

Representing Migration: Analysis of Media Portrayals of Syrian Migrant Women in Turkey*

Göçün Temsili: Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Göçmen Kadınların Medya Sunumunun Analizi

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Abstract

The media coverage of women migrants has played an important role in shaping public opinion and governmental policies. This article aims at exploring the media portrayals of Syrian Migrant Women in Turkey. For this purpose, the research data were collected from three Turkish online newspaper websites, Hürriyet, Birgün and Sabah, each of which has different editorial policy in representing migration, during one year period. The findings of quantitative content analysis of the news stories regarding Syrian migrant women would provide an understanding of the gender dimension of migration in Turkey. It concludes that Syrian Migrant Women in Turkey generally are reported in crime news and are framed as victims or perpetrators. However, the newspapers rarely report their hard living conditions.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Göç, Kadın, Haber,
Toplumsal Cinsiyet,
Suriyeli Sığınmacılar.

Öz

Medyada yer alan kadın göçmenlere ilişkin haberler, kamuoyunu ve hükümet politikalarını biçimlendirmede önemli rol oynamaktadır. Bu makale, Suriyeli göçmen kadınların medyadaki sunuluş biçimlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, hepsi birbirinden farklı yayın politikasına sahip olan Hürriyet, Birgün ve Sabah gazetelerinin çevrimiçi baskılarının bir yılı izlenerek veri toplanmıştır. Suriyeli kadın göçmenlerin haberlerdeki öykülerinin, niceliksel ve niteliksel içerik analizi yöntemiyle incelenmesiyle elde edilen bulgular, Türkiye'deki göçün toplumsal cinsiyet boyutunun anlaşılmasına katkı sağlayacaktır. Sonuç olarak, Türkiye'deki Suriyeli kadın göçmenler, medyada, genellikle suçla ilişkin haberlerde yer bulmakta ve bu haberlerde de kendilerinden mağdur veya fail olarak sözedilmektedir. Bununla birlikte, gazeteler, nadiren, kadın göçmenlerin zorlu yaşam koşullarını haberleştirmektedir.

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Introduction

International migration has become more complex, diversified and heterogeneous in the last few decades. One of the important aspects of this issue is the relationship between migration and gender. Despite women suffer more than men under the conditions of migration and in need of special protection, the difficulties encountered by women are dealt with rarely. This study determines whether the Turkish press raises awareness about the problems of Syrian migrant women in Turkey, which is the first step for the solution.

Turkey has been under the impact of the mass migration from Syria for five years. In the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees-UNHCR Statement on the Situation in Turkey, it is declared that “Turkey is already hosting over 2.5 million Syrians” (UNHCR, 2015a). More precisely it is stated that there are 2,764,500 Syrians registered by the Government of Turkey (UNHCR, 2015b). According to this data, the majority of the Syrians refugee population is women and children.

This article aims at exploring the representations of Syrian migrant women in Turkish press. Newspapers’ stories about this topic will be analyzed to examine how the Turkish press portray Syrian migrant women and to determine whether the press reflect the problems they face. Specifically, it also attempts to explore the differences and similarities among online newspapers in terms of editorial choices about migrant women. In order to compare the newspaper policies, research data will be collected from three Turkish online newspaper websites, *Hürriyet*, *Birgün* and *Sabah*, each of which has different editorial policies in representing migration. The findings of quantitative content analysis of the news stories regarding Syrian migrant women will provide an understanding of the relationship between gendered constructions of migration and the governmental policies. The study concludes with further evaluations and recommendations for contributing to formulate media policies and practices sensitive to migrant women rights specified in the international legal documents.

Literature Review

Lutz, points out the absence of women in mainstream migration research and gender as a key category in the understanding of migratory processes. According to Lutz (2010:1651) the gender is not just one aspect in the study of people on the move like economy, politics or religion, but a central organizing principle in migration flows and in the organization of migrants lives.

Previous researches on migrant women in Turkey generally focus on migrant women from Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union and examines them as worker and their working conditions (Demirdizen, 2013; Dedeoğlu, 2011; Gökmen, 2011; Gökbayrak, 2009; Coşkun, 2016 and 2014; Yalçın 2015; Vaghefi 2014).

