

RESEARCH REPORT

The dialectics of invisibilization in Syrian female refugees in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with how Syrian female refugees are intersectionally invisibilized in Turkey as refugees and as women. The main aim of this study is to understand the dialectics of (in)visibilization of Syrian female refugees. Therefore, using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), we analysed discourses in social media as well as popular discourses by Turkish and Syrian women in Ankara. We concentrate on the relation between the discourses produced in the host society and the particular way of how Syrian female refugees are portrayed and invisibilized. We wanted to know how powerful these discourses are in the host society when it comes to the (in)visibilization of Syrian women and their bodies. Furthermore, we wanted to understand the intersectionality of discrimination and invisibilization of Syrian female refugees. This study shows how discriminatory discourses are internalized and circulate also among women. Moreover, we show how different forms of invisibilization are usually related to marginalization, but in some cases can even be used as a means to escape discrimination.

RESUMO

Este artigo trata do modo como as refugiadas sírias são interseccionalmente invisibilizadas na Turquia como refugiadas e como mulheres. O objetivo principal deste estudo é compreender a dialética da (in)visibilização das refugiadas sírias. Portanto, usando a Análise Crítica do Discurso (ACD), analisamos discursos nas redes sociais, bem como discursos populares de mulheres turcas e sírias em Ancara. Concentramo-nos na relação entre os

discursos produzidos na sociedade de acolhida e a forma particular como as refugiadas sírias são retratadas e invisibilizadas. Buscamos saber o quão poderosos são esses discursos na sociedade anfitriã quando se trata da (in)visibilização das mulheres sírias e de seus corpos. Além disso, pretendemos entender a interseccionalidade da discriminação e da invisibilização das refugiadas sírias. Este estudo mostra como os discursos discriminatórios são internalizados e circulam também entre as mulheres. Além disso, mostramos como diferentes formas de invisibilização estão geralmente relacionadas à marginalização, embora, em alguns casos, possam até ser usadas como um meio de escapar à discriminação.

KEYWORDS

Syrian Female Refugees. Turkey. Intersectional marginalization. Invisibilization. Discourse analysis.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Refugiadas sírias. Turquia. Marginalização interseccional. Invisibilização. Análise de Discurso.

Introduction

The Syrian refugee crisis is one of the most noteworthy humanitarian crises in this millennium. Although the official numbers are contested (DÜVELL, 2019), the Turkish government and the UNHCR speak of 3.6 million refugees currently living in Turkish territory (UNHCR, 2020). However, it is not only the number of refugees but also the geostrategic position of Turkey that attract international interest. Turkey is often seen as the buffer zone between the Near and Middle East on the one hand and Europe on the other. Additionally, for Turkish domestic politics the topic of mass migration at the crossroad of international policy, welfare politics and identity politics have an enormous influence. Initially the fear of an uncontrolled impact was so prominent that newspapers were not allowed to write about the topic, and conducting academic research on Syrian refugees in Turkey was proscribed. Like in most humanitarian crises, women face different, and often more, difficulties than men.

From a theoretical point of view, discrimination is often framed as invisibilization (see, e.g., LE BLANC, 2009; BRIGHENTI, 2007; HERZOG, 2020; HONNETH, 2001) and the relation between diverse sources of discrimination has frequently been described in terms of intersectionality (e.g., CREENSHAW, 1989; 1991; CHOE *et al.*, 2013; HOPKINS, 2019). Invisibilization can be a form of discrimination in itself while, at the same time, higher visibilization can be used as a mechanism of power, control and discrimination. Regarding intersectionality, this dialectical approach has led to the coining of

the term “intersectional invisibility” (PURDIE-VAUGHNS; EIBACH, 2008) where invisibility can be a form of discrimination while sometimes invisibility can even protect from discrimination. What is important in all these approaches is not to understand discrimination as stemming from a particular (intersected) identity but to understand identity production itself as the result of a discriminatory practice of ideologies. With regard to female Syrian refugees in Turkey, little research has been done in order to understand the particularity of this discrimination of mostly Muslim women in a largely Muslim country.

The aim of this paper is to understand the particular discrimination, framed as dialectics of (in)visibilization, that female Syrian refugees face in Turkey. This means that on the one hand we will make a genuine contribution to the conceptualization of processes of discrimination and on the other hand we will provide important empirical information about the specific situation in Turkey.

Therefore, in the first section we will present our theoretical approach towards intersected invisibility and the discursive production of (in)visibilized subject positions (1). After explaining our methodology (2) we will then apply the theoretical approach to social media discourses (3.1) as well as to popular discourses by Turkish and Syrian women (3.2).

