02.04.2013

The third most represented condition in the photographs of Syrian refugees is the need (or, humanitarian aid), which portrays the international and national organizations' help actions to the refugees (11%, n: 245). Refugees are photographed as receiving aid in the camps or in settlement places (n: 209) or having received aid (n: 36). As these photographs portray the humanitarian help actions to the refugees, they highlight refugees' vulnerability and weakness, and represent them as people in need. The most represented subjects here are once again Syrian children (47%), photographed alone or with adults. In a significant part of these photographs other represented subjects are state actors, humanitarian organizations and celebrities visiting the refugee camps. A representational aspect noted in this theme but not in others is that refugees receiving aid in the camps are seen with happy or positive facial expressions (33%). This is the highest ratio of positive facial expression among all the other themes. Through these representations the intended connotation is that social and political authorities are fulfilling their social responsibilities and refugees are made content with these humanitarian aids. Therefore, in the images of the need, the main actors are political and social authorities, whereas refugees are represented as a social group subjected to social benevolence and responsibility (see image 4).

Image 4: A Photograph of Suffering depicting the Need



Source: Hürriyet, 23.10.2011

The fourth most represented condition portrays the direct victimization that refugees suffer from. In these photographs we see the “loss and pain” that the refugee experiences (11%, n: 239), sharing almost the same frequency of appearance with the theme of the need. The main characteristic of the images under the theme of loss and pain is that they depict the actual instances of victimization and tragedies. The iconic photograph of Aylan baby is an example to this group of photographs. The main topics here are pain and sorrow, which are observed through refugees’ facial expressions of pain, crying and fear (n: 82); the second topic is death (n: 61) which is depicted through the images of boat casualties; the third topic is refugees exposed to violence (n: 49); and the fourth topic is survivors of disasters (n: 47). These photographs of direct victimization altogether document the sufferings, struggles, despair, survival and death of Syrian refugees. Even if they have survived a disaster, refugees appear in a position of victim because of their losses or for having to experience a traumatic disaster.

Overall, the photographs of suffering that depict poverty, displacement, need, and loss and pain may be accepted as positive and inclusionary representations of refugees for the reason that they make the conditions, experiences and stories of the refugee visible to the public and policy makers. In other words, they are the visual records of refugees’ existence in inhuman conditions. By making the situations of the refugee visible, they raise in the viewer a sense of sympathy and responsibility towards refugees, in this way they provide justifications for the humanitarian aid

targeting these people. But they also have negative consequences for the refugee identity which will be discussed in the concluding part.

Subjects and Emotions

One of the striking features of the photographs of suffering is that they focus on children to depict the consequences of war and displacement. Children are the most frequently represented subjects in the photographs of suffering. They are featured with no other actor in 23 per cent (n: 345) of these photographs. Including the photographs in which they are featured with women (n: 229) and with men (n: 111), children appear in 45 per cent (n: 685) of the photographs of suffering. There are other mixed photographs in which men, women and children are seen altogether in groups (n: 484), but in 685 photographs children are featured in the foreground (see Table 2).

Table 2. The Syrian Subjects in the Photographs of Suffering

Subjects in photographs	No. of photographs	% of photographs
Mixed	484	32
Children	345	23
Children and women	229	15
Men	142	9
Children and men	111	7
N/A	92	6
Women	64	4
Camp alone	53	4

The finding that children are the most represented subject in the photographs of suffering fits with the profile of the ideal victim identified in the literature on victimology (Strobl, 2004; Greer, 2007). The literature also defines ideal victim as looking sad and vulnerable. In most of the Syrian refugee photographs (29%, n: 439), people's facial expressions cannot be identified because they are photographed from distant camera angles. Where their facial expressions are identifiable, refugees mostly appear showing no particular emotions (25%, n: 381). One reason for remaining expressionless is that a big part of the theme of suffering portrays the conditions of poverty and displacement. In the photographs of poverty people are portrayed in their current conditions looking at the camera without showing any facial expression. In the photographs of displacement they are seen on the move again without the display of any emotion. When refugees are seen expressing an emotion, this emotion is mostly sadness (23%, n: 348). Particularly the images of direct victimization show refugees as miserable people in pain, fitting in the ideal victim profile.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Studying the photographs of Syrian refugees has shown that the figure of the Syrian refugee is predominantly constructed as victim, through representations of suffering, in the examined Turkish newspapers. The photographs portray different conditions of suffering as poverty, displacement, the need, and loss and pain. At first, the collection of these themes seems to indicate a diversity in representation, but actually, what the photographs portray are the direct and indirect types of victimization. These characteristics are defined in the literature on refugees and asylum seekers as the stereotypical characteristics of the refugee identity (Mannik 2012; Malkki, 1996). This shows that the representation of Syrian refugees in Turkish newspapers has a stereotypical and conventional way of capturing refugees.

