

A CRITIQUE OF DISCOURSE OF SYRIANS IN TURKISH DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present research is to investigate the phenomenon of new racism expressed through the discourse surrounding "Syrians" in the digital public sphere (DPS) within the context of the new media ecology. This study is premised on the proposition that anti-immigrant discourse in digital spaces is particularly prevalent, as indicated by the new racism paradigm. The core question addressed in this study is the context in which the discourse of "Syrians" is employed in the DPS. The data was collected through purposive sampling, encompassing 7750 tweets, hashtags, and comments on Twitter, 294 video contents and comments on YouTube, 285 Facebook posts, and 38,600 comments/contents on Instagram. The discourse-centered online ethnography was conducted across Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok platforms between December 15, 2020, and February 10, 2021. The findings of the research reveal that the anti-immigrant discourse towards Syrians, which embodies a new form of racism embedded in Turkish nationalism, was expressed with great intensity in the DPS. The exclusionary comments and discussions have shed light on the intersection of informal Islamic nationalism and Syrian immigrants and on how Turkish nationalist discourse excludes and stigmatizes them.

Keywords: Turkish nationalism, Islamic-brotherhood discourse, anti-immigrant discourse, ethnic categorization, Syrians.

TÜRK DİJİTAL KAMU ORTAMINDA SURIYELİLER SÖYLEMLERİNİN BİR ELEŞTİRİSİ

ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın amacı, dijital kamusal alanda (DKA) "Suriyeliler" i çevreleyen söylem aracılığıyla ortaya çıkan yeni ırkçılık olgusunu yeni medya ekolojisi bağlamında incelemektir. Çalışma, yeni ırkçılık paradigmasının da işaret ettiği gibi, özellikle dijital alanlarda göçmen karşıtı söylemin yaygın olduğu önermesine dayanmaktadır. Ele alınan temel soru, "Suriyeliler" söyleminin DKA'da kullanıldığı bağlamdır. Veriler, Twitter'da 7750 tweet, hashtag ve yorum, YouTube'da 294 video içeriği ve yorumu, 285 Facebook gönderisi ve Instagram'da 38.600 yorum/içeriği kapsayan amaçlı örnekleme yoluyla toplanmıştır. Söylem merkezli çevrimiçi etnografi, 15 Aralık 2020 ile 10 Şubat 2021 tarihleri arasında Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram ve TikTok platformlarında gerçekleştirilmiştir. Türk milliyetçiliğine gömülü ırkçılık biçimi, DKA'da büyük bir yoğunlukla dile getiriliyor. Dışlayıcı yorumlar ve tartışmalar, gayri resmi İslami milliyetçilik ile Suriyeli göçmenlerin kesiştiği noktaya ve Türk milliyetçi söyleminin onları nasıl dışladığına ve damgaladığına ışık tutuyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk milliyetçiliği, İslami kardeşlik söylemi, göçmen karşıtı söylem, etnik kategorizasyon, Suriyeliler

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INTRODUCTION

The rhetoric of "guests" (including the "ansar-muhajir" dialect) used by the government and prevalent in the Turkish public sphere to characterize Syrian migrants indicates the presence of a longstanding immigration debate and gradually leads to the development of hate discourse towards Syrians. Furthermore, following the statement made by Turkey's president regarding the grant of citizenship to Syrians, who are often referred to as "guests" (misafir), the size of the hate and immigration debate has steadily increased in the social media ecology of Turkey (Bozdağ, 2019). Additionally, the government's temporary protection regime (geçici koruma) exacerbates the uncertainty surrounding Syrians in the context of neoliberal conditions (Polat, 2018). Furthermore, the anti-immigration and hatred present in new media ecology points to the emergence of a new form of racism articulated with nationalism, which is uniquely interactive, fluid, unstable, dynamic, and hypertextual.

This complexity makes it challenging to comprehend existing forms of hatred and racism. Additionally, Ertuna and Tribe (2021) have revealed through analysis of Facebook data that sarcasm directed towards Syrians is fueled by hate speech, leading to cultural violence. The nature of public discourse surrounding Syrian migrants in the new media ecology and the position of Syrian migrants within these discussions are the primary questions of this study. The basic structure of the viewpoint intended for Syrian immigrants, which is based on Turkey's informal national dynamic, separates it from the classical extreme-right, anti-immigrant populist discourse found in Western societies.

Despite similarities, this distinction has arisen due to a localized reactivity that draws attention to its characteristic locality and arises from informal nationalist dynamics rather than from an anti-immigrant wave nurtured by political elites. This responsivity reveals or reinforces distinctions that can deepen, from an atmosphere of economic insecurity to an emphasis on cultural, nationalist distancing with an ethnocentric perspective.