We will see that social and physical invisibilization usually leads to a specific form of augmented marginalization. However, in some cases invisibilization can even be used as a means to escape discrimination.

1. Theoretical conceptualization

There is a growing tendency to frame injustices and discrimination in terms of invisibilization. In journalism, political activism and even art, invisibilization is used as a thick concept, i.e., a concept that not only describes an imperceptibility of certain social groups and experiences but also reprehends the situation of invisibility. Moreover, in social sciences and humanities, lately, there is a considerable effort to try to conceptualize invisibilization and to understand the most diverse forms of discrimination with the help of this concept (e.g., LE BLANC, 2009; HERZOG, 2018; 2020; HONNETH, 2001; SMITH *et al.*, 2018; WILCKE, 2018). Correspondingly, in these cases, invisibility includes some kind of moral reprehension: something or someone should not be invisible. In all cases, the moral reprobation is not about a singular situation but about a structural failure to perceive, include or recognize the other or specific social situations. Especially in dialogical or communicative models of society (HABERMAS, 1984; HONNETH, 1995), invisibility prevents the communicative integration and even the normative progress. The implicit and explicit solutions against this invisibilization as a form of disrespect therefore point towards visibilization as a form of communicative inclusion.

However, from a critical perspective, visibilization as an answer to invisibilization, includes a series of problems (for a critical perspective on visibilization see also: BRIGHENTI, 2007; HEMPEL *et al.*, 2010; ILLOUZ, 2003; PAPADOPOULOS *et al.*, 2008; SMITH *et al.*, 2018; VOGELMANN, 2010; WILCKE, 2018, generally based on the previous work of FOUCAULT, 1975; 1981; 1990). Since Foucault, we know that

the eyes of the physician or the penetrating questions of the priest are not at all innocent observations but have a deep impact on power relations, disciplinization and self-perception. In other words: visibilization can also be a mechanism of power and control. Some social groups are quite aware of this dominating power of visibilization. Therefore, undocumented migrants often deliberately try to hide from the controlling eyes of the State in order to be able to live a life of less persecution.

Honneth (2001) explains that for ignoring and disrespecting someone, this person first of all has to be perceived and identified correctly. Only then, “looking through” the other as an act of visible invisibilization or perceivable disdain is possible. However, if visibility is a prerequisite for disrespect, then invisibility can have even emancipatory effects. In order to escape the grip of domination, individuals and whole groups can try to fly under the radar of public perceptibility. So, if we analyse processes of invisibility, we not only have to have a clear grasp of what invisibility means but be aware of the dialectical game between visibilization as inclusion and public recognition on the one hand and visibilization as domination and control on the other.

One possibility to understand invisibility is to distinguish between physical and social invisibility, acknowledging that both forms are interrelated. Physical invisibility refers to all those forms where a person or a social group is materially impeded from entering the relevant spheres of communication. Borders, prisons, but also social segregation impede the perception of the physical presence of the other. Foucault (1981) describes the privileged rights of only a few to speak in specific communicative contexts. For example, in public media the main voices are those from politicians, experts and journalists. Other voices are seldom visible as subjects of discourse, although they might be quite present as object of media content (HERZOG, 2011). Here, we can also distinguish different types of bodily invisibility. While usually in most cultures some parts of the body are covered, it seems like the visibility of the eyes is of specific sociological relevance (see also the classical approach of Simmel, 2009 on the importance of the eyes). Furthermore, the visibility of the face as a window to the personality of the individual is of high relevance too. Veiled eyes or faces, like in the case of dark sunglasses, ski masks or burka can impede the physical visibility of personal characteristics.

Physical invisibility can be an expression of or can lead to social invisibility. We can understand social invisibility as a form of disrespect (see also HONNETH, 2001), of not taking the other as relevant partner of interaction. Sometimes it is even necessary for the other to be physically present so that a disrespect as “looking through” (HONNETH, 2001) is possible. For the case of women, Solnit (2014) made famous the term of “mansplaining”, i.e., cases where the voices of female participants are not given the same value as those of men or are required to be confirmed by male participants. This logic can also be applied for other non-hegemonic groups. Again, making use of Foucault (1981) we can see that even in the same context of interactions not everybody with the same physical presence has the same right to speak or the same possibilities to be taken seriously.