If we ask why the examined Turkish newspapers prefer to portray images of refugees as victim, we can discuss that for the most part of the period between 2011 and 2015, these newspapers (except *Sözcü*) had relatively close positions to the government for different reasons, as explained above. Their portrayals of Syrian refugees as victims provide legitimate justifications and support for government's open-door policies and humanitarian aid targeting Syrian refugees. In other words, victimizing the refugee becomes a tool for the newspapers to show their support to the government.

However, victimization of the refugee produces some other problematical consequences for Syrian refugees. These will be discussed under two main arguments.

Victimization as a Stereotypical Representation and Its Implications

When the main characteristic of refugees is defined and constructed as suffering, refugees are not seen as "genuine" refugees when they are seen in improved conditions, and the aid expenses to them are criticized, as Mannik (2012) reports in her research. It is for this reason that media representations continue the stereotypical way of imagining and portraying refugees as suffering. Stereotyping essentializes the refugee identity and constructs victimhood as their essential characteristic. As an effect of stereotyping and essentializing, the representations do not reflect diverse experiences, individualities and differences of refugees (for example they do not represent the entrepreneur Syrians) but reduce them to the figure of the weak and vulnerable victim.

The findings of the study also reveal that victimhood is represented the most through children. Being the innocent and vulnerable subjects, children are chosen as the ideal victims to represent the cruel consequences of the war. This means that the victim profile in Syrian refugee photographs (innocent and weak children) fits with the general profile of the ideal victim in victimology studies. An implication of being represented as ideal victim is that children are objectified to represent the conditions in which the suffering occurs. This is also to say that children are instrumentalized to produce a sensational effect and invoke sympathy on the viewer of the photographs. The repetition of the images of Aylan baby in various communication

channels and the reactions it triggered is an example to this instrumentalization. The media and then the public attention that Aylan baby received was due to the dramatic effect of the photograph, rather than attention to the Syrian refugee crisis. The painful story of Aylan was turned into a media spectacle, to increase the number of TV viewers, newspaper readers, and clicks to online news. Once the story was consumed, Aylan baby and the refugee issues were off the media agendas. This is, as Kleinman et al. (1997: xi) put it, the commodification of victimhood. This paper reveals the use of children in similar ways in Syrian refugee photographs.

Victimization Depoliticizes the Refugee

Another effect of victimization of the refugee is that an emotional victim discourse prevents the discussion of rational and political solutions to the problems. For example, the reports of non-governmental organizations (Hayata Destek Derneği, 2016; Sosyal Kültürel Yaşamı Geliştirme Derneği, 2016) write about the various problems of Syrian children in Turkey. The reports document the problems of child workers, child beggars and children not attending school. According to UNICEF (2017), almost 44 per cent of Syrian children at the age of primary school do not take education either because they have to work, or because their families cannot afford the expenses or because they cannot complete school registration for they do not have identification cards. Solutions to such refugee problems require rational and rights-based political discussions. However, these discussions cannot find an adequate space in the newspapers due to the predominance of the victim discourse.

This argument also links to the argument concerning the depoliticization of the Syrian refugee, since it leads to discussing Syrian refugees around the issue of suffering, rather than their political rights. By depoliticization I mean “moving away from the political discussion” (Pandir, 2014: 272). In this case, depoliticization involves producing and highlighting the victim discourse and reducing the refugee debate to their suffering, and pushing back (or preventing) the political discussions on the rights of the refugee. Thus, victimization here works as a device for depoliticization, which prevents the appearance of rights-based discussions about the refugee issue.

Victimization also appears as a device for depoliticization when the refugee is imagined only as weak and vulnerable, rather than a subject with political rights and political agency capable of producing results for oneself and for the lives of the others. As Johnson (2011) puts it, victimization of the refugee “removes political agency from the figure of the refugee by establishing a condition of political voicelessness”. In other words, victimization does not perceive refugees as people who have managed to *survive* war and conflict, but sees them as *victims* of war and conflict. This is important because when refugees are seen only as victim, their human potential to control their lives are denied, their opinions on their conditions are not consulted and respected, and they are seen as passive subjects who need to

be controlled. In such ways, victimization and depoliticization leave refugees in powerless positions.

Consequently, this paper has argued that media representations of the refugee is important because they influence how we imagine refugees and engage with them. This paper has discussed that the processes of victimization and depoliticization of the Syrian refugee produce a disparity between the lived experiences of the refugee (who has survived a war) and the representations of the refugee (who is a powerless victim). A possible consequence of perceiving refugees solely as victim is that this imagination feeds into perceiving them as powerless people whose existence and inclusion in society is left to our benevolence, rather than accepting them as validated legitimate actors with political rights.

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