New Media Ecology and Digital Public Sphere Discussions

While there is still no consensus on this issue among various approaches, it is widely acknowledged that the rapid transformation of publicness has occurred in the wake of new media ecology (Dahlgren, 2005; Habermas, 2006; Kruse et al., 2017; Bennet and Livingston, 2018; Pere et al., 2019; De Blasio et al., 2020). Habermas theorizes that the idea of the public sphere is capable of transformation rather than transfiguration (Schlesinger, 2020). However, to fully understand this transformation, it is necessary to examine the interrelationships of the various elements of new media ecology and the characteristics of these relationships. For example, the rationality of communication and the concept of communicative action as a process that emerges and develops between counterparts in new media ecology are important considerations, as Habermas (1991; 2006) sees them as prerequisites for the establishment of a public sphere.

De Blasio et al. (2020) draw attention to the idea of a "platformed" publicity in new media, as highlighted by Sorice. This idea suggests that, rather than promoting diversity, new media creates an asymmetrical space for fragmented sub-publics that enable "one-dimensional thought" and engage in hegemonic communication. According to Bimber and Zuniga, new media poses epistemic and technical problems in the realm of politics and the public sphere, such as the concealment of information sources and disconnection from the source of information through networked communication, and the manipulation of public events. Bennet and Livingston (2018) refer to this as the "disinformation order." In the changing media landscape, trust between public institutions, civil society, and citizens is crucial for the transformation of democratic structures.

On the one hand, mistrust of traditional media and accredited information sources leads to the emergence of alternative sources. On the other hand, these sources can erode trust in government and the political order or be used to disseminate counter-information. The concept of a disinformation order also highlights the role of new media in the rise of far-right politicians and populism, as well as the implementation of anti-immigrant policies in Europe. Similarly, Castells (2008) argues that the new media environment should be considered a global public sphere, highlighting the increasing disinformation and shift from the national to the global sphere.

Castells (2008) posits that Thompson's concept of the media as a central component of the public sphere in industrial societies can be applied to the internet and the network society. However, there are also critiques of this perspective, as digital inequality for disadvantaged groups such as minorities, women, and immigrants raises skepticism about the potential for the internet to function as a true public sphere (Habermas, 2006; Kruse et al., 2017). Habermas emphasizes the importance of equivalence among subjects and inter-peer communicative action in the deliberative democracy model. In this context, it is crucial to consider the problematic aspects of embracing a publicity created or influenced by misinformation.

In terms of Habermas (2006) description of deliberative democracy, it is crucial that public power, as it relates to the political process, adheres to democratic standards in decision-making. Habermas (2006: 413) states that "the deliberative model is concerned with the epistemic function of discourse and deliberation rather than a rational choice or political ethos." The limitations of new media in the current context, as identified by Habermas (2006), include the absence of public interest, transparency, equal opportunity, and reasonable and justifiable outcomes.

Dahlgren (2005) argues that the political economy of the internet, as it relates to global capitalism, raises skepticism about the internet's ability to function as a true public sphere. Furthermore, the limitations of political usage and weak contributions to democratic will formation are also noted. While it is acknowledged that the internet has brought about significant advancements in society, it is uncertain whether it has resulted in an impeccable advancement for the concept of democracy. There are concerns about the power of national governments and global organizations to control social networks.

For Dahlgren (2005), the intense flow of information, rather than a one-dimensional flow, leads to a problematic reality in which censorship of information can be seen as an anti-democratic move. Additionally, the new media ecology, characterized by filter bubbles and the effect of echo chambers, encourages individuals to consume similar content and information, thus reinforcing tendencies and creating a vicious circle in the virtual ecology. It is also significant to consider the agency relationship between fragmented and weakened knowledge and power relations in the context of new media and the public sphere, as well as the potential for degeneration and "chaotic populism" (Pere et al., 2019).

Anti-Immigrant Sentiment and New Racism in the New Media Ecology

The notion that the new media environment removes all traditional barriers to homogeneous participation, as touted as a result of digital transformation, is debatable. Rather, it is important to consider the existence of individuals or groups that propagate opposing views, including racist, homophobic, and anti-immigrant ideas, on digital platforms (Ekman, 2019).

Unfortunately, the rise of hate and racism, along with disinformation, can be observed in the virtual habitat in which we find ourselves. Additionally, the new media ecology provides a technological opportunity for the proliferation of daily and interactive anti-immigration and racist

sentiments (Özdüzen et al., 2020). It is not uncommon for citizens to make little effort to seek out information about immigrants.