However, both mechanisms of invisibilization, at the same time, can be used as deliberate strategy to escape certain forms of disrespect. The physical unavailability can be a form of escaping direct power, control and discrimination. Historically, within the Black or Jewish Ghetto, the inhabitants usually are safe from everyday racism and anti-Semitism. And regarding social invisibilization, we

could say that not being taken seriously can also mean not being understood as a competition or a threat and therefore escaping direct negative reactions.

Additionally, an important differentiation concerns the question: who invisibilizes? Is it the state and society, or does the invisibilization stem from the invisibilized individual or group itself? However, from a sociological perspective we have to be aware that there is no such thing as a pure individual and that strategies of self-invisibilization are learned in social interactions with others. For example, hiding oneself due to shame or safety reasons is usually the result of a specific process of socialization where individuals learn that being “invisible” can pay out. Goffman (1986; 1990) already knew about the strategies of hiding parts of the own personality that are considered “stigmas” across large parts of society. Goffman here speaks of “evidentness”, i.e., the fact that people must be able to understand a physical marker as a social marker. This requires certain cultural skills such as understanding the markers of social class.

The way someone dresses, moves or speaks can be perceived by everybody in close proximity. However, only for those familiar with the fine mechanisms and rules of “distinction” (BOURDIEU, 1984) do these ways “make sense”, i.e., can they be “read” as a symptom or a sign. Some of these markers can be used consciously, depending on the context. This means that information about the characteristics of a person can be managed more or less through the conscious (in)visibilization of its bearer. While a sexual inclination or clinical record is usually not perceivable at first glance in most social interactions, other markers, such as a visible invalidity or skin color, can be easily perceived by people who are physically present.

Here we face a final conceptual problem. A person is never completely visible both socially and physically. We always present ourselves in a specific (positive) light and are perceived from a particular viewpoint. So, the question of visibility is not whether a person or a group is visible or invisible but what kind of visibility is created and what aspects are invisibilized. In other words, we have to ask for the specific identity – or better: alterity – or subject position that is created through processes of (in)visibilization. And we have to ask for the power relations in those processes where (in)visibilization is negotiated between social actors. The question is whether the dialectics of (in)visibilization of non-hegemonic groups follows the same mechanisms as the (in)visibilization of other social groups or whether we can observe here some forms of discrimination, i.e., processes that produce a subordinated or demeaning subject position.

Regarding our case of two ideologies that can lead to invisibilization, we could ask for the intersection of these two forms of discrimination. Against a simplistic approach that understands intersectionality as a mere adding of non-hegemonic identities, we have to understand the mechanisms of intersection of ideologies (see also STÖGNER, 2017). Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) use the term of “intersectional invisibility” explaining that sometimes having only one non-hegemonic identity can be the cause of greater discrimination. So, for example male homosexuals are more often victims of homophobic attacks than lesbians. The latter seems less socially visible, i.e., they are not seen as a threat for the patriarchal order in the same way as male homosexuals. Combining the approach of intersectionality of ideologies with the concept of invisibility we are now able to

understand why, in some cases, having more than one sub-ordinated identity can trigger more discrimination, while in other cases it does not. As we have seen, being less visible can sometimes lead to discrimination or can be itself discriminatory while in some situations invisibilization can even help to escape mechanisms of power, control and discrimination.

Summing up our argument we have to analyse not only the existence of intersected mechanisms of invisibilization but also have to ask whether invisibilization works in each case as discrimination or even as protection against discrimination. For understanding the mechanisms, we have to understand the driving forces behind the processes of invisibilization, i.e., whether they stem from society or from the invisibilized themselves. And finally, we have to understand that there is seldom a full visibility or invisibility and that public perceptions and identity are created always partially and in a fragmented way. Therefore, we have to ask what social perceptions are created as an outcome of these processes of (in)visibilization.

2. Methodology

In our research, we apply the perspective on intersectional invisibilization to Syrian female refugees. Syrian female refugees are socially, economically, culturally, ethnically and sexually marginalized (YAMANER, 2021). Our primary aim in this qualitative study is to understand this marginalization. We used a feminist approach towards Critical Discourse Analysis (DIJK, 2001) in order to analyse two sets of data: Facebook posts and interviews.

(1) We use Facebook posts and comments related to Syrian female refugees. We are interested in these discourses and in how these discourses influence the attitudes of the individuals of the host society towards the refugees. Facepuger software has been used to fetch publicly available data from Facebook. BINO Facebook Posts Scraper and Auto Publisher have been applied to get the most liked posts on specific dates that provide us with an opportunity to analyse what discourse became highly relevant during the post-migration period. The next step was to classify the collected data using MAXQDA to analyse how Syrian female refugee issue was perceived and how the information was reproduced on social media. We have retrieved these posts from various Facebook groups and pages that adopt different political ideologies such as “Kemalism” – a national ideology of modernization, “Turkish Nationalist Movement” and (religiously) “Conservatism”. We have monitored these pages for 8 months starting from July 2018 and examined them from their very first posts concerning the refugee issue.