İçduygu states that there are different categories of migrants in Turkey. In terms of irregular migration there are three types of flows directed to Turkey: immigration from Eastern Europe, transit migration and asylum-seekers (İçduygu, 2005: 6). According to

Erder and Kaşka, “irregular migration from the regional countries has become a new challenge to both researchers and policy-makers in Turkey.” The authors stated that since the 1990s, Turkey has been facing new population flows, namely “irregular” migration movements, whose features have been markedly different from former experiences. They focused on the implicit position of new migrants in the Turkish informal labor market (Erder and Kaşka, 2012:113). Erder and Kaska’s research (2005) showed that, although such media reports dwelled on irregular migration and prostitution, generally they rarely reported on the deception, poor working conditions and other hardships suffered by the women. Kaşka (2005) also studied Moldovan women domestic workers in Istanbul.

Dedeoğlu (2011) examined social exclusion of Azerbaijani Women Workers in Turkey and alleged that Turkish migration regime is designed to automatically exclude those irregular migrants as ‘criminals’ helps to generate a pool of cheap labour source for one of the globally industries in Turkey. Yüksek (2003) examined the relationships between undeclared trade and genre in Laleli. He argues that because of the majority of shuttle traders from Russia is female, relationships male and female has formed the trade culture in Laleli. Gülçür ve İlkaracan (2002) focused on the case of migrant sex workers from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in Turkey and concluded that policy debates regarding sex work should focus on the need to ameliorate migrant women’s living and working conditions by addressing restrictive and abusive immigration policies and by decriminalizing undocumented sex work. Kayhan (2008) examined the problem of the public awareness about women trafficking in Turkey. She argues that the manner in which the issue is perceived by society needs to change if a permanent solution is to be found.

Despite that the Syrian migrant women have been living in Turkey for five years, there isn’t any study focusing on them, specifically in the context of gender. However, as Buz (2007) has stated, effects of gender on migration is important. Therefore, this study deals with gender dimension of migration in the sample of Syrian migrant women in Turkey.

The Current Situation and Relevant Legal Framework

As the early of 2000s, the migrants from Syria were accepted as “guests” who would temporarily reside in Turkey. However this notion changed with the increasing number of Syrian migrants who resided in Turkey or tried to be transferred over Turkey to the other countries. Nowadays, Syrians in Turkey have important difficulties in terms of integration. Some parts of the integration problems are closely related with the demographic characteristics of the host cities or regions, including the ethnic nature of the host areas in Turkey. Beside this, recent studies on the issue in Turkey delineate that economic factors, especially related with employment, wage levels, negatively affect host people’s attitudes towards Syrian people. In some sectors, Syrian people are seen as reserve labor force with low wages and on the side of host populations this means that increasing burden of unemployment, increasing level of economic competition. Also

rising rents and housing costs, increase in the prices of consumer goods in the areas where Syrian people are residing can be listed as sources of problems which shape host communities' attitudes toward Syrian people. Depending on the density of Syrian people in the regions, and their poor living conditions, important number of host people believe that Syrians cause security problems at different levels (İçduygu, 2015:1-9). Alongside these problems, legal regulations have some deficiencies to provide solutions to the Syrian migrant population in Turkey.

Considering the legal framework, there are two main legal documents which shape the policies towards immigrants and asylum seekers in Turkey: 1934 Settlement Law, 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Additional Protocol on the status of refugees. Turkey is one of the signatory countries of both document, but has granted this right only to Europeans. The lack of legal regulations and consistent policies make the issue of Syrians' trafficking and migration a daunting problem to deal with and increase the vulnerabilities of the Syrians.

According to the recent data, the majority of the Syrian refugees is women and children. They are defined as human groups with special needs and special care in international human rights documents and they can be more vulnerable to hard living conditions. Therefore, the focus of our study is Syrian migrant women in Turkey.

The available statistics on migration according to sex are far from being sufficient. In addition, considering that the flow of migration continues, it should be taken into account that the numbers changes depends on the periods. Therefore it is impossible to calculate completely the number of Syrian women migrants in Turkey.

Method

This study aims at exploring the representations of Syrian migrant women in the websites of Turkish newspapers. Although online media sources depict only a small portion of events related to Syrian migrant women, the importance of the media is found in their ability to shape public perception and migration policy.

Newspapers' stories about this topic were analyzed to examine how Turkish press portray Syrian migrant women and to determine whether the press reflect the problems they face. In this way, the study could provide an understanding of the gender dimension of migration in the Turkish context.