Platformed racism, as described by Fernandez (2017), is dependent on the design of the new media ecology and its technical infrastructure, which tends to include and maintain majority content rather than diverse content. Ekman, referencing Sharma (2019), also highlights the racism present in the new media ecology, where anti-immigrant sentiment, prioritizing emotion and national belonging, is often amplified through distorted, exaggerated, or selectively presented information or individual posts.

In the virtual ecology, information about immigrants is available at two different levels: professional/semi-professional or institutional information, and information from community pages. Balibar (1991) notes that one of the important aspects of the current wave of racism is the practice of racism hiding behind nationalist discourse, which is reinforced by the nationalist emphasis on the distinction between "us" and "them" in anti-immigrant sentiment. This is especially evident in anti-immigrant sentiment, which attempts to renew itself as immigration categories replace racism.

Recently, in Turkey, the presence of Syrian immigrants has brought about a new publicness and private anti-immigration debate. Özdüzen et al. (2020) found that in the context of digital conceptualization, the Twitter public sphere in Turkey is characterized by anti-Syrian sentiment and dramatized everyday racism. Bozdağ (2019) also found a mass and rising anti-Syrian sentiment in a study of Twitter in Turkey.

METODOLOGY

The present study employs a qualitative research methodology, specifically utilizing both online ethnography and critical discourse analysis. Online ethnography, as defined by Hine (2000, 2017) and Pink et al. (2016), involves the examination of cultural, media-based, and technological changes that are contingent upon human-computer interaction and a human geography-oriented understanding. This methodology is considered an organic aspect of the new media ecology, encompassing social and daily life interactions and allowing for the direct utilization of digital possibilities.

The study aims to examine the nature of hate directed towards Syrian migrants by the indigenous population, as observed in the daily field (Saraçoğlu and Belangar, 2019), and to reconstruct it through the hypothesis of anti-immigrant hate within the digital ecology. The keyword "Syrian(s)" was chosen from studies that examine the daily lives of Syrians, as it is extensively used to define the Syrian immigrant group. Additionally, the hypothesis of the significance of ethnocentric perspectives towards Syrian migrants in new media ecologies as seen in the Twitter example (Bozdağ, 2019; Özdüzen et al., 2020) is examined at the level of discourse within the digital public sphere. To collect data, 7750 tweets, related hashtags, comments and comments written under the posts were analyzed on Twitter.

Additionally, 294 video-content and comments were analyzed on YouTube using keywords, including the examination of the video titled "Who's Right? Syrian Citizens Debate in Turkey/Reflection#1" which features a discussion between a Turkish PM who fosters anti-immigrant discourse and a Syrian activist, and includes 12,500 comments made in a very short period of time. Additionally, 285 Facebook posts and 38,600 comments/content from Instagram were included in the sample and a discourse-centered online ethnography (Androutsopoulos, 2008; Hine, 2017) was conducted on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok platforms between 15 December 2020 and 10 February 2021.

This methodology was chosen to avoid ethical interference and to obtain a reliable data set. The groups on social media, hashtags, and labels were directed to identify the comments/posts that were circulated through the open hashtags/tags, and the desire to create public power over politicians and civil society was observed. Hashtags and tags are widely employed as communication strategies within the social media ecology (Pond and Lewis, 2017). By tagging, individuals are able to circulate their posts among a specific group and establish their presence within that group. Hashtags allow for the navigation of specific topics and groupings within platforms, enabling the addressing of similar issues even when they are disconnected.

They also facilitate the attainment of public demand or power cumulatively. The related posts were "pinned to the head" and notifications were kept open to monitor the shares and events within public and private groups. Furthermore, retrospective discussions, comments, and posts were analyzed retrospectively using keywords and opened hashes. Posts and closed group discussions conducted by individuals from their own social media accounts were considered as private areas and the data was not directly noted. Instead, observation was made as these required a permit procedure.

The comments made under groups and public posts/sharings that are open to participation and do not require permission by the manager/founder/member were utilized. To preserve anonymity, personal account information was anonymized, and the purpose was solely to reveal the discourse. Due to the hypertextuality of the online space, the data was recorded offline via Microsoft Word, Note (name/date/platform/text/image). In some cases, it was registered in social media accounts and then transferred offline. All of these forms of data collection are considered as observation and (online) field notes. Additionally, MAXQDA-2020 was used to classify the data, and complex and dense data were categorized, compiled, and visualized.

The critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework, which emphasizes the importance of discourse as a unit of the use of language and a field in which ideology positions and reproduces itself to understand hegemonic relations (Wodak, 2001; Fairclough, 2010; Van Dijk, 2018), was used in this study. Understanding the density of dichotomies, arguments used, and the Syrian context, is based on understanding the power relations within the discourse (Van Dijk, 2018).