The data retrieved from Facebook were analysed and categorized under three distinct groups: general discourses, discourses on Syrian refugee women and discourses depending on the agenda. The codes that have been created for the first group can be listed as Syrians and their profile as a guest, asylum seekers and/or refugees in Turkey, Turkey’s migration policies, national security, the relationship between hosting the refugees and economic problems (that Turkey has been going through), scapegoat, othering, threat, normative refugees (or the perception of the refugees in the

host society) and the aids Syrian refugees receive. Under these key codes, there are also some sub-codes such as personal/group tragedies, brotherhood, and so forth. It might be said that there is an intersectional perspective among all these codes and sub-codes.

In the second group, discourses targeting the women directly take place. Because the representation of Syrian female refugees and the representation of the refugees in social media are two different subjects of study, the discourses have shown great differences according to gender and gender power relations. During the creation process of our coding scheme to organize the data with the help of MAXQDA, two opposite codes, “Threat” and “Victim” became prominent. The “Threat” code is associated with other codes like “backwardness” (this code is related to how Arab women are perceived as the symbols of backwardness in both public and private spheres especially by the secular individuals and to how the status of Turkish women in society triggers a comparison between Turks and Arabs), “moral values”, “fertility rates”, and “home-wrecking”. The “Victim” code involves “empathy”, “pity”, “sexual violence” and “human tragedy”. However, in both cases Syrian women are mainly considered objects rather than subjects of the discourse.

Discourses in the third group can be understood as event-based discourses. They have been coded as “Economic reasons”, “Discussions regarding ongoing war”, “Terrorist attacks”, “Particular events Syrian refugees were involved in”, “Propagandas for the elections” and “Turkey’s political and military actions” such as Turkey’s incursion into Syria (Operation Olive Branch – Zeytin Dalı Harekati). Discourses depending on the agenda are seemingly connected to the first group of the discourses and somehow function as the determinant factors that keep the generalization and alienation of the refugees on the agenda.

(2) Regarding the interview data, we have conducted 24 in-depth interviews (12 interviews with local women and 12 interviews with Syrian female refugees) in Ankara. We held all interviews with both local and refugee women in their own homes. We have prepared two semi-structured interviews in Turkish and Arabic (The Arabic interview was translated from Turkish into Arabic by our female translator and social worker who accompanied us in the field). We reconducted seven interviews with Syrian female refugees because a male family member attended these interviews. As we thought that the replies of the respondents would be affected negatively by the presence of a male family member (triggered due to the presence of a male researcher), we decided to give our translator our questionnaire to repeat those interviews during all of which a male household member had participated. Repeating the interviews by our translator not only helped us to overcome the gender-based problems but also contributed affirmatively to reach intimate responses due to her previous well-settled relationships with the refugee community around the region. Soon after, we noticed that we somehow were able to categorize the interviewed refugees into two as the ones who had known our translator for a long time and the ones who had not. Her voluntarily works for refugees helped build a creditable image of her as we were told in our first interview with these words: “anybody who comes to our home through her, is a good person because we only met good people thanks to her and received kindness from her”. With the contributions of her and of a social worker, who helped us in the field, we were able to deal with one of the biggest difficulties in the field for a male

researcher due to the gender-based restriction. It also helped us to understand the researcher's position in the field as a Turkish male researcher coming from the middle class.

Although we have confronted multifaced problems in the field, the interviews with Syrian women refugees provided us with rich and deep data. Even though the need for translation and offering food and beverage in each interview without any doubt were some of the points that extended the length of the interviews, the willingness to share experiences of social exclusion was very prominent in almost all interviews. The urge of female refugees to share the process of their social exclusion and invisibilization is not only a common cry but a comparison, a criticism and an evaluation of a situation. As for the interviews done with local people, we could say that the longest and most complex interviews were with those who had direct contact with refugee women.

3. Results

3.1 Results from social media (Facebook)

Our data collection started with a decision with important consequences for the outcome regarding the visibility of Syrian refugees. By analysing posts written in Turkish, we followed a logic of physically invisibilizing, i.e., not considering, posts written in Arabic that could have presented a way of countering the hegemonic Turkish discourse. However, as our aim was to understand the processes of invisibilization in the Turkish society, the data collection strategy seemed reasonable.

