

**The Construction of Syrians as  
Enemies in Turkey:  
Enemy images and Enemy Discourse  
of Turkish Political Opposition**

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Student name: Ismail HACIİSMAİL

Thesis supervisor: Nino Kemoklidze

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## **ABSTRACT:**

This study discusses the dynamics in which enemy images of the Syrian population in Turkey have been constructed in the discourse of the Turkish political opposition (TPO). It introduces the notion of enemy discourse against the Syrians in Turkey. The study examines discourses in the Turkish historical, political, and social contexts. The issue of Syrians<sup>1</sup> in Turkey has become one of the most profitable tools of political investment for the TPO, although it has so far failed to remove the Turkish president from power. Therefore, the TPO created a particular discourse when addressing Syrians, which this study marks as the enemy discourse. By using specific representations and language in mainstream and social media, the TPO has constructed the stereotype of 'the evil Syrian' to the extent that the word 'Syrian' itself has gained currency as a pejorative. Parallely, the TPO has mobilized the negative sentiment against Syrians and the government that followed an open-door policy towards them to score brownie points in the race for power. The critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to examine a set of books, statements, tweets, articles, and videos. CDA and content analysis were also used in a mixed quantitative/qualitative method in a chapter of this study. These discourse samples were selected because they belong to Turkey's most famous TPO elite institutions and figures. Thus, they explain the enemy-constructing process and demonstrate how discourses synergize to gain domination. Besides, two types of TPO discourse relating to the Syrians have been compared. The first was included in the election campaigns, and the second

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, the term 'Syrians' refers to all Syrians who moved to Turkey after the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011 and settled there.

was after winning in some municipalities. Finally, the study provided examples of the manifestations of the enemy discourse in social cognition.

**Keywords: Enemy Discourse, Enemy Images, Critical Discourse Analysis, Power, Syrians, Syria, Turkey, Turkish Political Opposition**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to millions of Syrians in the Homeland and Exile, who live in different manifestations of hell on this earth!

Besides, in the memory of George Floyd, I would like to say: We all, under the devil's knee, can't breathe either!

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Turkish Political Opposition..... TPO
- Nationalist Movement Party- Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi..... MHP
- Republican People's Party- Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi.....CHP
- Good Party- İYİ Partisi..... IP
- Victory Party- Zafer Partisi..... VP
- Justice and Development Party- Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi..... AKP
- Free Syrian Army-Özgür Suriye Ordusu..... ÖSO
- Turkish Armed Forces-Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri..... TSK
- Turkish Lira..... TL
- Islamic State in Iraq and Syria..... ISIS

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# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1. Research Problem & Objective of Study**

"They did the best. A perfect way of death for the Syrians..." (Sever, 2017); this was a Turkish citizen's comment on the rape and murder of a pregnant Syrian woman and her 10-month-old baby by two Turks in 2017. This quote is an extreme example of the language and the representations used to address the Syrians in Turkey, including infants and unborn children, as enemies deserving the worst forms of death. However, this normalization of evil in the comment of an ordinary citizen is quite a harvest of the enemy discourse against the Syrians in Turkey practiced by Turkish elites belonging to a particular political spectrum.

The main objective of this study is to introduce the notion of enemy discourse constructed by elites belonging to the Turkish political opposition (TPO) vis-a-vis the Syrians residing in Turkey. The study introduces an insightful view of the dimensions of adversarial images around the Syrians in Turkey in various forms of the TPO's discourse. Through an in-depth literature review and analysis of primary and secondary sources, the focus will be directed towards the enemy-constructing process per se and as a tool for power and domination. More specifically, the connotation of the dimensions of the constructed enemy images includes 1) linking the representations and language used towards the Syrians in Turkey in the discourses of the opposition elite and the public to the literature that addresses the characteristics of the enemy images, 2) highlighting the political and social backgrounds of the elites who have constructed the enemy images, and 3) demonstrating the political instrumentalization of the constructed enemy images within the dichotomy of discourse and power.

## 1.2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Before moving forward in this study, it is essential to provide a theoretical and conceptual framework for some used terms that may be unfamiliar or have been addressed from one perspective in the Western media or the Western academic community. Over that, to provide a theoretical and conceptual framework for the main topic: the enemy discourse that constructs Syrians as the enemy in Turkey.

The enemy discourse in this study means the discourse that includes the language and representations that construct the enemy images for the Syrians. It is a discourse specifically created to address the Syrians in Turkey and is linked to domestic and external political positions.

The first part of this notion is related to discourse definition, which the study adopts as a multidimensional phenomenon, as Chalaby (1996) puts it, i.e., not only being confined to the linguistic contexts of any of the analyzed discourse units but also paying attention to the socio-historical context of this language. For example, a common phrase in Turkey is as follows: 'If you like Syrians, take one of them and feed him at your home.' The phrase uses the Turkish verb '*besle*,' which means feed, but denotes feeding animals in day-to-day spoken Turkish. Therefore, this phrase, in its social context, refers to the constructed mental pattern that perceives Syrians as animals. Further, the dimensions of utilizing the enemy discourse vary but synergize with general utilization, according to the discourse teller and context. For example, these dimensions in the tweet of an influential figure like Sinan Oğan<sup>2</sup> on the eve of the elections differ from those in a street interview conducted

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<sup>2</sup> Sinan Oğan is a right-wing Turkish academician, politician, and former deputy in the Turkish parliament. There is a separate chapter in this study covering Oğan's discourse.

by a media person like Arif Kocabıyık<sup>3</sup>. Otherwise, the two discourses are synergistic in dehumanizing Syrians in social cognition; therefore, the analysis of the narrator's background and the specific discourse context is an integral part of the discourse analysis.

Moreover, the study adopts Wodak's description of discourse as "anything from a historical monument, a *lieu de memoire*, a policy, a political strategy, narratives in restricted or broad sense of the term, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations, to language per se." (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, & Wodak, 2018). Therefore, in the context of the digital era, any written post on social media, a tweet by image or video, and even a retweet, could be defined as discourse.

The previous approach to defining discourse is relevant to the second part of the enemy discourse notion. This part is concerned with the characteristics of the enemy images represented in the discourse. According to Bahador, "Enemy images are formed by the use of images, metaphors, frames, narratives, myths and ideas, in general, to delegitimize a particular group or individual for a political purpose." (Bahador, 2011, p. 1). The latter definition establishes that the process of construction of enemy images is a discourse with a particular objective. Consequently, the discourse holds the characteristics of its construction and is termed in this study as the enemy discourse.

On the other hand, enemy images are "based on beliefs or hypotheses and become stereotypes when held by an entire group." (ibid). Therefore, the entire group adopts the enemy discourse when addressing the target group. Retroactively, the entire group cognizes the target group by the stereotypes of that discourse when the target group is mentioned.

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<sup>3</sup> Arif Kocabıyık is a Turkish content creator who owns the (İlave Tv) YouTube channel. He is known for his opposition to AKP and his videos mocking Syrians.

Considering the characteristics, "dehumanization and demonization [are] the strongest type of enemy image characterization." (ibid). Further, the six characteristics introduced by Spillmann and Spillmann (1997) are present fully or partially in any process of creating enemy concepts:

1. *Negative anticipation.* All acts of the enemy, in the past, present, and future become attributed to destructive intentions toward one's own group. ("Everything the enemy does is either bad or-when it appears reasonable- stems from dishonest motives"). Whatever the enemy undertakes is meant to harm us.

2. *Putting blame on the enemy.* The enemy is suspected of being the source of any stress factors impinging upon the group. ("The enemy is guilty of causing the existing strain and current negative conditions.")

3. *Identification with evil.* The enemy's value system represents the negation of one's own. ("The enemy embodies the opposite of that which we are and strive for; the enemy wishes to destroy our highest values and must therefore be destroyed.")

4. *Zero-sum thinking.* ("What is good for the enemy is bad for us and *vice versa.*")

5. *Stereotyping and deindividualization.* ("Anyone who belongs to the enemy group is *ipso facto* our enemy.")

6. *Refusal to show empathy.* There is a refusal to empathize with all members of the enemy group in their particular situation. Consideration for one's fellow-being is repressed through strong feelings of opposition. ("There are no things in common binding us with our enemy; there are no facts or information that could alter our perceptions; ...is dangerous, self-destructive, and out of place to have feelings of human consideration and ethical criteria with regard to our enemies")." (Spillmann & Spillmann, 1997, pp. 50-51).

Finally, to ensure continuous mobilization against this enemy, the discourse must always represent this enemy as "a menacing, murderous aggressor, a satanic violator of the moral and conventional standards, an obstacle to the cherished aims and ideals of the nation as a whole and of each constituent part." (Merskin, 2004, p. 162). The preceding characteristics will form the theoretical framework for demonstrating enemy discourse against Syrians in the narrative of the opposition Turkish political elite.

### **1.3. Significance of Study**

The term enemy discourse was coined for a specific purpose in this study. The literature on constructing enemy images deals with those constructed within nations against other nations in war or terrorist attacks. e.g., the images constructed in the US against Japan

and Germany in WWII, the Soviet Union in the Cold War, and Arabs and Muslims after 9/11. In all these cases, the ruling elites and their satellite institutions created the enemy images against states or under the pretext of terrorist entities that actually engaged in one of the conflict forms against the US and the West.

However, in the case of the Syrians in Turkey, enemy images have been created by opposition political elites against a vulnerable human group that does not have a political entity to represent or defend its interests and has not engaged in any conflict against the other side. Besides, this discourse accuses the incumbent party and the Turkish president of bringing the enemy inside the borders and antagonizing the Assad regime, which the discourse describes as the legitimate regime in Syria. Moreover, it calls for returning Syrians to areas under Assad's control, stopping support for the Syrian opposition, and restoring relations with Assad. This discourse portrays the Syrians not only as enemies but rather as *the* enemies: the gravest and proximal danger to the security and life of citizens, the independence, and the territorial integrity of Turkey. In other words, this discourse aims to grab power as well as change Turkey's regional position. Therefore, such discourse is much worse than the racist discourse used against refugees and immigrants in many countries. It is an independent discourse with pre-determined domestic and external political goals. It would also constitute a precursor of violence these elites might commit against millions of the vulnerable if they come to power.

In sum, the results of this study have implications for human rights as well as Turkish foreign and domestic policy and, thus, for the Middle East region.

#### **1.4. Research Questions**

How do the negative concepts about Syrians in Turkey amount to the construction of enemy images?



What is the enemy discourse, and how has it been established? Who are the active promoters of this discourse, and how do they promote it? What is the relationship between this discourse and competition for power?

Do the promoters of the enemy discourse have a political or sectarian affiliation or both? Do they have a specific approach to international politics?

How intense is the use of the enemy discourse? What are its impacts?

## **1.5. Methodology**

Data were retrieved from primary and secondary sources and mainstream and social media. This data was examined through two tracks: the first is based on the academic literature review and the analysis of the findings to explore perceptions of the Turkish public towards Syrians on the one hand and the existence of bias on the other. The latter is the reason for including the relevant literature review as a data source for this study. Much Turkish research that addresses the Syrian issue in Turkey provides data about the construction of enemy images without naming them. On the other hand, the perspective of most of these works is to hold President Erdoğan solely responsible for the negative conditions of the Syrians, especially in pursuing sectarian policies. However, these works ignore the role of the Turkish opposition elites and their sectarian affiliation.

For the second track, CDA was used to analyze the discourse samples, which were extracted from books, video interviews, photos, tweets, articles, etc. The previous materials are discourses according to Wodak's definition of discourse: "anything from a historical monument, a *lieu de memoire*, a policy, a political strategy, narratives in restricted or broad sense of the term, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations, to language per se." (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018). Ruth Wodak is an Australian linguist and one of the CDA pioneers, having authored several solid academic works on CDA. Her

"research agenda focuses on the development of theoretical approaches in discourse studies (combining ethnography, argumentation theory, rhetoric and functional systemic linguistics); gender studies; language and/in politics; prejudice and discrimination." (Kendall, 2007).

Epistemologically, CDA suits this study that adopts the<sup>4</sup> definition of discourse as a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Chalaby, 1996) as, simultaneously, CDA studies demonstrate discourse as "a form of social practice which both constitutes the social world and is constituted by other social practices." (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 61).

In essence, CDA studies and the identification of enemy image-construction characteristics are closely aligned. For example, both approaches look for the (us vs. them) notion instrumentalized by elite discourse to reproduce inequality. According to van Dijk, dominance is "the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality." (van Dijk, 1993, pp. 249-250). The latter definition corresponds to the mobilization notion in enemy-images studies, which, according to Merskin (2004), is implemented by the elites' utilization of propagandist discursive elements to mobilize sentiments. Besides, as Lasswell states, "eminence is the one means of mass mobilizations that is cheaper than violence, bribery, or other possible control techniques." (Merskin, 2004, p. 162.) Moreover, both approaches trace manipulation and representations in the discourse. Therefore, CDA, namely van Dijk's principles of CDA (van Dijk, 1993),

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<sup>4</sup> Jean K. Chalaby is a sociologist whose early research in the 1990s focused on historical and comparative sociology (University of London, 2020). Over the past two decades, he has specialized in global media and communication. Chalaby has authored more than 70 single-author publications (University of London, 2020).

becomes the effective qualitative method to analyze all dimensions of the discourse of the Turkish political elites that construct the Syrians as enemies.