The aim of the study is not to analyze individual language performances. Instead, it is to examine the hegemonic view of a particular group, believed to exist towards the immigrant group, from a critical perspective, with the dialectical relationship established through discourse, in a sociopolitical context and the new media environment (Wodak, 2001; Fairclough, 2010; KhosraviNik and Zia, 2014; Unger et al., 2016).

CDA, in this context, means taking a critical position to deconstruct the power relations contained in discourse, rather than bias (Wodak, 2001). Furthermore, the Discourse Historical Approaches enables extensive analysis and interpretation by using historical approaches to the background of discourse and social theory, feeding on the eclectic structure between theory and method (Unger et al., 2016).

According to Androutsopoulos (2008), a discourse-oriented online ethnography approaches digital texts as an outcome of social relations or process and provides comprehension from the perspective of its producers. However, Web 2.0 and newer versions differ from static web pages and classical sources of discourse in terms of fluidity, technological infrastructure, and information flow (hypersexuality). They contain a unique communication style and discourse.

Digital Public Sphere of Turkey and The Discourse of Syrians

In Turkey, it is evident that public authorities and traditional news media engage with public discourse on social media. Specifically, the mobilization of masses in response to social events can significantly influence the course of public events. As such, it is important to note that social media posts gradually acquire public value and transform into political content. However, anti-immigration sentiments within digital content production mobilize hate groups in the social ecology, making racism more visible. The dual opposing dialectic based on the us-them distinction (Van Dijk, 2018) triggers an epistemic break in the migration discourse.

The discourse surrounding Syrians in Turkey is primarily influenced by opposition groups (Bozdağ, 2019). Notably, the emphasis on citizenship brings the political group belonging and emphasis to the forefront. This aggregation can be observed clearly in the discourses produced for Syrian migrants on platforms such as Twitter (2021):

They do not bother to fight for their country, they know how to go on eid. In Turkey, they do not want (Turks) our own country. Half of the violence against women comes from them. I am racist on this subject to the end. #SuriyelilerSuriyeye, #ulkemdesuriyelisitemiyorum (#SyrianstoSyria, #Idon'twantSyriansinMycountry)

The “us” and “them” dialect additionally highlights the level of discourse through political concentrations. In anti-immigration discourse, individual language and action performances coales into a public will that is in harmony with group belonging. In the discourse of TDPS, Syrian migrants are generally portrayed as being a part of the war. The discourse here uses the argument “they fled from war” to counteract the government’s discourse of victims and guests (Misafir). However, it has a form of exclusion that ascends through the belligerency in the dynamics of Turkish national identity and the repertoire of the homeland as sacred (Akçam, 2008). Ethnicizing Syrian immigrant groups and creating potential enemies in discussions and exchanges as a general trend (Anderson, 1991) is also part of this strategy (Instagram, 2021):



Figure 1. A Post Showing Racism Against Syrians on Instagram

‘(RETURN YOUR DESSERT VAHHABİ MUTT! – Syrians became homeowner with tax of the Turkish citizen)’

Akçam (2008) posits that Turkish national identity was formed as a reaction to constant humiliation. Therefore, this situation, which developed into social paranoia and psychosis, ensured the creation of internal and external enemies in the imagination. In this context, it is significant that Syrian immigrants are perceived as a constant threat in the discourse of TDPS

regarding Syrian immigrants. Notably, during the observation process, most of the comments repeated this perception of threat and reluctance with vigorous expressions (Facebook, 2020):

TURKİC DEFENCE GROUP

Ahmet Y.

Syrians do not go to their country. Imagine that, they have a homeland there, they have a dormitory, they have relatives, vineyards, gardens, and houses. But still, they don't go. Now there is no religious, national, humanitarian, sociological or psychological explanation for this. So science can't figure it out. Because this is soulless that a human being cannot do. He does not want to return to his own land and live freely, freely, independently, he is trying to be a servant-worker and feed me.

Fatma K.

I totally agree with you, but what good is it? Half of our people's little brains are poisoned, the other half is asleep.

Eriksen (1993) distinguishes informal nationalism from the ideology of the bureaucratic organization of the state and its emerging civic sphere. One of the main points of informal nationalism in TDPS that differs from formal nationalism is that it rejects the discourse of brotherhood (ansar/muhajir) for immigrants through Islamic discourse over historical and nationalist senders.

Particularly, there is a reaction from the civilian sphere to the distance that is desired to be set from the Arab culture through the principles of Republican modernization such as secularism (Volder, 2012) and integration with the migration policy of the young nation-state's emphasis on Turkishness (Kirişçi, 2008). This perspective grants consent for the acceptance of immigrants in the social field through ethnic and cultural proximity.