Regarding invisibilization, the three discourses described above, namely general discourses, discourses on Syrian refugee women and discourses depending on the agenda point towards an ambiguous picture.

3.1.1 General discourses

The first group of the discourses has several functions. One of the main functions is to address public concerns by justifying discriminatory discourses arguing with a threat to Turkey's national security. General discourses use stereotypes such as "coward", "freeloader" "traitor" and "rapist" to create a public perception towards Syrian refugees. These stereotypes have an important effect also on other discourses. The emphasis on the threat has been repeated in terms of (a) negative characteristics of refugees, (b) criticism of the government concerning its refugee policy and (c) prognostication of risks and threats in the near future. The worries can be listed as:

- Syrian refugees cannot be controlled.
- Syrian refugees will cause serious problems in the future.

- Syrians are working illegally.
- Syrian refugees show problems of adaptation, which is considered as a threat to social harmony and peace in society.
- Syrians provide unspecific damages to workplaces of the locals.

General discourses are mainly based on economic reasons, fostered by racism, and national security concerns, highlighted by the fear of terrorism and a threat to Turkey's territorial integrity. Take the following examples:

If you stay silent, one day they will invade your homes (Facebook Posts and Comments, Group 1, Entry 8, General Discourses).

They found a country to take shelter in but if we were in the same situation, we would never have left our country. Even if we wished to seek refuge, who would accept us? (Facebook Posts and Comments, Group 1, Entry 3, General Discourses).

When we cannot care for our poor people, we take care of these terrorists. (Facebook Posts and Comments, Group 3, Entry 38, Discourses Depending on the Agenda).

The three Facebook comments give us multiple subtexts. For example, the first one pays attention to the risks of sheltering large numbers of Syrian refugees. It attempts to show the seriousness of the crisis by using "home" as a metaphor. The quotation also implies exaggeratively the metaphor of homeless, which could be considered the worst-case scenario for the locals even though it is unrealistic. The second comment might be one of the most used examples to point out the way how Turkish people praise themselves by underlining the benevolence, compassion, courage and patriotism of the society. In the last fragment, we see that there is an objection to the financial aid granted to the refugees. It has two justifications: the comment stresses Turkey's current economic troubles while simultaneously emphasizing on the negative identity of Syrians as terrorists. All three discursive fragments can be considered as criticism on Turkish refugee policies.

Economic reasons and national security concerns have established the common ground of Facebook posts and comments. Both have been fostered by racism, fear of terrorism and threat to Turkey's territorial integrity (The Kurdish issue). Using the "terrorist" discourse for the refugees or "terrorist threat" for the new-born Syrians would underline Turkey's experience with terrorism, which has various prominent characteristics and interpretations depending on the ideological and social background of people and/or even the personal history of each individual. This reference would also repress the weak voice of others who attempt to support refugee rights and make affirmative comments on Facebook. General discourses do not directly single out women refugees as the target. However, the discriminatory discourses negatively affect the life conditions and the integration process of refugees that lead to psychological problems such as loss of self-esteem (ALBA, 2005).

Consequently, female refugees are already marginalized because of “a form of prejudice based on group membership” (COOLEY; ELENBAAS; KILLEN, 2016) as Syrians.

In this general discourse it seems as there was a specific intersectional invisibility. The discourse explicitly or implicitly targets mainly male refugees. Due to the subordination of women in both Syrian and Turkish society, Syrian women are not really seen as agents of social threat except in some cases like when talking about alleged high birth rate. Regarding to the interplay of social and physical invisibility we have to state that Syrian women (and also men) are not treated as sources of information. From those posts where we were able to identify the source, we could see over 81% of the posts were written by Turkish men, less than 19% by Turkish women.

In most of the cases the main source of information were Turkish sources and only in less than 3% of the Facebook posts analysed the information came from Syrian refugees itself. Here we have a mixture of physical and social invisibilization. Syrian voices are not heard in the discourse. At the same time, this not-being-heard can be easily understood as a structural irrelevance, or social invisibilization, of those voices.

3.1.2 Discourse on Syrian women

In the second group, discourses on Syrian female refugees, the discourse of “we accept women and children but not young male refugees” became one of the most dominant discourses. This discourse indicates the criteria and the restriction of who is acceptable as a refugee according to gender and age factors. When analysing the discourse, we see that there is a hidden message which is traditionally well-established perception of honour built on female sexuality and body under the responsibility of male dominance. We might state that the intake of Syrian female refugees and children has been regarded as a humanistic duty. However, there is a very subtle border between humanistic duty and social exclusion for refugee women. The border can easily vanish when patriarchy in the host society identifies groups as a national threat to the host society. It does so by stressing the (high) birth rate, representing Syrian women as husband-hunters or criminals. The discourse separates men from women and children, thus creating a perception that a man, especially a young man, should not be perceived as a refugee. Male refugees are described as unwelcomed. They are supposed to defend their homeland. This discursive figure links to the high symbolic value of military service, one of the most significant duties to the nation in Turkish society.