A mixed quantitative/qualitative method was used in the second chapter of this study to determine the extent of the spread and reactions to enemy discourse. A sample was selected from the overall case study. The sample is Ümit Özdağ's discourse, and the overall case is the Turkish political opposition elite's discourse directed against the Syrians. Here, the quantitative research was conducted on the Twitter account of Ümit Özdağ. The search to extract quantitative data (number of tweets, reactions, reactions rate) was done through the Advanced Search feature on Twitter. Further, a direct review of tweets was used one by one to extract data within a specific time frame. The data were analyzed according to two tracks—a content analysis based on keywords and CDA of the content. The extracted data (quantitative and qualitative) have been moved from Twitter to Google Sheets Docs. Calculations and data visualization were performed using the Google Sheets feature. All search criteria and terms are detailed in Chapter 2.

In short, this work is a case study of the discourse of the Turkish political opposition directed against the Syrians, based mainly on the critical discourse analysis methodology. A mixed quantitative/qualitative method was also used in a part of this work.

## **1.6. Background**

In 2021, the number of political parties in Turkey increased to 116 (Daily Sabah, 2021). Otherwise, five major parties dominate the political scene and constitute two main competing political mainstreams with different approaches to the Syrian issue. The first mainstream is represented by the 'People's Alliance' consisting of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), socially conservative and economically liberal (Carnegie Europe, 2015), and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), far-right (ibid). This alliance

supports hosting the refugee Syrians and changing the Assad regime. The three other parties represent the opposition mainstream:

- The Republican People's Party (CHP) is secular social-democratic (ibid).
- The Good Party (IP) is a far-right split from MHP.
- The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) is a leftist party mainly representing Turkey's Kurds (ibid).

The first two parties officially constitute the 'Nation Alliance,' which calls for the expulsion of refugees and restoration of relations with Assad. Otherwise, the HDP has supported Nation Alliance against the People's Alliance but unofficially, due to the sensitivity of supporting a far-right-wing nationalist party. The HDP also shows sympathy for the refugees but calls for the restoration of relations with Assad.

It is worth mentioning that though the newly formed Victory Party (ZP) is not significant in the political arena, it split from IP, which has a prominent role in constructing enemy images. Besides, the party leader, Ümit Özdağ, is one of the prominent figures who built the anti-Syrian identity of the IP before splitting to form his new party, whose main political project is to deport Syrians.

In general, the first political mainstream represents the conservative social strata in Turkey, the majority of which are Sunnis, whether Turks or Kurds. Contrarily, the second represents the secular segments that include Alawites of different ethnicities. Moreover, the electoral fund differences between these mainstreams have been slight, in the general political sense, not in the partisan sense, because the various parties witnessed effective splits. The latter reflects the great polarization in Turkish society and thus the importance of political instrumentalization of subtle social issues such as sectarian affiliation to gain power.

Talking about the influence of sectarian affiliation (to prioritize affiliation to the sect rather than the nation) in Turkish politics is a somehow societal taboo if the affiliation meant is that of the minor sects, the Alawite/Alevi. There is no legal ban on it, but it may lead to the protagonists being branded as biased against minority rights. The latter claim is similar to some journalists' complaints about accusing critics of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories of anti-Semitism (Deutsche Welle, 2018). Therefore, it is difficult to find sources of this type of sectarian affiliation of political elites as well as the sectarian dynamics in Turkish politics. However, the same topic is considerably researched from the perspective of sectarian affiliation being the majority's violation of minority rights. For example, regarding our study topic, much research accuses the first political mainstream, particularly the AKP and President Erdoğan, of following a sectarian approach to the Syrian crisis by hosting millions of Syrian Sunnis and supporting the Sunni Syrian opposition to overthrow the Alawite Assad regime.

On the other hand, there is no term in the English language that conforms to the idiomatic meaning of the Turkish term '*mezhepçi*' or the Arabic term '*أفطوي* Akkallai', referring to individuals/organizations who prioritize the interests of the minor sects over the nation's interests. Therefore, it is worth noting that the sectarian affiliation referred to in this study is that of populations/individuals/organizations affiliated to the Alawite/Alevi/Shiite/Jafari sects and/or favor the interests of the regional regimes that belong to the same sects, namely the Syrian (Assad) regime, and the Iranian (Mullahs) regime. However, it is necessary to establish a conceptual and theoretical framework for the Alawite/Alevi/ Shiite/Jafari notions.

Sunnis and Shiites constitute the two largest sects in Islam. Many smaller sects were born throughout Islamic history from these two divisions, but they remained affiliated with the parent sect. For example, despite substantial differences in belief and rituals between the

Ash'aris and the Salafis, both groups defer to the Sunni sect (Hussain, 2020). Similarly, the Alawites, despite having split from the Shiites, still define themselves within the Shiite mainstream. Moreover, these small sects having similar names differ in beliefs and rituals but have the same political position, with an ambiguous *inter se* distinction. For example, the name of both the Alevi and the Alawite sects is derived from the veneration of Ali Ibn Abi Talib, cousin of the Prophet Muhammad of Islam. The first sect constitutes a minority in Turkey and the second is a (ruling) minority in Syria. In Arabic and Turkish, the two sects have the same name. Though they differ in beliefs and rituals, their general political position supports the Assad regime and the Turkish opposition parties, sympathizes with Iran and Shiite organizations, and is against the Turkish president and the ruling party.

On the other hand, Shiite constitutes a marginal sect inhabiting eastern Turkey near the Iranian borders, known as *Caferi* [Jafari]. Their political position is consistent with that of the Alevi/Alawites. Finally, the general political position of the Sunnis, who constitute most of Syria's population and a large proportion of Turkey's population, could be described as the opposite of the Alevi/Alawites. In this study, the words Alawite/Alawites are used to name both Alevi and Alawites sects when discussing sectarian affiliation.

## 1.7. Literature Review

Most literature reveals a strong anti-Syrian sentiment in Turkey, with different approaches to explain it. Some authors (Erdoğan, 2014) combine Syrians with other immigrants and attribute the antagonism to Turkish society's lack of tolerance towards others in general. In 2019, another study that reviewed 50 academic articles about the Syrians in Turkey found the key topics of these articles to be "the lack of official refugee status of Syrians and the securitization of migration. Access to healthcare, education, and the labor market as well as growing xenophobia among Turkish population" (Akdemir, 2019). Toğral Koca (2016, p.73) concluded that Syrians have been framed as "a societal security issue", by linking them to crime and terrorism or considering them an economic threat to the local labor force (ibid).

Analyzing this problematic situation for about 3.7 million Syrians<sup>5</sup> in Turkey (Refugees Association, 2022), many studies have found that Syrians have become the target of public hate speech: "sarcasm [of Syrians in the social media] is instrumentalized to reproduce superiority over refugees as well as criticizing official policies" (Filibeli & Ertuna, 2021, p. 2036). An analysis of YouTube content about Syrians in Turkey and Poland found that the Syrians were the "victims of fear and danger discourse" (Sayimer, Małgorzata, & Derman, 2017, p. 384). Further, Karakuş and Arun, using CDA to analyze elite and public discourse on the Syrians, concluded as follows:

"...there exists a general anti-Syrian consensus at the grassroots level. According to existing data, competing political party supporters - who exhibit deep polarisation on almost every other issue - seem to unite when it comes to opposition to the permanent settlement of Syrians. Narratives of humiliation and grievance related to the issue of the Syrian population in Turkey posted on Turkish

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<sup>5</sup> This number is according to the official statistics of Syrians registered under the so-called temporary protection. Some unofficial statistics estimate the number of Syrians residing in Turkey at 5 million.

social media accounts illustrate the presence of extremism towards Syrians." (Karakuş Yetkin & Arun, 2020, p. 3).

The consensus against the Syrians that some previous literature concluded has manifested in extreme forms in various sectors, from health services to universities, from public officials to ordinary citizens. For example, Ayşecan Terzioğlu said in her 2016 study (published in 2018) that she "was struck by how common health-care staff's discriminatory and even racist comments against [Syrians] were." (Terzioğlu, 2018, p. 39). The doctors and nurses expressed their unwillingness to see the Syrians and their astonishment at their reproduction rate (Terzioğlu, 2018, pp. 39-41). For instance, a nurse said Syrians reproduce like rabbits (Terzioğlu, 2018, p. 40). Moreover, without naming it, the same study articulated an example of the enemy image that was cognitively stereotyped in the minds of even highly educated people. The researcher quotes a general practitioner as follows:

"When we graduated, we took the Hippocratic oath, so we know that even if a terrorist came to the clinic, I would have to take care of that person. But what would happen if a person from the other side, I mean the enemy of that Syrian terrorist, would find and kill me? Who will protect my safety and health?" (Terzioğlu, 2018, p. 44).

Another study titled "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Insecure Lives in an Environment of Pseudo-Integration" (İçduygu & Millet, 2016) demonstrates how the issue of millions of Syrians was just a negotiating card between Turkey and the EU in the refugee deal of 2016.

On the other hand, studies that mentioned the sectarian affiliation influence on the Syrian issue did so from the perspective of accusing the Turkish government of implementing a sectarian policy and the Alawites' concerns about that policy and the Syrian (Sunni) demographic-changer presence in Turkey. For example, Oktav and Çelikaksoy accused President Erdoğan of adopting a "sectarian policy formula that favors the Sunnis...[that]



created negative feelings among the Alawite people living in Hatay and other southeastern provinces" (Oktav & Çelikaksoy, 2015, p. 10). Another study found that President Erdoğan's response to the CHP's accusations of supporting Sunni jihadist groups against the Alawite population increased the societal division related to the sectarian dimension of the Syrian presence crisis in Turkey (Karakuş Yetkin & Arun, 2020, p. 20). To demonstrate the selectivity approach in the previous finding, it is necessary to mention the context the study articulated for the mutual accusations between Erdoğan and CHP, namely the terrorist bombings in Reyhanli town in 2013. According to the study, the CHP's accusations of Erdoğan came as a reaction to these explosions. However, Reyhanli is a Sunni town, so there was no targeted Alawite population as the CHP accused and the study implicitly agreed. Besides, Erdoğan's response alone was considered to reinforce the societal division and not the CHP accusations. The accusations arose mainly in the context of creating enemy images for the Syrians and holding Erdoğan responsible for supporting this enemy. Further, a study on sarcasm and hate speech toward Syrians indicated the fears of Turkish Alawites that the government might use this large number of (Sunni) Syrians to change the demographic balance in Turkey (Filibeli & Ertuna, 2021, p. 2038). In sum, these studies did not shed light on the role of the sectarian affiliation of the Turkish opposition in adopting a discourse hostile to the Syrians in the country.

Discussing the Turkish partisan debate over Syrians in the literature leads to the literature addressing the Syrian impacts on the elections. For example, a study found "a negative, but insignificant, impact on the incumbent party" (Fisunoğlu & Sert, 2018, p. 298). However, the study is based only on the 2015 elections. Further, Erdoğan, who implicitly describes Syrians as refugees, argued in his landmark 2019 study that "the level of social acceptance in the Turkish community is still extremely high. Therefore, as a whole,

migration has not (and could not have) been in the agenda of the local and general elections in Turkey." (Erdoğan, 2019, p. 16). However, he mentioned a notable "change of attitude" (Erdoğan, 2019, p. 22) of the Turkish President towards the Syrians during the 2018 electoral process, considering the opposition's calls for "[reconciling] with the Syrian Government and sending the Syrians back to Syria." (Erdoğan, 2019, p. 21). Erdoğan (the researcher) referred to Erdoğan (the President)'s statements that he might send the Syrians back to Syria after the elections (Erdoğan, 2019, p. 22). The study also points out that the issue of the Syrians occupied a more significant space in the discussions of the 2019 local elections and the widespread perception that the Syrians were the cause of AKP's failure in Istanbul and Ankara (ibid) for the first time in more than 25 years and the impact of this loss on the Istanbul governor's decision to deport Syrians residing in Istanbul who were not registered or registered in other states. In short, despite the study's claim not to include Syrians in the election agenda, it shows the two-way relation (impact and vulnerability) between Syrians and the Turkish elections (Erdoğan, 2019, pp. 22-24). Finally, a recent research paper (Karataş, 2021), addressing the Syrian issue from a security perspective, indicates that the Syrians were one of the reasons why the AKP lost the 2019 elections in Istanbul and Ankara for the first time in more than 25 years.