Özkırımlı (2008) argues that in addition to Islamic and Turkic informal nationalism, at least three different types exist, including minority nationalism. However, the dominant discourse of TDPS towards Syrian immigrants is generally influenced by Turkic informal nationalist discourse. The Islamic nationalist approach, which is closer to formal nationalism, strengthens an argument based on the discourse of brotherhood and strong Islamic unity (Twitter, 2020). With the emergence of Islamic discourse from the civilian sphere and its transformation into a style of politics under state sovereignty, it is evident that nationalism based on citizenship from an ethnocentric perspective and an imaginary homogenous nation perception (Anderson, 1991) has been met with opposition.

This opposition suggests that the objections of the informal nationalist discourse arising from the civil sphere are influential in shaping the perspective of immigrants, despite the efforts of the formal discourse in the political sphere to establish a robust hegemony. Additionally, it is problematic that some individuals who develop positive discourse styles towards Syrian immigrants approach through a hegemonic relationship influenced by informal nationalist discourse and established in the context of sibling-oppression. This could also be seen as informal Islamic-nationalism in Turkey, which Özkırımlı mentioned.

Turkic and Islamic identity is embracing, and the idea of a home for the Muslims of the region is effective in the approach and discourse towards Syrian immigrants. However, it could be argued that this style of discourse is influenced by the moral-cultural hegemonic approach that

the government has undertaken with the West (Polat, 2018). The problematic aspect of this discourse is that it creates an immigration mass left at the mercy of the host, rather than legal, universal inclusiveness, contributing to anti-immigration (Instagram, 2020): **Muhammed K.:** NO, Syrian IS MY BROTHER! They are NOT MY BROTHER who calls a Syrian Brother! 1 FOR MY MILITARY LET ALL Syrians BE VICTIMS!

The reaction in this context is directed towards the dual dialectic developed by Islamic-informal nationalism. It is a reaction that is also directed towards the irregular and irrational relationship established between Syrian immigrants and the host society. There is a contrast between Polat's (2018) emphasis that the government's discourse of brotherhood aims to establish moral hegemony and the discord created in TDPS regarding this emphasis. While this discourse is perceived as robust in anti-Western rhetoric, it amplifies anti-immigration sentiment in TDPS.

The New-Racist View of Nationalism in TDPS

It is challenging to distinguish racism from its classical forms in the new media environment; the agency of the environment and its ability to conceal the source of information could facilitate a fluid and dynamic racism (Ekman, 2019; Datts, 2020). The information flow directed towards Syrian immigrants frequently relies on generalized and prejudiced-based argumentation. Disinformation is utilized to justify hatred.

The source of legitimacy of the arguments on which the hatred is based is fed by the nationalist context. The news about Syrian immigrants is mostly presented with a single pattern of language usage. It spreads in a uniform way, regardless of the political economy conditions and ownership structure of the media, mostly with the comfort of acting on the distinction between us and them. In general, specific events and news about Syrian immigrant groups are presented in a generalized and ethnicized manner (Twitter; TikTok, 2021):

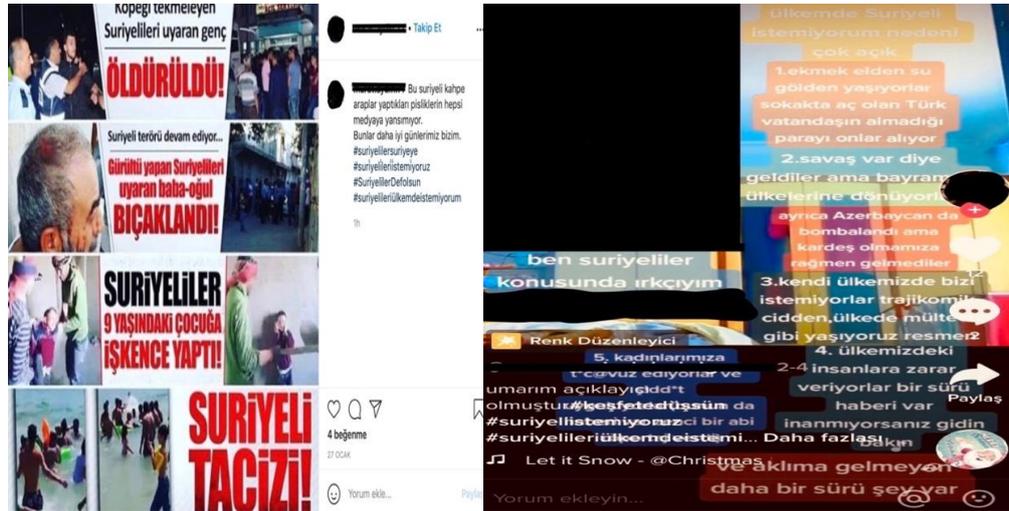


Figure 2. Racist Posts on Twitter and TikTok

In the virtual ecology where information (interaction) for immigrants is available at two different levels, firstly, professional/semi-professional or institutional, interpretation, discussion, and dissemination of information from community pages, and secondly, the dissemination of individually produced content to the public (Datts, 2020). Furthermore, hate content is shaped and presented in a platformed form by the environment (Fernandez, 2017).