Specifically, it also attempted to explore the differences and similarities among online newspapers in terms of editorial choices about migrant women.

In order to compare the newspaper policies, we collected research data from three Turkish online newspaper websites, *Hürriyet*, *Birgün* and *Sabah*.

We assumed that they have different editorial policies in representing migration. *Hürriyet* is a leading mainstream newspaper in Turkey with an average of 331.600 circulation. Like many other mainstream newspapers in Turkey, *Hürriyet* is strongly

patriotic. *Hürriyet* also has a very considerable online readership, with 6.8 million daily visitors (*Hürriyet Kurumsal*, 2016). *Hürriyet* is seen as representative of the main ideology.

Sabah is one of the newspapers that support the government with an average of 301.700 circulation. *Birgün* is the opponent newspaper with an average of 17.500 circulation.

In this study we used purposive sampling. There were hundreds of news items related to Syrian migrants, but we only collected the news items from the Turkish online newspaper websites using relevant keywords: Syrian, migrant, women. News items that include these three words were gathered from October 1st 2015 to October 1st 2016.

Since the newspapers except *Hürriyet* have not online searchable newspaper archives we used search engines.

Findings and comments

We prefer content analysis on the aforementioned newspapers stories regarding the Syrian migrant women. This method allows the researcher to collect and code information and explore both manifest and latent content within the data (Denton, 2010:12). For the purpose of this study, we collected only manifest content and analyzed it.

Table 1. News Frequencies to the Newspapers

Newspapers	Percent	News Frequency
HÜRRİYET	% 55	35
SABAH	% 33	21
BİRGÜN	% 12	8
TOTAL	% 100	64

We found that a total of 64 news items appeared relating to Syrian migrant women during one year period (see Table 1). The most stories were found in *Hürriyet* (% 55) and the lowest in *Birgün* (% 12). However, it can be said that the number of news items is the unique indicator of representation. The quality of the news item is also important. When viewed from this aspect, it is observed that *Birgün*'s news is more in depth.

Table 2. News Sources of the Newspapers

Newspapers	News Agency	Percent	Reporter	Percent	Unspecified	Percent	Total
HÜRRİYET	33	94,29%	2	5,71%			35
SABAH	12	57,14%	4	19,05%	5	23,81%	21
BİRGÜN	1	12,50%	7	87,50%			8
TOTAL	46	71,88%	13	20,31%	5	7,81%	

In assessing quality of news, news sources are one of the important components. When we looked at news sources of related news items (see Table 2), we saw that the newspapers mostly gather news items related to Syrian migrant women from news agencies by 71%. These are İhlas Haber Ajansı (İHA) and Doğan Haber Ajansı (DHA). DHA is owned by Turkish Dogan Media Group, the largest media organization in Turkey, at the same time the owner of *Hürriyet* newspaper. İHA is part of the Turkish conglomerate İhlas Holding. 94 percent of source of *Hürriyet*'s news items is DHA. The sources of *Sabah*'s news items are DHA and İHA (57%). However, the news in *Birgün* is made up of its own reporters. Therefore, it can be said that special reporters make news in depth and detailed on the specific topic.

Table 3. News Categories by the Newspapers

Newspapers	Crime News	%	Other	%	Total
HÜRRİYET	22	62,86%	13	37,14%	35
SABAH	9	42,86%	12	57,14%	21
BİRGÜN	3	37,50%	5	62,50%	8
TOTAL	34	53,13%	30	46,88%	

We classified the news items in two categories: Crime news and others. 53 percent of news stories (n=34) are related to crime, such as prostitution, mendacity, fraud, migrant trafficking or murder that mostly women are victims or perpetrator of (see Table 3). 47 percent of news stories (n=30) are of other events, such as holding a training course directed at Syrian migrant women, health, and marriage. Crime news appeared mostly in *Hürriyet* (n=22), and less often in *Birgün* (n=3). The representation of Syrian migrant women in conjunction with crime in news items can affect negatively on public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Table 4. The Emphasis on the Fleeing From the War by the Newspapers

Newspapers	The fleeing from war	%	Other	%	Total
HÜRRİYET	8	22,86%	27	77,14%	35
SABAH	4	19,05%	18	85,71%	21
BİRGÜN	2	25,00%	6	75,00%	8
TOTAL	14	21,88%	50	78,13%	

Besides this, we examined whether there was the mention of migrants fleeing from the war in news texts. We observed that 22 percent of the news stories included fleeing

from the war (see Table 4). The newspaper that emphasized this point mostly is *Birgün* by 75%.