In summary, numerous academic works have studied the issue of Syrians in Turkey. The studies are unanimous that negative perceptions and behaviors prevail in the local community towards Syrians, but they differ in their interpretation. On the other hand, the studies that dealt with the sectarian dimension of the issue did so from a single perspective that holds the Turkish government and President responsible for pursuing Sunni sectarian policies. However, they did not address the sectarian dimension of the opposition's anti-

Syrian stance. The studies on the electoral dimension underestimated the issue's impact in general and did not elaborate on its exploitation by the opposition to seize power.

## **CHAPTER 2: Enemy Discourse of Ümit Özdağ**

**Figure 1**

*The poster of the Victory Party*



### **2.1. Background**

Ümit Özdağ is one of the most famous figures targeting Syrians in Turkey. He moved between several right-wing parties before establishing the ZP. Otherwise, although Özdağ belongs to the far right, a special chapter has been devoted to him in this study because he represents an extreme phenomenon whose main manifesto is to antagonize the Syrians and call for their expulsion from Turkey, even if violently. For example, one of the founding slogans of the VP used in the party's advertising posters (Figure 1) was: "The Victory Party will come, and the disguised invaders will leave." (Özdağ, 2021a). The following chapters will demonstrate how the phrase "disguised invaders" means Syrians to the Turkish mindset.

Besides being an elite political and academic figure, Ümit Özdağ has close to a million followers on Twitter (Özdağ, n.d.). This popularity on social media has benefited from targeting Syrians. On the other hand, he has authored an important book titled "Cognition Management" (Özdağ, 2020a), where he theorizes about the role of propaganda in controlling minds. Regardless of his discourse against Syrians, the danger of the Özdağ phenomenon stems from the fact that he is a politician and an academic who calls for the practice of terrorism<sup>6</sup> against those who disagree with him politically. For example, Özdağ paid a visit to felicitate a Turkish citizen who assaulted someone who did not observe a minute's silence on the Atatürk Remembrance Day<sup>7</sup> (Özdağ, 2021b). Özdağ also protested the CHP's attempts to apologize for the Dersim massacre (Özdağ, 2021c), where thousands of Alawite civilians were killed (Ayata & Hakyemez, 2013, p. 135). Özdağ considered the massacre victims a group of traitorous spies who had been rightly

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<sup>6</sup> Based on the definition of terrorism as " the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims (Reitano, Clarke, & Adal, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> A Turkish tradition of observing a minute's silence in memory of Ataturk's death at 09:05 AM every year on the 10th of November.

crushed (ibid). Moreover, Özdağ threatened a Turkish lawmaker of Armenian origin after a debate on Twitter over the 1915- events<sup>8</sup>. The threat was a veiled call for murder, as Özdağ threatened the MP that he must meet the fate of the traitors who stabbed the Turkish army in the back. Though the tweet (Figure 2) has been removed from Twitter, several news sites cited it (İstanbul - BİA Haber Merkezi, 2021).

## Figure 2

*Ümit Özdağ's threatening tweet to a Turkish lawmaker*



There is no academic or journalistic source indicating Özdağ's sectarian affiliation. Ümit's father, the putschist general Muzaffer Özdağ, descended from an immigrant Dagestani family of "*Kumuk-Kıpçak* [Kumyk-Kipchak]" (CNN TÜRK, 2021) origins. Sunnis

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<sup>8</sup> Mass violent incidents occurred in eastern Anatolia between the Ottoman authorities and the Armenians. There are two historical accounts about these events where the two parties (Turks and Armenians) exchange mutual recriminations.

constitute most of this Caucasus Turkic ethnicity (Minority Rights Group International, 2018) with a Shiite minority (Antúnez, 2016). However, the two Özdağs, father and son, have literary works that promote Alawites (e.g., Muzaffer Özdağ's book "The Rise of the Turkish Alawite" (Özdağ, 2002)). Ümit Özdağ has authored several related articles and reports. He defends the Alawites as a genuine component of the nationalist movement and justifies their drift to the left in politics (e.g., "How does an Alawite Turk think? (1) [and] (2)" (Özdağ, 2014a) and (Özdağ, 2014b)).

Ümit Özdağ holds a doctorate in political science. He has founded and headed several research centers and is currently heading the 21st Century Turkey Institute (21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü, n.d.). All these centers adopt an analytical approach close to Moscow's anti-imperialist political narrative. Despite that, Özdağ had worked as an advisor on terrorism affairs at the Economic Committee at NATO headquarters in Brussels (21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü, 2008). He has lectured in many universities worldwide and authored many books. In short, Özdağ is a typical model of the Turkish elite who invests in enemy image construction and manipulates discourse to seize power. The next sub-chapters will demonstrate how Özdağ has become the godfather of the enemy discourse.

## **2.2. The Handbook of the Enemy Discourse**

Özdağ's book "Strategic Engineered Migration"<sup>9</sup> (Özdağ, 2020b) has become the handbook of the anti-Syrian discourse. It is in this book that Özdağ coins his famous slogan about Syrians on the title page: "They did not come here because they have been bombed, they have been bombed to come." (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 2). Here, Özdağ reduces the Syrian war that has resulted in millions of casualties to the issue of a mass migration

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<sup>9</sup> Özdağ borrowed (partially) the name of his book from a study by Kelly M. Greenhill titled "Strategic Engineered Migration as a Weapon of War" (Greenhill, 2008)

conspiracy that will destroy Turkey. In this context, Özdağ considers the migration of Syrians to Turkey the most significant threat facing the Turks in Anatolia for a thousand years (Cover copy, 2020). Özdağ classifies the Syrians as more dangerous than the Crusaders (ibid), the arch enemies in the Turkish mentality.

This book could be considered a 'foundational text' for the enemy discourse because it amasses all enemy representations used today in the Turkish elite's discourse to portray Syrians as a major threat to Turkey's survival. For example, Özdağ essentializes the impossibility of integrating Syrians into Turkish society because they are Arabs who hate Turks and whose individuals "pray" for Turkey to be destroyed (Özdağ, 2020b, pp. 103-105). Özdağ attached the Syrians to all of Turkey's enemies, real and imagined, i.e., their presence in the country is the "trap of imperialism" (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 115) set by the United States, the European Union, Israel, and the PKK (Özdağ, 2020b, pp. 107-113) (the latter has been fighting Turkey for more than 40 years). Moreover, he portrays the Syrians with all the evils a Turkish citizen can imagine. For instance, Syrians are the breeding ground of the mafia and criminal organizations, terrorist groups, hostile intelligence agencies, and the ultra-nationalist Arab organizations (Özdağ, 2020b, pp. 79-84) (the latter are no longer exist in the Arab world).

On the other hand, when addressing the crises that usually accompany the influx of refugees, such as economic pressure and the educational and health infrastructure issues, Özdağ uses the approach of zero-sum thinking, that everything good for the Syrians is bad for the Turks and *vice versa*. For example, the money spent on the Syrians has been borrowed at the expense of the poor Turkish citizen (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 75). Also, "while Turkish parents spend thousands of Liras to get their children into schools, Syrian children enter the same schools without exams." (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 85). Moreover, Özdağ has escalated the zero-sum thinking notion to a new level of conceptualization: the good

is only for them and the bad is only for us. For example, Özdağ quotes the popular claim that Syrians have priority to free health care, as they receive services in public hospitals before Turkish citizens without waiting: "I am Syrian, I do not wait in line." (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 87).

From another perspective, Özdağ attaches importance to refuting any motives for sympathy for this enemy. The book devotes a particular chapter under the title "INTENDED PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATION AND TOLD LIES TO THE TURKISH PEOPLE " (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 89). In this chapter, Özdağ trashes many principles endorsed by human rights organizations, such as rejecting forced deportation and integrating Syrians into Turkish society, *inter alia* (Özdağ, 2020b, pp. 89-106). Otherwise, Özdağ's most dangerous approach in this chapter is his attempt to lift the veil of protection even from Syrian children and women by saying that the common phrase: "we [Turkey] protect women and children fleeing war" (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 89) is a lie. To refute that lie, Özdağ cites statistics proving that the Syrian population in Turkey consists of both males and females (ibid). Then, he articulates an emotional discourse in which most of the characteristics of enemy image construction lie:

"While Turkish [boys] are fighting in Syria, Syrian young are doing bodybuilding in Fatih and smoking hookah in Sultan Ahmet. AKP's policy on Syrian refugees does not only protect women and children. Indirectly, [this policy] protects the Syrian killers, who killed Necati Bağcı in front of his house in Gaziantep. [Bağcı was trying to defend his brother, who had just returned from the military and was beaten by Syrians]. First, they stabbed Necati Bağcı in the shoulder with a Rambo knife and dropped him. Then, they stabbed him in the throat on the ground. Also, [this policy] protects the Syrian scoundrels who killed 16-year-old İsmail Bayar by breaking his ribs and stabbing him in the heart, in the middle of the day in Fatih in Istanbul, only because they claimed that he was laughing at them. Also, [this policy] protects Syrian perverts who rape children and trade drugs and women." (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 90)

In the Turkish text, the description used for the Turkish soldiers is "*çocuklar* [children]" as opposed to Syrian tough young males who are enjoying life in Istanbul. In his objection



to the policy of receiving Syrians, he uses de-individuation by pluralizing the descriptive noun. Here, the Turkish professor parliamentarian does not seek justice for the victims. However, he implicitly seeks revenge from all Syrians who are represented as "Syrian murderers," "Syrian bastards," and "Syrian perverts" who commit heinous crimes, including raping Turks' children and trafficking their women. The latter accusation can mobilize even the most tolerant strata against 'those heartless satanic'.

In all parts, Özdağ's book identifies Syrians with absolute evil. The book absorbs the enemy discourse spread by the elites among the public through all the media during the previous years and reproduces it 'scientifically'. So, the Syrians are now proved to be Turkey's historical enemies, conspiring to "spoil the demographic structure" (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 61) and create "a bloc that will act as a detonator of the civil war" (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 14). Moreover, Syrians have been framed as Turkish people's darkest fears, such as "Syrian occupation" (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 68) and "invasion" (Özdağ, 2020b, pp. 37-50). Eventually, this evil bloc will lead to the disintegration of Turkey by claiming some of its territories (Özdağ, 2020b, p. 73).

### **2.3. The Enemy Discourse against Syrian Children**

Ümit Özdağ has used all the representations that would construct the Syrians as enemies of the Turkish nation. Nevertheless, a scary feature of his discourse lies in his targeting of children. According to Özdağ, Turkey's dilemma with Syrian children is zero-sum because if they enter schools, they will degrade the quality of the educational system; and if they do not, those children will compose the human resources for the Mafia and ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) (Özdağ, 2019). In this context, Özdağ asserts that many Syrian children are already preparing to become members of Mafia and Arab nationalist organizations (Pena, 2022). He proclaims that only stupid Syrian children remained in

Turkey after the "Americans toured in the camps and took the smartest children with their families." (Haber Global, 2022).

**Figure 3**

*Özdağ's tweet on the obese Syrians*



On the other hand, Özdağ immerses Syrian children in the discourse though they have nothing to do with its topic. For example, in 2017, Ümit Özdağ (then the vice-chairman of the IP) tweeted about the obese Syrians (Özdağ, 2017a). This tweet could be considered an example of the "provocative propaganda" (Özdağ, 2020a, p. 37) that Özdağ suggested in his book "Cognition Management" (ibid). Over the photo of three healthy-looking Syrian children before the dining table in the background (Figure 3), Özdağ practiced domination technics to create enemy images through just a few lines:

As an intellectual and academic person who never speaks without sourcing, he highlighted with red the most provocative (statistics) at the bottom: "#Turkey with numbers" (Özdağ, 2017a), and at the top "Nearly 50 thousand Turkish citizens are officially hungry," (ibid). Between these two headers, he utilized the polarization strategy 'us vs. them': ", while 1 million 250 thousand [Turkish citizens] live under the hunger limit, 32.6% of Syrians in Turkey are overweight and 27.7% of them are obese." (ibid). It is noteworthy that Özdağ did not provide a source for his data. At the same time, he introduced this quantitative data in the form of decimal numbers, indicating its accuracy. Moreover, the discourse elements are artfully woven to represent the Syrians (the visual element is of children) as obese, a feature hated by society and linked to laziness, versus starving Turks whose food these Syrians seized. The tweet received 3,510 likes and 2608 total retweets.

## **2.4. The Criteria of the Mixed Quantitative/Qualitative Research on Umit Özdağ's Tweets**

Twitter relies on the following definitions and data to define the engagement rate:

"Engagements: Total number of times a user interacted with a Tweet. Clicks anywhere on the Tweet, including Retweets, replies, follows, likes, links, cards, hashtags, embedded media, username, profile photo, or Tweet expansion" (Twitter Help Center, 2019).