Another common theme is that the criticism about intermarriages. The argument seems to be twofold here. The first argument is that refugee women “con Turkish men using gratuitous marriage plans”. The primary reason for this is that middle-aged and elderly men want to marry young women; thus, get condemned by (some) local women as womanizers and sexual predators.

I'm watching the Müge Anlı Show. All “uncles” aged between 50-60 are on the screen saying “we've been conned”. They find Syrian women to get married; sell everything they have; buy gold jewellery as a gift to those women. It's such a joke, I'm losing it (Facebook Posts and Comments, Group 2, Entry 29, Discourses on Syrian Refugee Women).

The second argument against intermarriages is that Syrian women “accept polygamy and becoming the second wife of a man”. Their cultural backgrounds, social positions, identities, worldviews, life choices and conditions became reasons for alienating, excluding and humiliating them.

Isn't it clear where all this Syrian loving comes from? Syrian women allow their husbands to get married to other women, they even encourage it. All (Syrian women) I talked to have asked me: “How many wives do you have? (Facebook Posts and Comments, Group 2, Entry 4, Discourses on Syrian Refugee Women).

In this discourse targeting especially Syrian women, intersectionality shows up not as a direct, physical silencing but as a particular form of visibilization. Syrian women are presented (i.e., visibilized) in a subordinated way and hence they are allowed to enter (momentarily) Turkish society. However, it is precisely the visibilization as helpless victim that easily can swing towards a threat when their desperate situation threatens to undermine the gender-relations established or desired in the Turkish society. Invisibility here can only mean a particular form of degrading visibility. By visibilizing certain characteristics, both of vulnerability and of threat, a more complex approach recognizing Syrian refugees with their a) needs and emotions, b) moral responsibility and c) traits and abilities (see also HONNETH, 1995) is made difficult.

3.1.3 Discourse depending on the agenda

One of the most popular discourses in this group is the visit of Syrians to Syria repeated twice a year for bairam (religious holiday). The bairam discourses have been repeating themselves for years with almost the same context. This made us think about how to understand this discourse – whether under the category general discourses or depending on the agenda. However, we have decided to examine them under the agenda since they are on the agenda periodically. Such discourses are used repeatedly every holiday:

People cannot go to their village because of poverty, while the Syrians who fled war are going to vacation to their country (Facebook Posts and Comments, Group 3, Entry 1, Discourses Depending on the Agenda)

Have you ever seen a refugee going to the country where he fled for bairam holiday? (Facebook Posts and Comments, Group 3, Entry 2, Discourses Depending on the Agenda)

Syrians returning home for bairam contradicts local people's initial mindset which identifies refugees as people without means. Refugees going to Syria is associated with the end of a life-threatening security problem and therefore with no more need to show a hospitable attitude. Here individuals' asylum rights are ignored by political actors, the media (CANTEK; SOYKAN, 2018) and the people. The image changes from that of a refugee in need towards the notion of the guest. The following example illustrates how any incident might be attached to the refugee issue:

Unassigned Turkish teacher (female) commits suicide. On the other hand, the appointments of Syrian teachers (female) have been made (Facebook Posts and Comments, Group 3, Entry 19, Discourses Depending on the Agenda).

In the example above, we see that there is an approach “from case-based reasoning to generalization and targeting” which causes physical invisibility.

These particular discourses show very nicely how particular realities (read: visibilizations), like those of traveling or being a teacher come up against stereotyped visibilizations of Syrian women as poor and little educated. However, instead of rethinking and correcting the stereotype, negative visibilization is even enforced. Instead of being poor and needing help, some Syrian women are “not even poor”, i.e., they are reluctant to be integrated as subordinated subjects as foreseen by the hegemonic discourse.

3.2 Results from the Fieldwork

Regarding the discourse of local women and Syrian refugees, we found that local women are more inclined to repeating the dominant discourses rather than constructing them. Local women often use expressions like “Rumor has it...” or “Syrians are said to do...” when describing things happening in their neighbourhoods. Using our conceptualization, this reference to impersonal sources means that the very process of invisibilization gets invisibilized itself. Local women, although spreading the rumor, do not want to be seen as the source of rumor and denigration.