Hatred, which is limited to 140 characters on Twitter, is supported by videos, images, and texts on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, where the visual image is more prominent. Thus, hate is shaped appropriately to the environments and becomes more comprehensible. Individuals generally do not make an effort to examine information about Syrian immigrants. Apart from the activist pages and alternative news sources for immigrants on Facebook and Twitter, there is generally a negative anti-immigrant tendency located in restricted areas (echo rooms) that examine information for Syrian migrants (Facebook, 2021):

The Immigration Support Network Platform

Yusuf K.

We live with really immoral people. On social media, Syrians unfurl a banner "Get the Turks out", "news" is circulating in this photo.

Yusuf K.

Whereas this is the banner

Ahmet M.

I'm really suffocated in this community 😞

It is important to establish networks within the civilian sector that challenge discrimination, hatred, and misinformation against immigrants. However, it has been observed that on platforms such as Facebook, groups are formed that primarily ensure the circulation of information within the group. When observing the Immigrant Support Network Platform, it can be seen that there are different groups within groups that propagate and circulate hatred towards immigrants. In platforms that bring together opposing groups, these groups are closely situated in cyberspace, despite being intellectually distant. On one hand, hate speech resonates, while on the other, efforts are made to combat it. Due to its infrastructure and architecture, Facebook is particularly conducive to the formation of nationalist groups and communities (KhosraviNik & Zia, 2015; Pere et al., 2019).

However, during the observation process, it has been observed that racism has become commonplace through nationalist discourse. Racism is often consumed as comedic material, which leads to anti-immigrant sentiment becoming normalized in everyday life and the racist approach towards immigrant groups (Bilig, 1995) becoming simplified and accepted (Twitter, Instagram, 2021). The racist discourse directed towards Syrian immigrants is often rooted in nationalist ideologies, as argued by Balibar (1991). He posits that nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments serve as a foundation for a new form of racism, characterized by the emphasis on cultural homogeneity and the belief in unshakable national feelings.

This type of racism is often defended using reflexive statements such as "I am racist on this issue" or "this is not racism," which perpetuate its circulation with a high level of awareness. The justification for racism against Syrian immigrants is found in the nationalist motives and backgrounds that underpin it. This form of racism is distinct from classical biological racism and is situated within a cultural context. Furthermore, the prevalence of troll and bot accounts observed during the monitoring process further exacerbates this phenomenon by facilitating the dissemination of hateful and discriminatory information.

The new media environment, characterized by disinformation, echo chambers, and the hidden origins of information, provides a breeding ground for those who express hostility towards Syrian immigrants. The ability of this new racism to provide a public background further naturalizes and generalizes negative stereotypes and categorizations of Syrian immigrants, who are often imagined as being recipients of government aid, economic burdens, criminals, and betrayers of the host society. Eventually, these expressions gradually turn into negative labels that characterize the group and play an active role in the process of defining the group.

As Yeğen (2004) notes, Turkishness is defined within a political-territorial context on constitutional grounds, yet it continues to possess an ethnic potential. The ethno-religious underpinnings of the perception of citizenship maintain dominance. When considering the interactions in the new media environment, it becomes clear how categorization has evolved towards social acceptance. Wimmer (2008) describes this as ethnic categorization, in which ethnic boundaries are reinforced.

The majority of information, comments, and content that solely employs the term "Syrians" is considered negatively, and this expression has become an intrusive form of definition that reinforces negative stereotypes and ethnic boundaries. Turkey's immigration policy, which is based on concepts of Turkishness and adherence to the Hanefi branch of Sunni Islam, reflects a tendency towards a decline in social acceptance of non-conforming individuals.

This approach to immigration policy prioritizes certain ethnic and religious characteristics, which can lead to discrimination and exclusion of those who do not fit within the defined parameters of the ideal immigrant. This exclusion is evaluated on the basis of conformity to the ideal immigrant template created. Such a policy is in line with the generalization and naturalization of negative stereotypes and categorizations of immigrants, as discussed previously. This approach to immigration policy reinforces ethnic and religious boundaries and can perpetuate discriminatory practices within the host society.

The Ethnocentric Point View of New Racism

It is observed that the group is perceived through a homogeneous ethnic repertoire of view towards Syrian immigrants. According to Wimmer (2008), there is a difference between a group expressing itself as an ethnic group through certain common affiliations and being forced into ethnic categorization in an interventionist way. The perception of Syrian migrants as a homogeneous group with an ethnic categorization facilitates generalizing and prejudiced opposition.