"Engagement rate: Number of engagements divided by impressions" (ibid).

"Impressions: Times a user is served a Tweet in timeline or search results" (ibid).

However, obtaining the previous data requires access to Twitter API Documentation at the Twitter Developer Platform, unavailable for this study. On the other hand, Twitter provides the Advanced Search feature publicly, where three categories are provided for the engagement criteria in the search screen: minimum replies (comments), minimum likes, and minimum retweets, where users can choose minimum engagement/reactions while searching for tweets or leaving it blank to include all tweets. Therefore, in this study, reactions to a tweet mean the total number of comments, retweets, and likes made over that tweet. Consequently, the total number of reactions to tweets in a time frame is the sum of all reactions to a tweet in the same time frame. The rate of the reactions per tweet in a time frame is the total number of reactions divided by the number of tweets in the same time frame.

According to the latter definitions, the study compares data of the Twitter account (using certain words) between different periods. This method differs from that adopted by Twitter and other media analysis platforms, which depend on knowing impressions or the number of followers of an account during the research time frame. The latter data requires accessing Twitter historical data, which is not officially available except through the Twitter Developer Platform. However, the quality of Twitter Advanced Search for words in Turkish may affect the accuracy of the results. For example, while the searched words are (*Suriye, Suriyeli, Suriyeliler* [Syria, Syrian, Syrians]), the tweets with the word

(*Suriyelilere* [to Syrians]) will not appear in the results, though it is relevant to the topic. Further, as the Turkish letter (*ı*) is sometimes used mistakenly instead of the letter (*i*)<sup>10</sup>, many related tweets may not appear in the results. To expand the search limits in line with the study objective, I conducted the search process as follows:

First, using Twitter's advanced search feature, I searched for the following words (*Suriye*, *Suriyeli*, *Suriyeliler* [Syria, Syrian, Syrians]). The search was conducted over Ümit Özdağ's account since the account was created in November 2010 until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021. Özdağ started tweeting in 2011; therefore, the year 2010 is not shown in the results. Each year within the previous time frame was searched separately. The search criteria were:

Regarding Words:

Any of the words "*Suriye*" or "*Suriyeli*" or "*Suriyeliler*"

Languages: Turkish

All other search option spaces are blank

Regarding Accounts:

From these accounts: @umitozdog

All other search option spaces are blank

Regarding Filters:

The search included All tweets (tweets, retweets, replies, with and without links).

Engagement:

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<sup>10</sup> This error occurs when writing these letters in the lower case.

No minimum engagement rate was selected, i.e., tweets with all engagement rates were included in the search. I also filtered the results according to keywords, to determine the number of tweets that contained the word (*Suriye* [Syria]) and those that contained the two words (*Suriyeli*, *Suriyeliler* [Syrian, Syrians]). On the other hand, I reviewed the rest of the tweets from November 2010 until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011 (without the search Words), using the same previous criteria except that the words *Suriye*, *Suriyeli*, and *Suriyeliler* were submitted in the ‘None of these words’ space, and the ‘Any of these words’ space was left blank.

Second, I reviewed all the tweets generated by the previous search (with keywords)<sup>11</sup> to find the content of enemy discourse (representations of enemy image). I found that Ümit Özdağ started tweeting this content in 2018. Therefore, I analyzed the entire content of these tweets in the years 2018-2019-2020-2021, that is, the tweet with its photos, videos, and links. Then, the tweets were classified into two groups: (Positive) with enemy discourse content and (Negative) without enemy discourse content. Then, I determined the proportion of each from the total number of tweets resulting from the advanced search and rates of reaction for each group<sup>12</sup>.

Third, regardless of the previous results from Twitter Advanced Search, I chose the year 2021 to review all Ümit Özdağ’s tweets one by one. I analyzed the entire content of the tweets, that is, the tweet with its photos, videos and links. The tweets were classified into two groups: the first named Syrians, with content targeting Syrians, whether with enemy

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<sup>11</sup> The term ‘with Keywords’ means that a tweet contains at least one of the words searched for (*Suriye*, *Suriyeli*, *Suriyeliler* [Syria, Syrian, Syrians]).

<sup>12</sup> The 2021 two groups (positive and negative) contain not only the data of tweets extracted using Twitter Advanced Search, with keywords, and then analyze the tweets’ content, but also the data of tweets targeting Syrians (both positive and negative) which have been added. This added data was recorded by reviewing all the 2021 tweets one by one.

discourse (Positive) or without (Negative). This second group was named ‘Others’, consisting of all other tweets.

Finally, data were recorded manually during the data collection period 9-17 March 2022. Data were transferred manually from Twitter to Google Sheets. The arithmetical operations (sum, division) were performed on the data using the formula feature in Google Sheets. The data was visualized by the Chart feature in Google Sheets. The term ‘with Keywords’ in the results means that a tweet contains at least one of the Words searched (*Suriye, Suriyeli, Suriyeliler* [Syria, Syrian, Syrians]). The data is available at request.

The limitation of this research is as follows. Only for 2021 was the content of all Umit Özdağ’s tweets reviewed. Between 2011-2020, the content of all tweets generated by the search has been reviewed against the above criteria only. In other words, there may be tweets with relevant content between 2011-2020 not included in this study. Therefore, the analysis based on the quantitative data may not include all related tweets in the entire time frame. However, it is indicative of the intensity and spread of enemy discourse in these tweets and the rates of interaction it achieves.

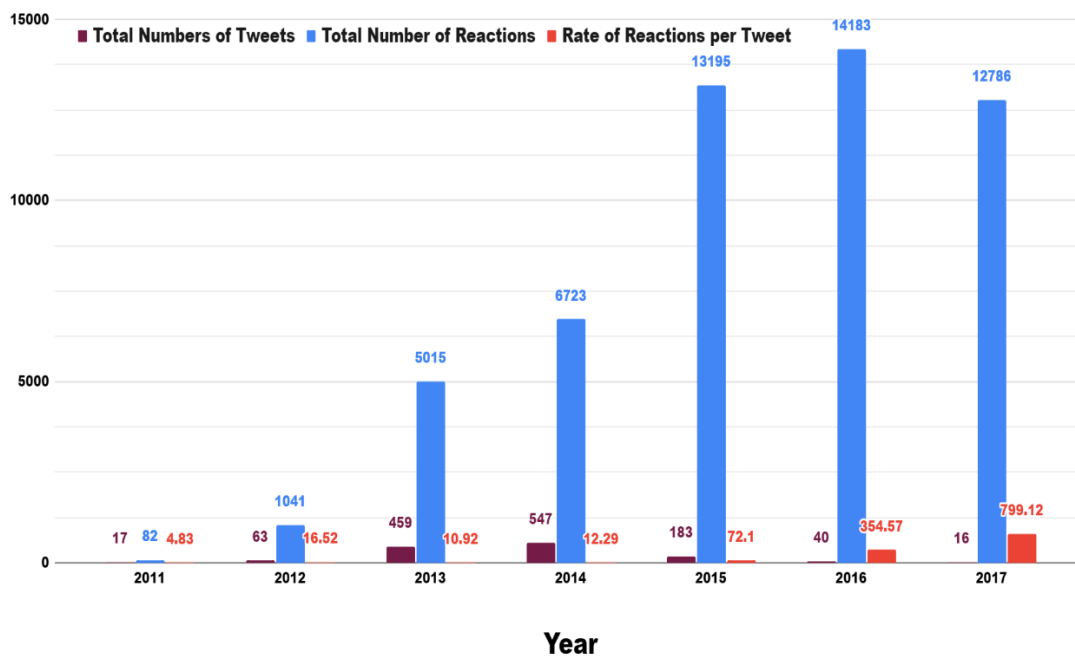
## **2.5. Findings and Analysis of the Mixed Quantitative/Qualitative Research**

Overall, two sub-timeframes could be defined within the entire time frame of data analysis. The limit between the two frames was in 2018 when Özdağ started tweeting with enemy discourse. However, the data in both frames demonstrate that tweets targeting Syrians received higher rates of reactions than others.

The year 2015 saw a significant jump in the total number of reactions, while the total number of tweets decreased (Figure 4), thus increasing the rate of reactions per tweet. However, while this rate did not exceed the 100 reactions barrier, it was almost ten times its counterpart of all Özdağ's tweets with and without keywords in 2011 (Table 1). On the other hand, 2015 was a general election year where Özdağ was still in the ranks of the MHP, which was then in the Turkish opposition camp. However, even before its alliance with the incumbent party, this right-wing party did not use harsh language against the Syrians. The latter may explain the absence of Özdağ's attack on the Syrians during that period.

Figure 4

*2011-2017 Data (All Keywords)*



(Source: Twitter advanced search feature. Author, 2022)



2016 was a hot year for Ümit Özdağ. He disliked his party's leadership over the party's agreement with President Erdoğan's proposed constitutional amendments. This dispute ended with the removal of Özdağ from the MHP (Deutsche Welle, 2016), which allied later with the president's party. In that year, the number of tweets related to the Syrians decreased, compared to a noticeable jump in the reaction rate for the tweet (Figure 4). The latter trend in 2017 was close to that of 2016 (Figure 4). Otherwise, between 2011 and 2017, there were noticeable differences in the reaction rates between the tweets that addressed Syria and those targeting Syrians. The latter's rates were approximately 15 times the former (Figure 5).

Table 1

*All Tweets by Ümit Özdağ in 2011*

	Total Number of Tweets	Percentage of Total Tweets	Total Number of Reactions	Percentage of Total Reactions	Rate of Reactions per Tweet
With Keywords	896	98.1%	7164	98.9%	7.99
Without Keywords	17	1.9%	82	1.1%	4.82

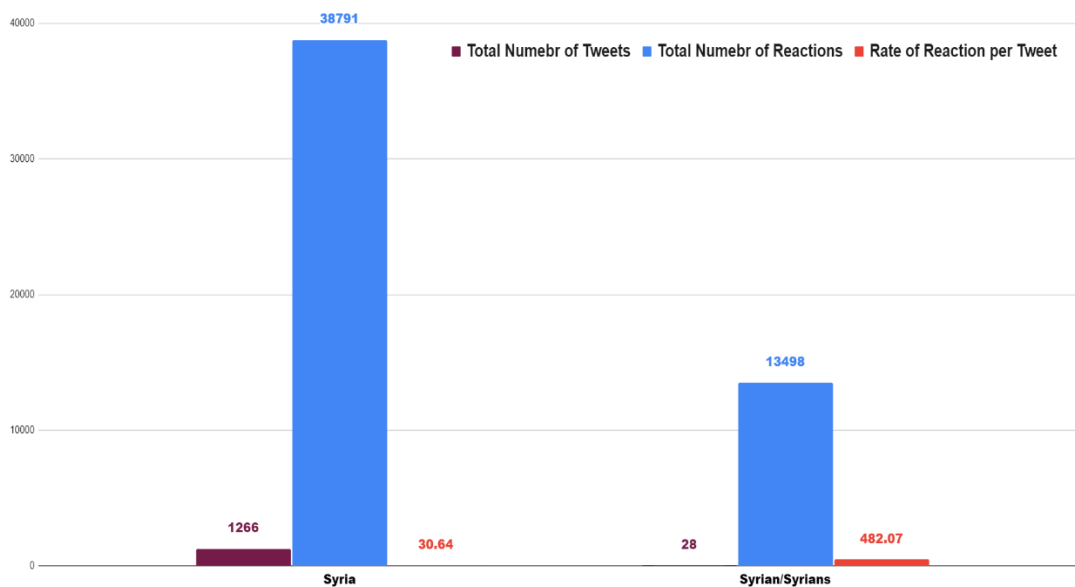
(Source: Twitter advanced search feature. Author, 2022)

*Note.* The only keyword that appeared in the results is (Suriye [Syria]). Özdağ did not tweet about the Syrians in 2011. All the tweets included general articles about Syria.

Among the tweets shown in the search criteria, the first use of enemy discourse came in a promotional video for the IP that Özdağ joined. The tweet was published on June 9, 2018 (Özdağ, 2017b), and included visual content portraying Syrian men turning to mafia networks and Syrian women into the prostitution business, after moving to Turkey. Except for 2018, tweets containing enemy discourse comprised most of the tweets in all other years (Figure 6) and (Figure 7). Ümit Özdağ had the highest number of tweets containing enemy discourse in 2021 (Figure 6). Otherwise, enemy discourse tweets in 2020 accounted for the largest percentage of total tweets in a single year (Figure 7).