It is worth mentioning that we can group the local women into the ones in communication with refugee women and those who are not. The local women who are in contact with the female refugees have used a language and constructed a discourse which reflects a perspective dominated by cultural relativity. This group does not see itself as a storyteller but a fact reciter. The most evident example of this situation was the comment “For them (Syrian Female Refugees) make-up is a necessity” made by a local respondent (Dilek, married, in communication with the refugees, over 30, local). Dilek’s talking about the allowance given to Syrian females on Fridays and her saying that this allowance is spent on personal care by Syrian women indicates her awareness of the culture of the refugee through her relationship with them. That’s why she opted for the word “necessity” during a time when female refugees, for socio-cultural and economic reasons and religious doctrine, were facing social exclusion.

Over time, the rising use of discriminatory discourses spreads among female refugees too. Both, the refugees and the locals state that their relationships have fallen apart and that discourses used since 2014 have altered their perceptions about the other group. The topic of Syrian female refugees having excessive make-up habits – from the locals’ point of view – indicates another complex figure of social exclusion by local women. When we analyse the statements made concerning this issue, wearing make-up is connected to various issues such as motherhood responsibilities, how the aid

money is spent (wasted), whether Syrian women allure husbands of local women and even whether Syrians are devoutly religious Muslims.

The “make-up” discourse, in this research, is also important in order to understand the relation between physical markers and social invisibilization in the case of female refugees. The discourse is of great importance for the local women who live in the same region with female refugees and has got some specific meanings such as the fear of losing one’s husband. Make-up is a form of physical visibilization. Thus, by the mere act of putting on make-up, Syrian women can be seen (at least from a Turkish point of view) as escaping the social space prepared for them by the host society. Make-up, therefore, is a social marker which is interpreted by the Turkish society according to their schemes both on make-up and on Syrian female refugees. At the same time the discourse on Syrian women as a threat due to their make-up makes the female refugees extremely visible. This example shows the dialectics of self-visibilization and visibilization by the host society, as well as the relation between physical visibility and social visibilization as well as invisibilization: Make-up is used in order to create a specific physical visibility and gain a certain social visibility by Syrian women. At the same time, the discourse on make-up serves the host society to socially invisibilize (denigrate) Syrian women and to exclude them from being subjects of the dominant discourses (physical invisibilization).

We as Turkish women, do not give that much importance to what we wear when we are at home and generally wear quite casual things, and do not put on make-up. Unlike us, Syrian women love to put on make-up and dress up nicely at their homes. This situation is being perceived as a threat. They (Turkish Women) thought that Syrian women put on make-up in order to steal their husbands. Although “they will steal our husbands” is one of the most common discourses used by local women, I have not come across any type of such an incident. I think, the bush telegraph makes everything worse for the refugees and builds a great prejudice against them (Dilek, married, in communication with the refugees, over 30, local).

The question of “who invisibilizes the female refugees?” has, of course, more than one answer. In the field, it definitely is the local women. At the same time, these women reproduce social and structural invisibilization that exceeds their own agency. However, the invisibilization of female refugees by local women is not based on a single aspect. While building a power relation, local women often tend to use patriarchal, nationalist and religious discourses that function to hold “us” together and to keep “them” out. Using these discourses means that the local women are not the only ones who invisibilize Syrian women refugees but the Syrian society. As the circle of invisibilization around the female refugees gets enlarged, the intersectional invisibilization encompasses the refugees. Almost anything related to the female refugees can be easily criticized by the local women and the rest of society.

Their belief is criticized because of the way they wear make-up. Are these women Muslims or what? What kind of Muslims are they? This make-up case has become a great problem among Turkish women. A Turkish woman wearing a head scarf recorded them during their wedding ceremonies and showed the videos to everyone to discredit them. Indeed, Syrian women wear low-cut dresses but men and women don’t stay at the same place or there are no men in their weddings. Nevertheless, the way they dress up and wear makeup leads to serious reactions. Local women who show these reactions consider themselves more religious because they do not wear makeup. Being a dressy woman means a

disturbing type of woman in the subculture. And those who meet these criticisms come from this culture. A woman who wears makeup can't be a good woman (Nevin, married, in communication with the refugees, over 30, local).

