

Chapter 19

Political Economy of Anti-Refugee in Turkey and Cyber-Racism: Thematic Analysis of #suriyelilerdefolsun Hashtag

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the economic fundamentals of cyber racist rhetoric against the Syrian refugees in Turkey has been examined through the #suriyelilerdefolsun hashtag on Twitter platforms via thematic analysis. According to the findings, state aid, the Syrian refugees as the cause of the economic crisis, and the reaction the “rich” Syrians themes come to forefront. The cause of economic problems in Turkey are linked to the presence of Syrian refugees. The main reasons for the reaction can be listed as: health, food, education and salary assistance of the state for refugees; aid by race characteristics, cheap labor, Syrian employer, tax evasion, unskilled labor, insufficient housing / rent increase, inflation increase, distinction of needs, and luxury. As a result, it can be said that the young Syrian male population became the target of the reaction in cyber racist discourses.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of racism, which can be summarized as a hierarchical order made in a negative context on the basis of bodily characteristics, language, religion, ethnic elements, culture and similar features among

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people and superiority of some features over others, is fundamentally a phenomenon that should be read as a political economy. The ideology of racism has progressed in parallel with the industrialization process. The main reason for this situation is that employers need a reserve labor army because of the increase in production and the number of workers and the position of workers to claim rights. Capitalism is a system that needs “surplus” mechanism and continues to exist through it. Therefore, surplus working population is a necessary product of the development of wealth and a condition of existence in the capitalist system. This surplus population forms an army of reserve industry which is absolutely capital, ready to be used and creates human material ready for exploitation at any time. (Marx, 2010, pp. 610-611).

At this point, the system must create a pool of exploitation in order for the reserve army to survive on a regular basis. One of the basic ideologies used in the provision of this pool is racism. In this regard, the ideology of racism should be considered as an ideology that prevents workers from coming together and facilitates the construction of unskilled jobs to the lowest seen groups in the racial context (Willhelm, 1980). In the unskilled, cheap labor force, refugees are perhaps the most exploited group. The main reason for this situation is the lack of citizenship status, this group can not seek the right and can not claim rights. Refugees who perform the most undesirable positions in the society by working informally, uninsured and precariously are exposed to racial interpretations and movements as well as these negativities.

In 2011, a civil war took place in Syria and since the beginning of the war until today approximately 3.7 million Syrians have fled to Turkey. Initially, the issue was tried to be solved in the camp areas established in the border regions. However, due to the increase in the number of asylum seekers, the inability to get help immediately from other countries which was necessary and also the difficulty of keeping a large number of people in these camps, the Syrians are scattered throughout various provinces and the issue has become an important item on the agenda of Turkey. The exaggeration and misinterpretation of the shared news in traditional media and new media, have formed a discourse of hatred against the Syrians in Turkey. Especially with the content shared on social media, the problem has gained a cyber-racist dimension.

In this study, cyber-racist rhetoric directed towards Syrian refugees was examined on the #suriyelilerdefolsun (Syrians get out) hashtag on the Twitter platform through thematic analysis method especially in the context of economic problems. This tag was chosen because it was the first negative title on Twitter for Syrian refugees and the title became popular with the content of a large number of participants. The aim of this study is to analyze the tweets under the label and to reveal the economic political aspect of the refugee problem, which is handled continuously with its cultural dimensions. When the related literature is examined, it is seen that the legal, cultural and social dimensions of the issue come to the forefront; however, it is seen that the political economic dimensions are ignored. Therefore, this study will contribute to the literature because of the focus on economic causes of racist rhetoric against the Syrian refugees in Turkey.

The Political Economy of Racism

When taken as a concept, race means a common group with physical / mental characteristics (Boas, 1940: p.4) and can be defined as the determination of beliefs, actions, attitudes or policies related to racial characteristics (Abercrombie, Warde, Soothill, Urry, Walby 1994, p. 342). The concept of race was originally used to classify animals (Huxley, 1939, p. 9), but in time race and racism gained meaning that emphasized “hierarchy and inequality” (Benoist, 1999, p. 14).

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