Figure 5

*Syria Data vs. Syrian/Syrians Data between 2011-2017*



(Source: Twitter advanced search feature. Author, 2022)

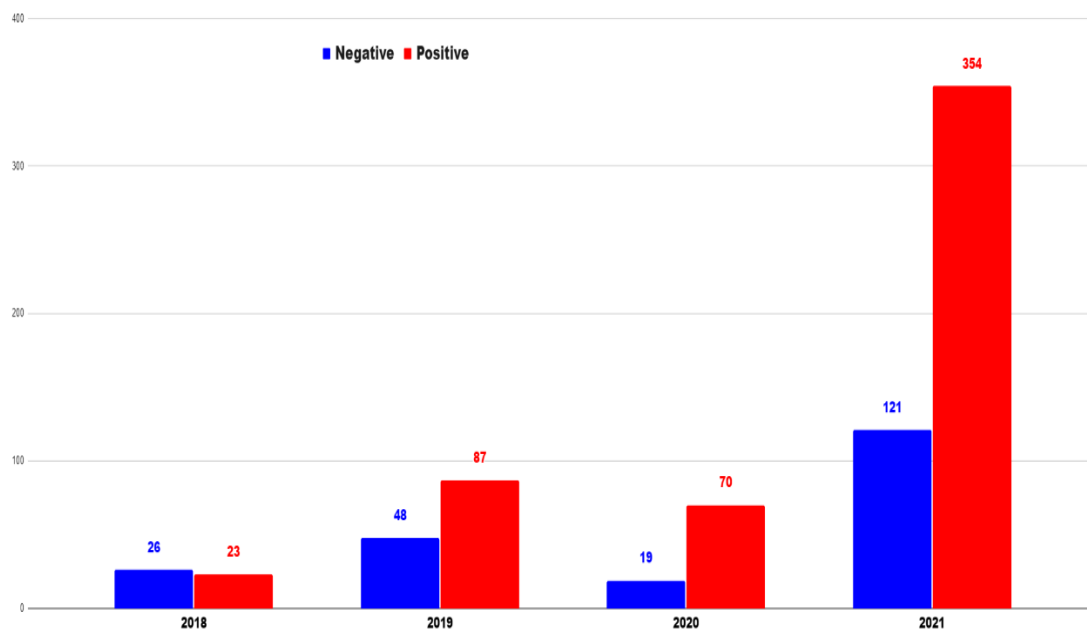
The 2021 data give a clearer idea of targeting Syrians and, particularly, the weight of the enemy discourse in Ümit Özdağ's tweets. The year was characterized by critical events in Turkey (Cookman, 2022) like forest fires, the deterioration of the TL exchange rate, and unprecedented inflation rates (ibid). Moreover, that year was special for Özdağ, with his founding a new party after he resigned from the IP. However, Özdağ's tweets targeting

Syrians in 2021 constituted 38% of the total tweets that addressed many other topics in that busy year (Figure 8). Finally, Özdağ's tweets against the Syrians got a higher reaction rate than the others (Table 2).

The quantitative/qualitative analysis of Ümit Özdağ's discourse shows the gravity of this discourse in terms of its intense presence within the overcrowded local agenda. In other words, the analysis demonstrates how this discourse has been prioritized over other problems and issues of great importance.

Figure 6

Negative vs. Positive between 2018-2021

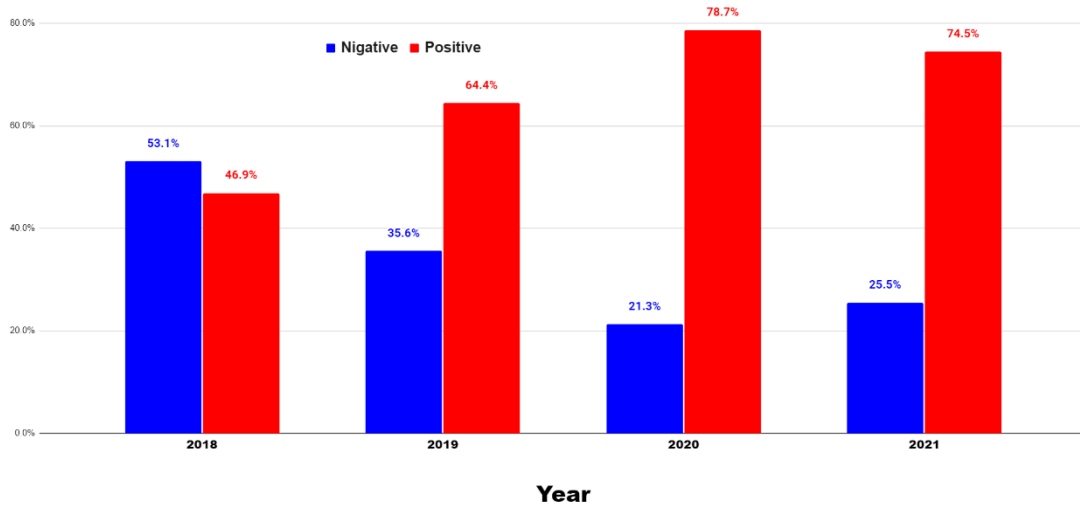


(Source: Twitter advanced search feature. Author, 2022)

*Note.* This Figure illustrates the number of tweets for each group out of the total number of tweets according to the search criteria.

Figure 7

Negative vs. Positive (Percentage) between 2018-2021

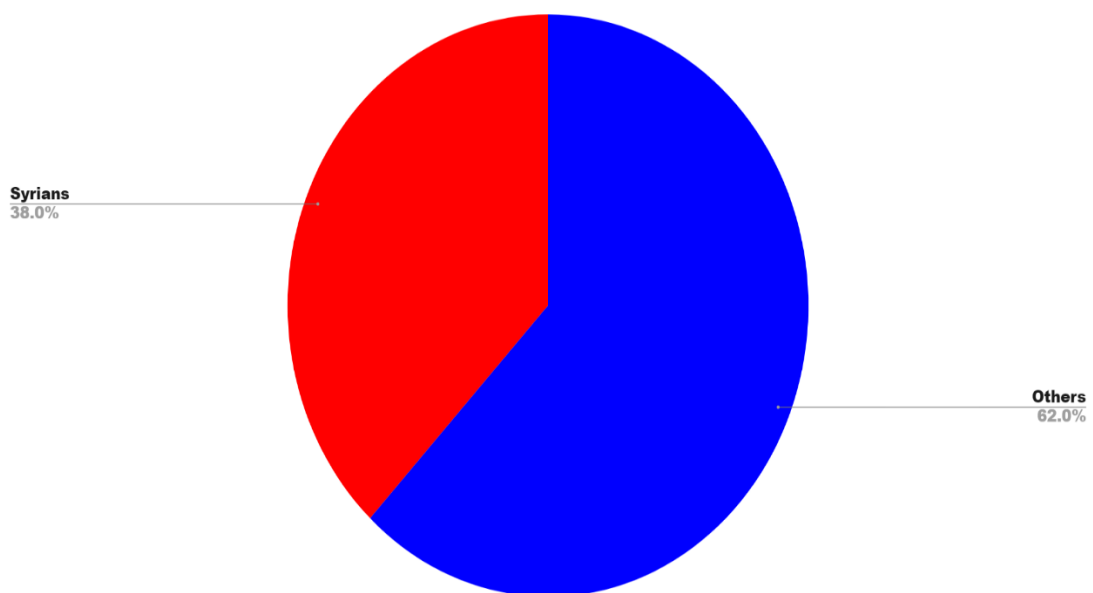


(Source: Twitter advanced search feature. Author, 2022)

*Note.* This Figure illustrates the percentage of tweets for each group out of the total number of tweets according to the search criteria.

Figure 8

*Syrians vs. Other Topics in Ümit Özdağ's Tweets in 2021*



(Source: Twitter advanced search feature. Author, 2022)

Table 2

*All Tweets by Ümit Özdağ in 2021*

	Total Number of Tweets	Total Number of Reactions	Rate of Reactions per Tweet
Others	774	1680757	2171.52
Syrians	475	1791154	3770.85

(Source: Twitter advanced search feature. Author, 2022)

## **CHAPTER 3: Enemy Discourse of Sinan Oğan**

### **3.1. Background**

Sinan Oğan is a Turkish Azeri-Shiite politician and a former deputy in the Turkish parliament for the right-wing MHP. He has wide popularity in the political and academic communities, as well as the public space. For example, he was selected as the Parliamentarian of the Year in 2011 (Biyografi, n.d.); his Twitter account has more than 1.1 million followers. In 2016, he ran alongside three other politicians in the MHP leadership elections against the party's historical head Devlet Bahçeli (Biyografi, 2016). Oğan lost this election and was expelled from the party in 2017 due to his opposition to the rapprochement with the incumbent AKP. It is noteworthy that the other three politicians, Meral Akşener, Koray Aydın, and Ümit Özdağ later separated from the MHP to form the İP before Özdağ defected again from this party to form the VP. Both new parties opposed to the incumbent party put the expulsion of the Syrians and the restoration of relations with the Assad regime at the top of their political and media agendas. Otherwise, Sinan Oğan has not joined any of these new parties and constantly defines himself as the son of the MHP. Sinan Oğan holds a doctorate in international relations from a Russian university (Biyografi, n.d.). He promotes the existence of an imperialist conspiracy in the world in general and over Eurasia in particular i.e., he adopts Moscow's

narrative in interpreting international relations. For example, in the preface to his book *The Orange Revolutions*, Oğan says that his book 'decodes' the new world order that seeks hegemony in Eurasia and the Middle East through the figures of this system represented by George Soros, the neo-conservatives, the George W. Bush administration and its global allies (Oğan, 2006). The defining characteristic of Sinan Oğan's political discourse and his like-minded politicians is its ability to blend a populist spectrum of contradictory ideologies, extending the range of manipulation and domination tactics to a broader audience. For example, although he is a far-right nationalist, Oğan, with his anti-imperialist discourse, can penetrate the most extreme segments of the Turkish left.

That said, Sinan Oğan is one of the most influential founders of the enemy discourse against the Syrians in Turkey. Besides his distinguished political and academic reputation, he is a figure who may change the political balance in Turkey if he returns to the leadership of the MHP, the only current ally that guarantees a parliamentary majority for the AKP. Although he was expelled several years ago from the party, some right-wing websites still define him as the candidate for the presidency of the MHP. Oğan's ambition to return and lead the MHP may explain his not joining one of the new right-wing parties that split from MHP and his constant assertion that he is still one of the party's members.

Before we analyze Oğan's discourse samples, it is worth recalling that the aforementioned brief biography provides, besides being part of the context of the discourse phenomenon, a background on Oğan's enacting of social power (as a parliamentarian, intellectual, and representative of Turkish nationalist values) to utilize the enemy discourse as a domination discourse.

### **3.2. The Discourse**

Oğan's contributions to constructing the Syrians as enemies began in 2017 through his television appearances and extensive Twitter activity. Oğan used language and representations that combined all characteristics of the enemy stereotype.

The sample of Sinan Oğan's discourse is extracted from his participation in the (*Haber Merkezi* [News Center]) program on the right-wing channel KRT TV. This interview was removed from YouTube, but its Syrian-related part made the headlines of many articles published in various Turkish media on March 3, 2017. However, during the search, this part of the interview was found still published on two accounts on the Facebook and Myspace platforms. The text of the interview was extracted from the article published in *Hürriyet* newspaper on March 3, 2017:

"Even if you (the president) give them citizenship, we will send them all back, this cannot be allowed. Wherever you look in Turkey, it is no longer possible to cross because of the many refugees. Turkey's labor and money cannot be squandered like this. You are not feeding Syrians using your father's money but using this (Turkish) nation's money. He (a Syrian) goes and becomes a suicide bomber who kills our people. He (a Syrian) goes to the beach to stare at [women and innocent girl children's sensitive zones]. Our people cannot roam freely in the streets. We will not allow this. What do the refugees on the beach do? The refugees [must] stay in the camps. The [Turkish soldiers] [must] not fight there (in Syria). You [must] take all (Syrians) who can bear arms to the fight. You [can] not give them (the Syrians) \$25 billion to buy sunscreen or undergo IVF. While [my student] pays for education, the Syrians study for free... Turkey has been turned into a vast refugee warehouse. Tomorrow (in the future), there is a 100% chance that each one of them will be a suicide bomber. Tomorrow (in the future), there is a 100% chance that each one of them will be a pickpocket, a thief, a rapist, or a murderer. Are we forced to? Are we forced to shelter so many thieves, so many ISIS members? Am I forced to feed the Syrians who go to the beaches and lust (for) Turkish women here, bro? They (the Syrians) are incompetent to defend their country and fled the war to (arrive) here; therefore, our people cannot walk around comfortably on the streets. In Turkey, there are at least 1 million Syrians capable of fighting. The Turkish soldiers are being martyred in Al-Bab (Syrian town) while the Syrians smoke hookahs everywhere and insult women in the streets; this cannot be allowed." (Hürriyet, 2017).