The use of ethnic labels to identify opposing groups can lead to the gradual development of intergroup boundaries and stereotypes. Initially, the label "Syrians" may be used simply to refer to a group, but over time it can become a negative and stigmatizing label. This evolution is often observed in discourse strategies. For instance, the content produced about Syrian immigrants may create a stereotype that all Syrians are people fleeing war. This stereotype not only stigmatizes Syrians but also creates social prejudice against them.

As a result, weaker pieces of information may be seen as sufficient to identify the opposing group. This situation is also prevalent in news media texts, which are vulnerable to disinformation. At the same time, it is an effective strategy in shaping the boundaries between groups as an identity strategy. It can be mentioned that the exclusion process is gradually facilitated by putting the unknown into a familiar form. It is possible to see this ethnic categorization in most of the descriptions used for Syrian immigrants on Twitter (Twitter, 2021):



Figure 3. The most intense characterizations used with the expression Syrian(s) on Twitter

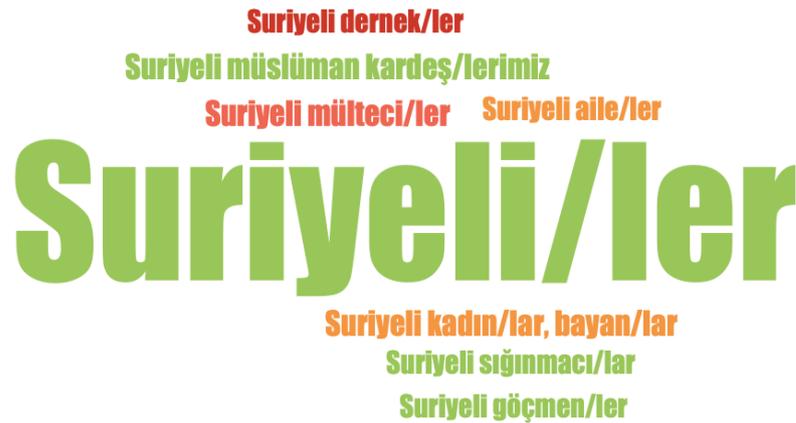


Figure 4. Characterizations used with the expression Syrian(s) on Youtube and Facebook

The ideal individual-immigrant could be understood through ethnicity and the role of religion in the civil sphere (Kirişçi, 2008). his repertoire of views also shows how the group is put into the interventionist categorization process through one-dimensional labels at the level of discourse. It is possible to see clearly the rhetoric-level equivalent of the perspective on Syrian immigrants rising from an ethnocentric perspective in TDPS (Youtube; Facebook, 2021).

The discourse on social media platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram, has been observed to have a strong ethnic view repertoire, which consolidates the existing national identity belonging through the creation of an "other." On the other hand, Syrian immigrants are beginning to be perceived as the current imaginary enemies of Turkish national identity (Anderson, 1991) as evidenced by the hashtags/labels used on these platforms (TikTok, Instagram, 2021).



Figure 5. Characterizations used with the expression Syrian(s) on Instagram and TikTok

Hashtags and labels are a crucial aspect of the communication style in the social media ecology (Pond & Lewis, 2017). They are particularly useful for creating a space for collective action, and for influencing public opinion through criticism of social movements and civil society. However, the functionality of hashtags and labels also facilitates the spread of anti-immigration sentiment and racism (Kreis, 2017).

The hashtags and labels associated with Syrian immigrants are generally clustered on hatred and antagonism. Most of the hashtags, tags, and comments contain content that criticizes the government's immigration policy and Syrian discourse and share racist hatred towards them (Bozdağ, 2019, Özdüzen et al., 2020). Even the opened hashtags and tags themselves contain hate speech and could be understood as a kind of keywords for identifying racist expressions.

Anti-Syrian Immigration as Political Argument for Mobilizing Mass and the Rise of It's Debate in Tdps

While the concept of Habermas' public sphere, based on negotiation, may be problematic in the context of virtual ecology, it is important to acknowledge its contributions. One of the most significant contributions of the public sphere is the technological infrastructure that has facilitated the organization of civil society for social movements. However, it is necessary not to ignore the quality of being visible in the public sphere alone as the focal point. In addition to the debate surrounding politicians and Syrian refugees, it is crucial for Syrian citizens in Turkey to participate in public debate and engage in activism (Youtube, 2021: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCzZgRcoFlk&ab_channel=BaBaLaTV):



Figure 6. First public discussion between a Syrian activist and a Turkish politician

This phenomenon can be understood as an indication of the potential for divisive debate surrounding the issue of immigration in the future. It is also important for Syrian migrants to have a space for expression in the public sphere, and for Syrian activists to assert themselves against anti-immigrant politicians. However, it has been observed that a general contrast in perspectives was maintained in the high number of comments under the video on social media platforms such as Youtube (Youtube, 2021):

Kübra P.