Another significant discourse to understand the invisibilization of Syrian female refugees is related to the burqa. At first, wearing burqa in a Muslim country seems not to be a problem. However, burqa symbolizes oppression of women, poverty, (Arab) bigotry and illiteracy especially for the secularist population in Turkey. Again, a highly visible physical marker such as the burqa (that, at the same time, invisibilizes the face of its wearer) is understood as a social marker of subordination. Secondly, it is one of the most powerful symbols of the religious rigidity and accompanying cultural elements that require women to wear a burqa is alien to the vast majority of Turkish people, even to those who claim to be Muslims. Although 9 out of 12 local women we interviewed wear headscarves, they have stated that they find wearing burqas excessive. Thus, wearing a burqa somehow makes refugees excessively physical visible as Syrian refugees, at the same time invisibilizing the individual characteristics of the women who chose to wear it. The burqa becomes a means to differentiate between Turkish women and Syrian refugees and a marker for subordinating the latter group.

These kinds of markers are even used to further commit sexual violence against women identified as subordinated:

When I was waiting at the bus stop, a car came nearby (it was day time) and started saying some offensive expressions. As soon as I replied them in Turkish, they understood that I am not a Syrian woman and went away. I have been wearing burqa "kara çarşaf" for a long time and have been insulted before but it was the first time I was sexually harassed (İlgin, married, over 30, local).

The burqa discourse is an example of the intersectional dialectics of (in)visibilization of female refugees. It has two sides: oppression in the family relations and social invisibilization in the host society. While local men make a clear differentiation between local and refugee women according to burqa (as in the example above), some male refugees show a tendency to create a relationship between "their" wives' protection thanks to burqa (as in the example below):

Since we came (to Turkey), my husband has become more obsessive and oppressive about burqa. I am constantly warned to be careful and not to do something inappropriate for our culture and religion (Rana, married, in communication with locals, under 30, Syrian).

The use of discriminatory discourses by local women has caused a change in the relationship between the two groups. As a result, Syrian female refugees are trying to be cautious about these discriminatory discourses they are exposed to, which can easily be observed in the language they use. What Melis, a Syrian woman, said can be an example of this. In response to the oppression and exclusion created by these targeting discourses, she said, "I can't say all the Syrian women are good". This is a diplomatic and an inoffensive discourse that avoids negative reactions from the local people. However, when she talks about incidents that bothered her, she can no longer stay cautious putting aside her diplomatic language: "I hate the way they stare at us" (Syrian female refugee, married, no communication with the locals, over 30).

4. Conclusions

We have seen that the conceptualization of the dialectics of (in)visibilization helps us understand the specific intersection of discrimination of female Syrian refugees. Intersectional invisibilization was shown to be sometimes helpful in order not to be identified as a threat. At the same time, this intersectional invisibilization had the price of greater irrelevance and a status of object and not subject of discourses and social processes. Instead of a binary perception of visibility or invisibility it has to be asked what kind of visibility is produced. Furthermore, to overcome discriminatory visibilization the question about the (re)production must be addressed. We have seen how social media discourses themselves are interrelated and how locals, as well as refugees, relate to these overall recent structures of discourse.

One of the most important findings of this study is that the dominant, masculine discourse is also internalized and reproduced by women. The nationalist and divisor discourse of “us” and “them” goes on the entire dataset producing the othering of Syrian refugees. The use of a long-established historical religious discourses on the Arab identity explains how the identity of the refugees being Arab can trigger racism in the host society. We saw how this discursive frame relates to other discriminatory discourses such as discourses on economic problems or terrorism. Female refugees are mostly portrayed as helpless victims in the written press. As long as women remain this way or do not become a threat, they are not a target of the media that guide the public. However, it is precisely the helpless situation that could turn Syrian female refugees easily in a threat, when the discourse identifies desperation as leading to criminality or “husband-hunting”.

The general framework of “us” versus “them” was able to combine such diverse realities as the wearing of the burqa and doing make-up. In both cases an independent subject status for Syrian women was denied. The discourse was mainly a discourse about female Syrian refugees and not with female Syrian refugees. Syrian women had been excluded from their own identity production. They were invisibilized as productive social actors.

There are several studies dealing with issues in which female refugees are involved such as legal violence, refugees' exclusion at work, post-migration period, health needs, mixed marriages, integration problems, schooling, representation of Syrian female refugees in Turkish media and so on. However, the ones apart from media and social media surveys cover only the refugees living in one particular city. This perspective reflects a specific visibilization of the migration problem as “a problem for the host” society. However, among other topics we need to pay extra heed to the female refugees staying in the camps, as the situation in refugee camps, while protecting from direct racism of individuals of the host society, can itself be seen as a form of physical and social invisibilization with severe consequences for Syrian women.

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