The manipulation strategy here is manifested by including in the discourse a massive number of generalized presumptions to portray every Syrian as an enemy who poses a constant threat and lurks among us. For example, every Syrian individual is confirmed to

be a suicide bomber, pickpocket, thief, rapist, or murderer. Therefore, we cannot roam our streets. Moreover, the inclusion of female sexual abuse occupied an essential space in Oğan's discourse. For example, in addition to all Syrians being potential rapists, they go to the beach to stare at the women. To represent the latter notion, Oğan chose specific Turkish colloquial expressions. For example, the literal translation of "*çoluğun çocuğun namusuna göz dikiyor*" is 'they are gazing at the honor of women and children'. The translation of the syntax (*çoluk çocuk*) is 'offspring or wife and children'. The translation of the word '*namus*' is 'honor'. Otherwise, the combined meaning of the previous phrase would become 'staring at the erotic zones of women and young girls'. One of the connotations of the word '*namus*' in Turkish colloquialism is chastity, the sexual honor of women in particular, which occupies greater importance than men's chastity in the Middle East and Turkey. Chastity in this phrase represents the erotic areas of females that Syrians violate. In short, this phrase constitutes one of the severe forms of provocation and manipulation of the observer's mind to create a cognitive model about the foreign Syrian (them) as violators of the honor of (our) Turkish females, adults, and children alike. Recalling child sexual abuse is to stress that every single Syrian is "a menacing, murderous aggressor, a satanic violator of the moral and conventional standards." (Merskin, 2004, p. 162). Oğan used a gruesome slang syntax besides animalizing the Syrians when he mentioned sexual abuse again in his discourse. When Oğan wondered whether we are forced to feed the Syrians who lust for Turkish women on the beach, he used the slang expression (*kadınlarını dikizleyen*) to describe Syrians, which depicts men who peep lustfully at women or secretly photograph them on beaches and use the images later to satisfy their sexual desires. Here, Oğan used the verb *besle*, which means to feed, but denotes feeding animals in the spoken Turkish language.



On the other hand, and within the manipulation discourse, the discourse contains contradictory representations of the Syrians, used to diversify the cognitive models of the enemy images. Thus, they fit to be constructed in the minds of the broadest segment of the public, i.e., while the image of the aggressive Syrian (analyzed above, ISIS) frightens large sectors of Turkish society in general and the Turkish left grassroots in particular, the representation of the coward Syrian (fled the war and unable to defend their country) invokes a model of national superiority where the brave Turks fought for their country's independence and are fighting (On behalf of the Syrians in Syria). Here too is displayed the characteristic of zero-sum thinking: if the Syrian fights, he is an ISIS terrorist, and if he does not, he is a coward occupying our streets and scrounging our money. In sum, all Syrians' choices are ultimately against our interests.

## **CHAPTER 4: Enemy Discourse of Turkish Left-Wing**

### **4.1. Sectarian Affiliation of the Republican People's Party CHP**

The CHP is the main opposition party in the country and has a special symbolism, as it was established by the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The CHP adopts six main principles: Republicanism, Populism, Nationalism, Secularism, Statism, and Revolutionism (CHP, n.d.). The party defines its ideology with the concept of "democratic left." (ibid). It is also a member of "the Socialist International and the European Socialists Party" (ibid). Within this ideology, the party emphasizes the unity of the Turkish nation and rejects the "reactionary mentality such as dervish lodges and sects" (ibid). However, CHP ruled as "an authoritarian single-party regime until the transition to a multiparty system in 1945" (Ayata & Hakyemez, 2013). On the other hand, CHP witnessed a slow transformation process over several decades leading to a similar outcome to the transformation that happened in another 'secular nationalist' party in the middle of the last century, but in Syria, when Baath Party became the Alawites' party. Later, the 'socialist' Baath endowed a sectarian totalitarian regime with legitimacy (Devlin, 1991).

CHP's being the Alawites' party might seem paradoxical not only due to its professed ideology but because of the CHP's bloody history with this sect. The only period in the Turkish republic's history where Alawites were not a target of mass sectarian violence is the AKP's period. Nevertheless, CHP, which "ordered and administered the Dersim Genocide" (Ayata & Hakyemez, 2013, p. 136), where thousands of local Alawites were murdered by the army (Ayata & Hakyemez, 2013, p. 135), is the party that enjoys the support of the majority of Alawites and the Alawite elite has started to occupy its leadership positions. Some researchers (Yılmaz, 2020; Oktay, 2017) and Alawite elite

figures (Balkız, 2015) attribute this phenomenon to Alawites' preference for the CHP's secularism over a conservative party like AKP. And so in 2010, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu became the first Alawite CHP leader (Yılmaz, 2020) after "a sex scandal led to his predecessor's resignation" (Arsu, 2010).

Moreover, in 2016, "42 of the 52 members of the party assembly [were] Alawites" (Yeni Soluk, 2016). This shift prompted some prominent party members to resign and speak publicly about the party's new sectarian identity. For example, Ihsan Özkes, a former parliamentarian/ party board member, claimed that Alawites controlled CHP and accused the party leader of being "sectarian from the very beginning" (Güneş, 2016). Özkes also denounced a famous tweet by a prominent party member during the increased tension between Iran and Turkey in 2015 over Syria, who said, "If Iran and Turkey come face to face, I will be on Iran's side" (ibid). Moreover, Rabia Burçe Tunga, a descendant of one of the party's founding secular families, said that the party had turned into an "Alawite association" (Gündoğdu, 2015).

#### **4.2. Enemy Discourse of the CHP's Leadership**

Recalling what was mentioned in the literature review about the concerns of the Turkish Alawites related to the Syrian crisis, the CHP's sectarian bonding with Alawites, whether ideological or clientelistic, is an essential part of analyzing the CHP's elite discourse about the Syrian issue and Syrians in Turkey. The party, known in the West as a secular, social, and democratic party, has two stated goals in its policy towards Syria: first, to expel the Syrians to their country (Hürriyet Daily News, 2022); second, rebuild relations with Assad (Duran, 2019). Besides, the CHP has a controversial stance toward the Turkish government's repeated demand to establish a safe zone in northern Syria to get rid of the burden of Syrians and urge them to return to their country— a request rejected by Russia,

Iran, and the Assad regime. While the CHP has repeatedly called for the Syrians to be expelled from Turkey, the party has refused to establish a safe zone in northern Syria. For example, at a conference organized by the party on Syria, CHP vice-chairman Ünal Çeviköz said, "How will [Turkey] guarantee the safety of these people without a meeting with the Syrian administration [Assad regime]? Without that, the safe zone plan that will be implemented will divide Syria" (Yeniakit, 2019). The logic of Çeviköz's discourse completely coincides with the argument of Russia-Iran-Assad rejecting the safe zone. In other words, on the Syrian issue, the CHP speaks for Moscow in Turkey.

In this context, it is noteworthy that the CHP has adopted the enemy discourse early towards both the civil Syrians who moved to Turkey and the Syrian military opposition groups that Ankara supports. The sharpness of this discourse often rises during the military operations these groups wage alongside the Turkish army in Syria. For example, on the 24th of August 2016, the Turkish army launched Operation Euphrates Shield (Seren, Yeşiltaş, & Özçelik, 2017) against the Islamic State terror organization (ISIS) in northern Syria, jointly with Syrian opposition groups. A week after, CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu held a closed conference of the party's central executive committee. Kılıçdaroğlu's statements during this conference were leaked by the press article "The expected from CHP" by Melih Aşık, who quoted Kılıçdaroğlu: "It is unacceptable for the Turkish army to form an alliance with an unspecified army. Turkish soldiers have the ability to enter Jarablus on their own. It is unacceptable for the Turkish army to fall under the command of a gang and remain in its shadow." (Aşık, 2016).

Every detail of Kılıçdaroğlu's statement and its contexts are a practice of the discourse power to demonize the target Syrian groups. Regarding context: the reporting journalist is a famous columnist who has been awarded several times by media close to the CHP; A two-and-a-half-hour closed meeting discussed only two topics, about the Syrians and

the rejection of a legal amendment that allowed policewomen to wear the Islamic headscarf. This pairing is of symbolic significance, as the Islamic headscarf represents, according to CHP, a violation of secularism, an essential value of the Turkish Republic.

Moving to the structure of the discourse, Kılıçdaroğlu used the Turkish word *çete* [gang] which represents in the Turkish spoken language a mercenary gang that engages in various criminal acts and seeks to control the area in which it operates. Therefore, the stigmatization of the Turkish army as operating "by order and under the shadow" of this gang (the enemy) serves the purpose of the populist discourse seeking power by transforming the demands into a collective identity against the leading cause of this shame: the AKP. In other words, the discourse combines a demand that exploits enemy representations with the violation of the secular principles represented by the Islamic headscarf to produce a mental model where Syrians are associated with reactionaries and the ruling party that must be defeated. On the other hand, the discourse was introduced to the public as a leak to spare Kılıçdaroğlu embarrassment if he had insulted the Turkish army, the symbol of nationalism, by a direct statement. Besides, it saved him from the direct provocation of the conservatives, the strata he has spent many years apologizing for to win their votes.

### **4.3. Enemy Discourse of other CHP's Elites**

The CHP's elite has professionally adopted enemy discourse to invest various enemy images in creating the anti-Syrian mental models, whatever the knowledge background of the recipient's cognitive process. For example, Eren Erdem, to whom is attributed the controversial tweet on Iran, commented on Operation Olive Branch during an interview

on Halk TV: "The real treason is sending the TSK<sup>13</sup> to an operation with a terrorist organization like the ÖSO<sup>14</sup>. Who is the ÖSO, who is this herd of marauders, who is this herd of dogs? Who fed them? Who made these?" (Beyazgazete, 2018). In Erdem's discourse, the Syrians are not only terrorists and marauders but were also represented using the Turkish word *it* [dog]. In Turkish, both words '*it*' and '*köpek*' mean dog. However, while '*köpek*' is used to name dogs as animals or pets, '*it*' in spoken language is used as an adjective that dehumanizes the portrayed person/group and depicts the worst characteristics. Therefore, Syrians here are represented as a worthless immoral herd of savage creatures that traitors (the AKP) organized, fed, and put beside the Turkish forces on the battlefield. This discourse is capable of affecting the cognitive process in all Turkish strata.

Although the Enemy Discourse of the CHP's elite focuses on Anti-Assad Syrian groups, it addresses all Syrians as a source of latent danger. For example, the *Sözcü* newspaper carried on its front page the headline: "A terrifying claim: Syrian refugees brought eight microbes that had been under control and increased AIDS cases" (Hrant Dink Foundation, 2017). The newspaper quoted the details from Fikri Seğlar, the former Minister of Culture and Tourism and the deputy of CHP for Mersin at that time, that "malaria, oriental boil, polio, tuberculosis, measles, typhoid and brucella diseases [that] have not been seen in Turkey for a long time [as well as] AIDS resurfaced with the Syrians" (Toprak, 2017). Moreover, Seğlar attributed AIDS increase to Syrian women's prostitution:

"Some of the women among the refugees who were taken to the country without adequate control and entered illegally work in nightclubs and pavilions without supervision. It is claimed that refugee women falling into the hands of prostitution gangs cause an increase in AIDS cases in Mersin. This situation makes our

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<sup>13</sup> Turkish Armed Forces.

<sup>14</sup> Syrian Free Army: A loose title that includes a large group of armed militias fighting the Assad regime.

citizens uneasy. Refugees not only disrupt the socio-economic internal dynamics of the society but also deeply shake the public health" (ibid).

Şağlar's discourse combines all the features of the enemy discourse that make every Syrian, male or female, child or adult, a threat to Turkish society. Besides, Sözcü, the Left-wing opposition newspaper, introduced the discourse in a way that reinforced the representations: the discourse was prefaced by a banner on the first page (Hrant Dink Foundation, 2017), where the word "Syrian" was written in capital letters under the title "terrifying claim" and before the word "microbes," which was used to denote diseases; The claimant is an elite intellectual; in the allegation, the Syrians are portrayed as the epidemics that Turkey had eliminated; above that, Syrian women who engage in rampant prostitution have brought the scourge of AIDS; Then it targeted the recipient's cognitive that if Syrians spoiling social and economic dynamics is not enough for you, they also pose a threat to your life and those of your family.

## **CHAPTER 5: Enemy Discourse Before and After Elections**

### **5.1. The Case of Tanju Özcan**

Tanju Özcan's discourse was selected for the following considerations: Özcan is a long-standing member of the CHP. In 2009, he ran for the first tenure in the party's name for the mayor of Bolu but lost the election. He was later elected as a representative of the Bolu province several times in the Turkish National Assembly. He chose to resign from the Assembly after his election as Bolu mayor in 2019, as Turkish law does not allow the two positions to be combined. Moreover, the enemy discourse was the essential element of Özcan's election campaign when he won the same position, he had previously lost. His discourse before and after the election results is an example of investing the enemy discourse in changing electoral behavior in Turkey. On the other hand, his practices after the elections could indicate the opposition's approach toward Syrians if it assumed power.

