

## Chapter 7

### PHOTOGRAPHS OF SYRIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS IN TURKISH NEWSPAPERS

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#### Introduction

When the photographs of Aylan Kurdi reached the global social media and the newspapers worldwide in 2015, they immediately caused the strongest emotional reactions to the biggest human catastrophe of our times to which politicians and masses of people remained silent since 2011. One powerful photograph finally convinced the world leaders that displaced people of Syria needed immediate attention, and so followed an expansion of appeals, reports, studies, articles and photos concentrating on Syrian asylum seekers. How effective and consistent the following policies have been is arguable; however the case is important in terms of showing the power of a single photograph.

The effect of media representations over social debates is a widely-studied area. Drawing on the cultivation theory which contends that the repetitive exposure to media shapes the world views and practices of audiences, it can be discussed that how Syrian asylum seekers are presented in the media is influential in producing positive and negative public opinion and attitudes toward asylum seekers. Additionally, discussing Syrian asylum seekers around certain themes and topics (e.g. crimes) builds the discursive field of the subject and determines how the subject can be talked about and within which thematic frames. Consequently, media representations take part in constructing a certain “Syrian asylum seeker identity”.

This chapter is a content analysis of the photographs of Syrian asylum seekers in Turkish newspapers between the years 2011-2015. The corpus includes the photographs published in five Turkish national newspapers, namely *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, *Sözcü*, *Posta*, and *Zaman*. These are the five newspapers with the highest circulation figures during the time of analysis (BİK, 2014). The purpose of studying the visuals of Syrian asylum seekers is to identify which themes are produced in the representations and what kinds of meanings and knowledge they produce about asylum seekers. Theoretically, the study adopts the view that the identity of Syrian asylum seekers is constructed in representation.

Within this constructionist framework, the content analysis in this study examines the themes, topics and meanings produced in Syrian asylum seeker photographs.

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