Regardless of what İlay Hanım says, no matter how logically she speaks, Ravdanur answers everything with pity. These are not the answers, they are emotional exploitation!

Hüseyin Ç.

The woman brought the reports, information, percentages, official evidence she collected. The girl with the bangs keeps making herself pitiful. You have no place in our country. So much!

It has been observed that individuals who support anti-immigrant politicians tend to cite their views and arguments, and present them through the use of numbers and quotations. Conversely, it has been argued that Syrian activists tend to rely on emotional appeals in their arguments rather than logical reasoning. In general, it has been observed that comments

supporting Turkish politicians and perspectives that exclude Syrian activists are dominant on social media platforms.

CONCLUSION

Anti-immigrant discourse in the West is often mobilized by far-right politicians (Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017; De Gleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Hameleers, 2019; Zúñiga et al., 2020, Jacobs et al., 2020) and the banality of everyday (Bilgic, 1995), informality (Eriksen, 1993) and characterized from top to bottom. However, there is a bottom-up nationalist attitude that reveals anti-immigrant publicity in Turkey (Bozdağ, 2019). With this determination, the study draws the boundaries of the digital public sphere through the context of anti-immigration, which is the most important step.

In the context of social media platforms, a reactive nationalist attitude and discourse can be observed toward immigrant groups, both from political actors, and news media. Thus, secondly, it seems possible to talk about the limitations of an anti-immigrant digital public space, which seems to be surrounded by the everyday and banal nationalist attitude. To ensure it is not overlooked, the discourse of the news media and certain political actors is based on a desire for legitimacy rooted in deeply ingrained nationalist reflexes.

As a result, the news media gains strong public support within the national boundaries it addresses, while politicians can use this public support as a political power. Based on the data obtained in this study, it is predicted that the level of anti-immigrant discourse creating an agenda will continue to increase in the future. However, due to the limitations of the qualitative study, this can only be presented as a prediction.

It has been observed that anti-immigrant and racist groups (echo rooms) dominate on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Racism has found a place for itself through nationalism, which both gives racism a rational and justifiable public force and allows it to be concealed and normalized. While visual content is dominant on social media platforms such as Tiktok and Instagram, text-based content is more common on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

In this case, the platformed racism emphasized by Fernandez (2017) was observed in the anti-Syrian sentiment. Moreover, it is quite normal that the anti-immigration sentiment rising from echo chambers like Facebook is based on a homogeneous mass, because it is very difficult to see a situation different from similar content and thoughts. As a matter of fact, it is quite a situation that the similar discourse style gives the appearance of belonging to the majority.

It can easily find a place according to the infrastructure of the platforms in a fluid manner. The dominance of racism in the public sphere also marks it as a non-equivalent field. Habermas (2001) emphasizes the principle of equivalence in the limitations of the public sphere, Turkey's digital public sphere has been punctured in its opposition to Syrian immigrants.

Anti-immigrant video content has also been produced on Youtube. While the visuals contribute to the opposing discourse with a generally edited and sarcastic style of expression, the video contents ask citizens what they think about Syrian migrants. However, anti-immigrant videos are powerful in general, and on social media platforms, racist anti-immigrant opposition is covered with nationalism. The contrast is not limited to a negative context, but at the level of discourse, it is characterized by disinformation and racist discourse genre. Based on the data observed, it is evident that a significant grassroots anti-immigrant sentiment exists, which can be easily manipulated.

In Turkey, the Islamic-informal nationalist approach combined with the government's discourse sees Syrian immigrants as brothers, guests, and Turks as hosts. However, Turkish informal nationalism propagates anti-Syrian, anti-immigrant discourse and criticizes immigration policy. These two nationalisms dominate the immigration discourse on social media platforms, and anti-immigration sentiment is becoming more widespread.

Furthermore, all informal nationalisms interventionistically categorize Syrian immigrants as an ethnic group. This can be observed from the descriptions, tags/hashtags and comments used. In the TDPS it is seen that all discourse styles are trying to create arguments by forcing the Syrian immigrant group to ethnic categorization and basing it on a homogeneous group belonging. To address the question of what kind of public space will be created as a result of these discussions, it is likely that a manipulative community fueled by anti-immigrant sentiments will emerge and be difficult to avoid. The mass mobilization around this issue will likely shape public discourse and attitudes toward immigration.

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