### **5.2. Pre-election Discourse:**

As mentioned earlier, Özcan ran for the mayor of Bolu, despite being a deputy in the Turkish National Assembly. A week before the elections, Özcan released his final campaign video, posted on his Facebook and Twitter accounts on March 22 and 23, respectively (Özcan, 2019a) & (Özcan, 2019b). Views on the two platforms alone exceeded 625,000. Likes on Facebook exceeded 10,000, and 2,800 on Twitter (ibid). However, the reactions to the video on other social media pages and accounts go beyond those of Özcan's accounts. For example, the video has more than 800,000 views on the "Alevi Türk [ Alawite Turks]" Facebook page, 8400 likes, and 1400 comments (Alevi Türk, 2019). Özcan's discourse was extracted from the video:



"Yes, there are only eight days left until the elections, and today I would like to answer one of the questions that have been persistently put to me. What will happen to the Syrians? I swear that I am saying it without any overthinking: First, I will not give a single penny of aid to any Syrian from a municipal budget. Second, I will not give any Syrian a license to open a business because I do not want them to settle in Bolu and stay in Turkey.

Why will I not do that? In Yukarısoku (a neighborhood in Bolu), while an (my) old aunt is concerned about selling oil and yogurt on the sidewalk at -10 degrees to earn 10 Liras for her livelihood, the healthy, energetic, and strong Syrians come to the bank to get money in front of her. They exit the bank, counting the money, and my old aunt is concerned about earning 10 Liras for her livelihood. I cannot digest this; I do not feel comfortable with it, I cannot accept it.

Also, (my) citizen should know that these Syrians receive help not only from the municipality but also from social services, social assistance, and the Red Crescent. In our President's statement, he says that the money spent on Syrians has exceeded 37 billion dollars. In other words, he has given our 200 quadrillion Liras more than enough sustenance for our women and children. I think this hospitality has become more than enough." (Özcan, 2019a).

Before analyzing the linguistic and semantic structure of Özcan's discourse, it is necessary to refer to the audio-visual effects in the accompanying video. Özcan was talking as he walked down a straight path through a park, showing women strolling with their children, enjoying the park facilities. During this visual scene warmed with the family impression, a piece of music similar to the military march played in the background. Özcan appeared as a military marshal declaring war on the enemies and swearing to protect the Turkish families from the Syrian aggressors.

Özcan began his speech by emphasizing that the Syrian question is one of the most urgent before the elections. The question form in Turkish, "*Suriyeliler ne olacak?* [what will happen to the Syrians?]" corresponds to the mental model of dehumanizing Syrians by objectification. The colloquial meaning of this question implies that Syrians are a group of 'same things' upon whom the same decisions are taken. These decisions are applied to 'the things' by the entire group and according to its interests, without any recognition of the Syrians' agency and autonomy or consideration of their feelings and experiences. The

Syrians, in this question, are goods that can be sent or kept according to the identity of the ruling party. Therefore, their rights can be violated as promoted by the discourse.

Moreover, that meaning implies that the Turks (we) fully own the Syrians, and hence their fate-determination. In short, the seven notions involved in Martha Nussbaum's definition of "the idea of treating as an object" (Nussbaum, 1995) are included in this question. The objectification characteristic appears again in the discourse in the phrase "*bu Suriyeliler* [These Syrians]," which is frequently used to refer to Syrians in everyday street discourse.

In light of the previous question's importance, Özcan swore that he would answer without hesitation so that the answers came in the context of stopping municipal aid to Syrians, but more than that, preventing them from establishing businesses in the province.

Özcan also used the representations of the old Turkish woman who struggled in harsh climatic and economic conditions to earn a living. Against that miserable spectacle of citizens (us), comes the representation of Syrians using the Turkish words "*Saglıklı Güçlü küvvetli* [healthy energetic strong]" which establish in the colloquial a conception of superhuman Syrians receiving periodic aid from the bank before the old woman's eyes.

Next comes the role of the populist political exploitation of discourse to gain power. After the discourse rich in artistic and linguistic effects aimed at creating a collective anti-Syrian identity, Özcan reminds citizens that Syrians receive aid from the municipality and other state institutions that Özcan does not have control over, even if he wins the mayor's post. Then, as Özcan began his speech by reminding the viewers about the upcoming election date, he concludes by reminding them that the cause of all the previous injustices against the citizens is the Turkish president, who spent billions of dollars of people's money and food resources on the Syrians. Here, the Turkish expression "*çoluğk*

*çocuğuk* [our women and children]," in the sentence "*Yani 200 katrilyon liramızı çoluğumuzun çocuğumuzun rızkını fazlasıyla vermiş* [he has given our 200 quadrillion Liras more than enough sustenance for our women and children]", provides a more provocative representation because it indicates that the money the president spends is the money of women and children. This gendered expression calls for men to defend their women and children against this very threat.

### **5.3. Post-election Discourse:**

Özcan's first official action after the elections was to cut off the aid provided by the municipal budget to the Syrians. On April 8, *Sözcü*, a left-wing newspaper opposed to President Erdoğan, quoted Özcan's statements on the topic under the headline "Özcan of the Republican People's Party fulfilled his promise regarding the Syrians." (Sözcü, 2019). In this statement, Özcan confirmed his electoral promises regarding Syrians. On the other hand, he stressed that he would work within the scope of his powers, as he could not cut off the aid provided by other state institutions. It is striking that this statement became famous on social media as containing the phrase (no bread for the Syrians), even though Özcan did not utter it literally in this way in the statement. This phrase in the Turkish colloquial includes representations beyond the enemy images as Turkish culture reveres bread as one of life's basics that should not be withheld from anyone, not even enemies. Two responses followed the assigning of this phrase for Özcan. First, he did not deny saying it but instead responded via Twitter to a mayor from the ruling party who reproached Özcan over this phrase (Nabız Haber, 2019). Second, senior political figures denounced the phrase, including the Turkish president himself (Yeni Şafak, 2019).

On April 14, the famous journalist Özlem Gürses conducted an interview with Özcan, published under the title "Syrians are the most comfortable in Bolu" (Gürses, 2019).

Özcan justified his measures, saying that the Syrians were living more comfortably than the citizens themselves in the state and that he, according to his powers, would not allow this situation to continue. As in the pre-election discourse, Özcan remained keen to combine his promises with a reminder of the limitation of his power after he ascended to office. Moreover, he started the following chain of events: taking anti-Syrian measures that challenge the government's policy, consequently, provoking controversy in society and gaining the support of large social segments, causing the judicial or executive authorities to suspend these procedures, provoking the indignation of those segments.

The before and after discourse is used in the same way during this chain. For example, in July 2021, the Bolu municipality announced new decisions that included a 10-fold increase in water and electricity prices for foreigners residing in the province. Controversy and reactions erupted. Then, Özcan made a press statement after the municipal council meeting. The statement text was extracted from two YouTube videos that contain the whole statement:

"Friends: we cut off aid from them, but they do not leave. We say we will not give you (them) a business license, but they do not leave, so we will take new measures ... Why are we doing this? We want them to leave. I do not have the authority to drive them out of the city with the police forcefully...Friends, there is also what is difficult for me; in Syria, in Al-Bab (Syrian town), my soldier falls as a martyr, a son of Anatolia, a member of the Turkish nation. Here, the burly Syrian men with gel on their hair have no work; they stay in the parks until the evening, they have no work but to stare at people's wives and daughters. This is extremely against our culture, mores, customs, and understanding of morals. This violates my feelings. You (Syrians) do not serve in the military, do not pay taxes in this country, and continue to receive aid from this country. While the poor of this country sleep all night hungry, you refuse to give up wearing Nike shoes... They will say I am a fascist. I don't care at all. I am the interpreter of this nation." (Real Medya, 2021) and (Ülke TV, 2021).

The above discourse is replete with the representations and language of the enemy images discussed when analyzing the discourse examples of the Turkish right. For example, the Syrians have fled from fighting while Turkish soldiers are still fighting in Syria; also, the

Syrians' violation of the honor of Turkish women. Moreover, the discourse is littered with 'us and them' comparisons that show a surplus of contradictions between the two sides: we are brave, our soldiers fall as martyrs, and they are wasteful and wear the most expensive brands, cowards, who do not fight, and violate all our values. The discourse uses dehumanizing language to represent Syrians. For example, Özcan used the Turkish term "*iri kıymılı*" to describe burly Syrian men. This word is used colloquially to describe gender-biased males and superhuman male characters such as Marvel series heroes. Finally, the same previous challenge of power was used in the discourse when Özcan introduced himself as the interpreter of the people's aspirations, who does not mind being accused of fascism for the sake of his nation.

Between 09<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> December 2021, the Turkish lira exchange rates suffered an unprecedented fluctuation, which led to a wave of public discontent due to the high inflation rates. In this context, in November 2021 (Küçük, 2021), Özcan announced new measures against the Syrians linked to the exchange rate issue, the country's hottest topic. In this regard, the Bolu municipality announced that the price per cubic meter of water would be 2.5 Turkish liras (TL) for Turkish citizens and 2.5 US dollars for foreign residents (more than ten times). Moreover, the marriage application fee for foreigners would be 100 thousand TL, which was 120 TL for Turkish citizens (T.C. Bolu Belediyesi, n.d.). The decisions were officially announced upon voting on the 2022 budget. They were approved by the council members majority (CHP and IP) and with the opposition of the minority (AKP and MHP.) These decisions were issued against all foreigners, not only Syrians. However, Özcan's discourse, which commented on the criticism, shows that these decisions came in the context of the enemy discourse towards the Syrians.

Özcan held a press conference on November 23, 2021. The following text is extracted from the press conference video but is not cover the complete press conference. The extracted part is related to the fluctuation of the currency rate and the Syrians.

"... we previously said that we will raise the price 10 times for foreigners. At that time, the dollar was 6 Turkish liras. But the dollar, during Mr. Bahçeli's speech, rose to 12 Turkish liras. This is not my problem... They say we discriminate. The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey is clear. The Constitution is binding on the citizens of the Turkish Republic. The article of the principle of equality in the Turkish Constitution means equality between the citizens of the Republic of Turkey. There is no such thing as foreigners being equal to Turkish citizens... We are not racists; we are not fascists. I am a person who promised to protect the interests of the Turkish nation, I am an elected human. Are our foreign asylum-seeker brothers upset about this? If so, water is cheaper in Damascus. Here you go. Wedding fees are cheaper in Damascus. The municipality of Damascus does not perform marriages either. The Sheikhs do. The Sheikh accepts any amount that you put in his pocket. Therefore, they [Syrians] are not obliged to marry in Bolu." (Akduman, 2021).

After linking the water pricing by US dollars to the Turkish lira crisis, Özcan's discourse utilized the manipulation notion as presented by van Dijk (2006) as a form of social power abuse: on the one hand, the constitutional article stipulates equality before the law (it does not mention citizens or non-citizens, but everyone regardless of their affiliation). On the other hand, socially, Özcan illegally used his power as an elected mayor (he used the representation of a chosen person) to promote social inequality. Also, cognitively and discursively, he exercised mind control by interfering with the understanding process by promoting national identity over equality. He invoked mental models and representations of the other (the enemy) who cannot be equal to us in any way. The enemy is the Syrians, not any other foreigner, although the decision officially relates to all foreigners.

Following the chain of events over which the discourse is taking place, on December 31, 2021, the Bolu Administrative Court decided to suspend the implementation of Bolu municipality decisions, as they violate the fundamental human rights guaranteed by international conventions (Şahin, 2022). The court's decision came after a lawsuit filed

by three Turkish lawyers against the municipality's decisions. Commenting on the court's decision, Özcan made the following statements during a press conference on 3/1/2021. The part related to Özcan's comments on the court's decision was extracted from the video (Kuş, 2022).

"First of all, let the lovers of asylum seekers gloat. These foreigners' lovers, immigrants' lovers, let them gloat. Yes, the Bolu Administrative Court has suspended the implementation of the decisions we have taken. Why did we make these decisions? We made these decisions with the mindset that any more of this hospitality is too long, and those asylum seekers should be sent back to their country as they came...we already lit a shepherd's fire...This is a grand US imperialist conspiracy...The number of refugees is increasing day by day. Ok, we are a hospitable country, but the hosting is 3 days, 3 months, or even 3 years. But the number is increasing day by day. I warned in 2013 when I was a Member of Parliament, the number was 1.5 million. Now the number has reached 10 million. If anyone rejoices that the court has suspended the implementation of our decisions...I have not given up on this matter. I will continue this struggle in other ways and methods." (ibid).