This point is important. Because, putting emphasis on fleeing from the war may raise awareness on hard living conditions of Syrian women. Their situations are not their choices. They came to Turkey because they were obliged.

Table 5. The Emphasis on the Motherhood by the Newspapers

Newspapers	Mother	%	Unspecified	%	Total
HÜRRİYET	8	22,86%	27	77,14%	35
SABAHA	5	23,81%	16	76,19%	21
BİRGÜN	0	0,00%	8	38,10%	8
TOTAL	13	20,31%	51	79,69%	

Whether or not related to events, another topic that newspapers emphasized in news stories was motherhood of women (see Table 5). While it is not indicated how many children a Syrian migrant man has, it is remarked how many children a Syrian migrant woman has in the news items. Emphasizing motherhood can be explained that Turkey is a patriarchal society in which the motherhood is a gendered construction. Being of women in society in which patriarchal norms prevail is reduced to the ability of women to give birth to a child. (Özbay 1995:160). Turkey ranks 130 out of 145 countries in the 2015 Gender Gap Index. The emphasis on motherhood by news items is in tune with Turkish politicians' mansplaining discourses¹.

The Portrayal of Syrian Migrant Women

When we look at how the migrant women are represented in the news stories, we saw that they are represented as mother, wife, co-wife, b-girl, prostitute, beggar, worker, teacher, advocate, and course attendee or victim of violence such as murder, suicide, human trafficking, and traffic accident. In some news stories, they are represented as perpetrators of crime such as swindler or murderer. Most of the women that are murdered are victims of domestic violence.

Co-wife (in Turkish Kuma) is one of the topics that is emphasized in news items.

1 See: "Turkey's Erdogan Says 'A Woman Is Above All a Mother'", <http://time.com/4250853/turkey-recep-tayyip-erdogan-a-woman-is-above-all-a-mother/>

"Turkey's Erdogan: women who reject motherhood are 'incomplete'", <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/05/turkeys-erdogan-women-who-reject-motherhood-are-incomplete/>

"Women's most significant trait is motherhood: Turkish minister", <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/womens-most-significant-trait-is-motherhood-turkish-minister.aspx?pageID=517&nID=104431&NewsCatID=338>

"Turkish President Erdoğan says gender equality 'against nature'", <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-says-womens-equality-with-men-against-nature.aspx?pageID=238&nID=74726&NewsCatID=338>

Although polygamous marriage is not legal in Turkey, the fact of co-wife, specifically in the eastern regions of the country, is encountered although not prevalent (Ökten, 2009). Syrian migrant women caused an increase in these events and pertaining problems. On the one hand some Turkish women began to see them as rivals. As Yıldırım stated that the responses tend towards co-wife instead of husband (Yıldırım, 2001). On the other hand, some Turkish husbands threaten their wives to marry a Syrian migrant woman or get them as a co-wife. Hassanpour (2001:244) indicated that threatening wife to take co-wife over her is one of the means that a husband uses to can keep his wife in bondage by.

The Differences Among the Newspapers

When examine the differences among the newspapers, we saw that *Hürriyet* and *Sabah* are similar with regards to their choices of topic and coverage of events related to Syrian migrant women. They have routine news stories in this topic, such as crime, accident, and activities that are organized by associations or local administrations for Syrian migrant women, such as training courses. As mentioned before, these newspapers usually get these kind of news stories from news agencies.

Although *Birgün* has less news items than other newspapers, it, deeply investigates the problems that Syrian migrant women face. *Birgün*'s stories are more informative and more truthful than others. It covers notable events, such as discrimination, exploitation of labor, letting girl children be a co-wife, and sexual harassment. This could be due to using their own reporters.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

We hope that our findings on the news stories regarding Syrian migrant women will provide an understanding of the relationship between gendered constructions of migration and the governmental policies.

At the same time, this kind of studies may raise the awareness of journalists and journalism students about the problems of Syrian migrant women, which is the first step for the solution.

Our study reveals that, further researches and analyses are required in order to better understand the real situations and problems of Syrian migrant women, and to contribute to the formulation of media policies and practices sensitive to migrant women rights in international human rights documents.

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