Özcan challenges the Syrians' supporters (the government) using a distinct rhetorical structure here, as he threatens them and puts them in the category of the enemy. Özcan used the expression "*kena yaksın*," which means (let them apply henna), a type of dye that brides apply on their wedding night. Otherwise, the colloquial meaning of this expression is (let them gloat) and, in this course, implies a veiled threat in which he invites them to enjoy gloating temporarily until his struggle is victorious. Also, Özcan used the word '*mücadele*,' representing the national independence wars. This cognitive manipulation by the recall of independence wars was more evident in the expression 'we already lit the shepherd's fire,' which represented the story of the revolution Atatürk and his comrades carried out from the heart of Anatolia against the occupying forces at the beginning of the last century (Hacı, 2012). Moreover, by invoking imperialism and US, Özcan represented the Syrians' presence as a grand conspiracy in which all enemies gathered against the homeland, which Özcan and his party represent as the last bastions of its defense.

# **CHAPTER 6: Examples of the Enemy Discourse Impact on Cognitive and Behavior**

## **6.1. Background**

The enemy discourse not only created stereotypes for the Syrians but also affected the mechanisms of social cognition of events taking place in society or even those that explain history. In other words, when any adverse event occurs in Turkey, a crime, a quarrel, or even an interpretation of a bitter memory from history, social cognitive processes call the Syrians and hold them responsible for these events. This chapter reviews some examples of Syrians being included in such contexts. It also provides examples of the weaponization of defensive symbols of national identity when dealing with Syrians.

## **6.2. Syrians and COVID-19:**

A strange phenomenon accompanied Covid-19 in Turkey: the infection rates among Syrians were low. Even for the infected Syrians, the symptoms were mild. As with any news about Syrians, social media was rife with debate. One celebrity asked, "Have you ever seen a Syrian who was intubated or hospitalized in intensive care due to the Coronavirus?" (Benli, 2021). This debate led the AKP Gaziantep mayor to say in 2020: "This rate is 1 in 7...They ask me why. One theory says...Syrians were vaccinated upon entry...[vaccines] protect them from Corona [and] strengthen the immune system. The second theory may be their lifestyle and the food they eat." (Altuncu, 2020).

The previous controversy followed another over the rumor that Syrians were allowed to roam during the curfew in Turkey. Tensions rose over this rumor to the point that famous politicians and media professionals echoed it. Moreover, the rumor was invested in enemy discourse. The discourse example is taken from an episode of the '*Teketek*, [one-to-one]'



TV Show on *HaberTürk TV* channel, one of the highest-rated channels in Turkey. The episode addressed the COVID19 restrictions imposed by the Turkish government in 2020. The moderator, a famous journalist and media executive, Fatih Altaylı utilized the enemy discourse, saying: "Frankly speaking, we can say that we lost Turkey in favor of Syria without war, it seems that they came with 4 million soldiers and captured Turkey." (Internet Haber, 2020). This statement was not uttered in isolation but within a context in which Altaylı attacked the Turkish government because, according to him, the Syrians can roam as they want while citizens are confined to their homes due to restrictions. Otherwise, this part has been the most circulated later, from not only Altaylı's statement but the entire episode.

The polarization strategy 'us vs. them' is clearly shown in this discourse by representing 'us' as oppressed citizens and 'them' as occupying soldiers. Here, the cognitive representations of the enemy discourse are inserted into a completely unrelated topic, the curfew, to practice mind control. Moreover, the discourse has been manipulated by representing an entire group of civilians as enemy soldiers who have kidnapped the homeland and by a lie that Syrians can roam freely while the citizens stay in the houses 'like prisoners' as a tool of discourse domination. As the controversy did not end after the episode, Fatih Altaylı reinvested the representations in an article on the HaberTürk website entitled "İşgaliye, [Under Occupation]" (Altaylı, 2020) using the word "İşgal [occupation]" eight times, including the title. He also re-represented the Syrians as army twice (ibid).

### **6.3. Singing Independence Anthem while Attacking Syrians**

In 2017, Karapınar town (central Turkey) witnessed tension against the backdrop of a rumor of a sexual harassment incident. The following details are summarized from the

SonDakika.com news website. The incident started with a dispute between a group of Turkish youth with a Syrian man and his brother. The dispute turned into a brawl that ended when a 21-year-old Turkish man shot the 53-year-old Syrian and his brother. After the incident, a rumor spread that the Turkish youth shot the Syrian man because the latter had harassed his sister. The Turkish police arrested the shooter while the injured were taken to the government hospital, and one of them later died. As the rumor peaked, a group of Turkish citizens organized themselves through social media and attacked the houses and shops of the Syrians. The protesters shot and broke Syrians' properties. Therefore, authorities evacuated Syrians from their homes to some government buildings. Angry protesters surrounded these buildings, demanding the expulsion of the Syrians from Turkey. In response, the town governor tried to calm the crowd and promised that all Syrians would be evacuated from the town (SonDakika.com, 2017).

There is a common feature between this incident and most of the similar incidents repeated in different regions of Turkey. A dispute erupts between Turkish citizens and Syrians. Then, a rumor spreads that the dispute is due to a disgraceful act committed by Syrian(s). Eventually, the situation escalates. Here, it appears how the local social cognition of the events, to which the Syrians are a party, proceeds. Moreover, in this incident, the protesters chanted national slogans and the independence anthem while attacking the Syrians (ibid). Here, the collective violent response to Syrians was conceptualized as a noble patriotic practice against a brutal enemy that must be eliminated immediately.

#### 6.4. The Syrians and the (Cigarette Brawl)<sup>15</sup>

In 2022, the Esenyurt district of Istanbul, crowded with Syrians and other foreigners, witnessed attacks on commercial centers run by Syrians. The incident started when a young Turkish man asked for a cigarette from an Arabic-speaking person. The latter refused, and the situation turned into a fierce brawl. After the brawl, a rumor spread on social media that the Syrians carried out a mass assault on Turkish citizens. The situation worsened with the start of an attack by Turkish youth on Syrian shops in the area. The angry crowd chanted nationalistic slogans, "This is Turkey, not Syria." (Artı Gerçek-ARTI MEDIA, 2022), while they were destroying shops. The rumors were exacerbated after famous Anti-Syrian figures like Ümit Özdağ (Özdağ, 2022) published content on social media confirming the occurrence of security incidents between the Turks and Syrians. Therefore, official figures were forced to intervene and deny the Syrians' connection to the incident. For example, the Turkish Deputy Interior Minister tweeted that the Syrians had no connection to the events that arose from a cigarette brawl between a Turkish citizen and a Palestinian visitor (Çataklı, 2022). The Deputy Minister accused Ümit Özdağ of "vote hunting" by fanning xenophobia (ibid).

The incident reveals the formation of a particular mechanism to cognize the adverse events. This mechanism spreads in reality and digital space and holds the Syrians responsible for the damages. Then, it generates violent acts against them. In this incident, too, nationalistic slogans were weaponized while perpetrating violence against Syrians.

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<sup>15</sup> (*Sigara isteme kavgası* [Cigarette brawl]) is a well-known brawl in Turkey. It begins when someone asks someone else, they do not know for a cigarette. If the request is refused, a brawl may arise. Sometimes, these brawls result in deaths and injuries (Bir Gün, 2021).

## 6.5. Syrians Stoned the Prophet of Islam<sup>16</sup>

Prophet Muhammad is the most sacred human for Muslims. Also, the Islamic literature articulates that the individuals/peoples who stood against his mission are the worst enemies. Moreover, those who physically assaulted the Prophet are represented as the worst of the worst enemies in Islam. According to Islamic jurisprudence, the punishment for anyone who offends the Prophet, even verbally, is death (Islam Online, n.d.). Islamic biographies tell a sad story about the Prophet's trip to Taif city in a related context. This story is very famous and has an unfortunate impression on the Muslims' consciousness. When Mecca tribes denied the new religion and turned the Prophet away, he decided to visit Taif and call its people to Islam. However, they refused to listen to the Prophet and asked him to leave. Moreover, they put rocks in his way back, mocked, insulted, and stoned him. The Prophet's body was bleeding. Finally, he left the town in a sorrowful situation (Al-Halbousi, 2012).

In 2020, a Turkish educational website (DinDersiOyun) published (Haksöz Haber, 2020) a sample of test questions (Figure 9) for the Prophet's Biography course with a question about the previous tragic story. The question was: Who stoned our Prophet? The sample gave four options of the answer: a- The people of Mecca, b- The people of Madina, c- The people of Taif, and d- The Syrians. While the first three options refer to people who were contemporaries of the Prophet, the inclusion of the Syrians among the options indicates the influence of the enemy discourse on the social cognition in Turkey. The latter influence interprets how Syrians were placed in the category of the most heinous

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<sup>16</sup> This title is quoted from an article on a Turkish human rights website (Haksöz Haber, 2020).

enemies who attacked the Prophet, enemies whom the Islamic faith demands to be punished by death.

Figure 9

*The Question from the Deleted Sample.*

1 - ..... ile ..... 'nin vefat yılına ..... yılı denir

2- Peygamberimiz ..... yılında ..... 'e gitti. Orada on gün kaldı. Yanında evlatlığı ..... de vardı.

3- Peygamberimiz'i kimler taşıladı?

<input type="checkbox"/> a- Mekkeliler	<input type="checkbox"/> c- Medineliler
<input type="checkbox"/> b- Taipliler	<input type="checkbox"/> d- Suriyeliler

4- Peygamberimiz'in Mescid-i Harâm'dan Mescid-i Aksâ'ya götürülmesine ..... denir. Oradan da yüce makamlara ulaştırılmasına ..... denir.

*Note.* The area marked with a frame contains the Question and the answer options.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This case study revealed that the negative sentiments prevalent in the discourse of the opposition political elite towards Syrians in Turkey amount to the construction of enemy images. The CDA of the discourse samples examined demonstrated the heavy presence of enemy representations, as Syrians were represented with all the characteristics mentioned in the related literature. Essentially, the discourse does not regard Syrians as human beings but rather animals (in plural) or a mass of things ruled. Even when the discourse introduced Syrians as animals, this was done with ugly titles not used for the same animals in the street slang. Syrians have also been demonized and matched with absolute evil to preclude any possible sympathy. They were blamed for all the problems in the country. Moreover, a zero-sum equation was established: any privileges that Syrians enjoy are always extracted from those of the locals.

However, the study introduced the concept of enemy discourse because the studied discourse surpassed the traditional process of constructing enemy images. In this context, the discourse users do not deny targeting Syrians with these characteristics, unlike Western elites who created enemy images of the Russians, Muslims, or others. On the contrary, they consider this practice a duty to defend the homeland.

On the other hand, this discourse has developed new characteristics that have not been detected previously in the studies on enemy images. For example, the Syrians are not only the cause of all problems in the country but the curse under which no problem can be solved. Also, a forcibly displaced human population has never been portrayed as the greatest threat to the state and the entire nation since its foundation. The last representation resembles the American elites' portrayal of Muslims as the greatest threat to the United States since Christopher Columbus' discovery of the new world. It may also

be similar to any imagined Native American literature depicting the White man. Over that, the discourse portrays the Syrians as the conspiracy of all enemies to destroy Turkey.

In short, it can be concluded that the enemy discourse is an upgraded version of the construction of enemy images—a version that has been elaborately customized for the Syrians. In its most extreme forms, this version turns into the distinctive identity of its promoters and occupies a large part of their public communication.

On the other hand, the study also showed that the promoters of the enemy discourse belong to the political opposition camp. While the left, represented by the CHP and its leadership, used the enemy discourse early, the right-wing, represented by the IP, the VP, and all the nationalists outside the MHP, includes the strongest promoters of this discourse. The two sides adopt a Eurasian, anti-Western orientation that identifies with Moscow's policies and supports Tehran and the Assad regime.

Further, it was illustrated how the enemy discourse was weaponized effectively with the opposition's election arsenal. It was used to influence social cognition such that it promoted the opposition's victory as the only way to get rid of the constructed enemy. The study also indicated the impact of the enemy discourse on social cognition and behavior and the extent of its threat to security.

More research, especially in the psychology discipline, can reveal how social cognition exposed to enemy discourse can generate collective violence towards the target group. Further, research that can access the historical data of social networking sites and utilize analytical software might obtain more accurate results regarding the size and impact of the enemy discourse, as well as identify the cooperation networks between the promoters of this discourse inside and outside Turkey.

Considering the above, the expected victory of the Turkish opposition in the 2023 elections may lead to severe actions against the Syrians. Implementing the opposition's promises to deport millions of Syrians will mean a national crisis leading to security incidents or a new flow of migrants toward Europe. The opposition may also distract public opinion from its expected failure to run the country by turning a blind eye to mass attacks against Syrians or even facilitating them. At the international level, the opposition's ascent to power means Turkey is closer to Moscow-Tehran-Damascus, representing a significant change in the balance of power in the Middle East.

No research, whether on the Syrians' issue or any general Turkish topic, can reach more reliable results if it does not abandon the bias towards the AKP, specifically towards Erdoğan. Research can arrive at results different from the prevailing ones, which are now reflected in the Western media and academia about Turkey, only if this bias is abandoned.



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