

## **Integration or Occupation: What Do Pro and Anti-Refugees Say About Current EU Refugee- Crisis?**

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### **Abstract**

*The concern of being occupied by refugees runs through the discourses of both anti and pro-refugee parties considering them as either a threat to be avoided or as an opportunity to be welcomed. This paper by analyzing the reactions of opponents and supporters of welcoming current refugees in Europe, as the largest movement of people since the establishment of the European Union shows that they both consider European Values as the symbol and refugees as the occupiers of that symbol. Differentiating the occupation of land from occupation of mind, this paper illustrates that in the occupation of mind, a symbol that stands for the prevailing ideology is occupied to call the governments to react to the needs of individuals that are gathered as a group. Also, by applying the critical term of “occupation” to read refugees themselves, it has been suggested that rather than the fix meaning of refugee, its floating meaning is addressed by politicians. It is concluded that by employing refugees as a threat, politicians intend to connote this message that the occupied will be another occupier.*

**Keywords: Refugees, Occupation of Mind, Occupation of Land, Floating Signifier.**

## Introduction

According to Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection of European Commission, in 2015 over 1 million asylum seekers arrived in Europe that is considered as the largest movement since the establishment of EU and biggest after the mass migration of the second world war. The most crucial driver of migration for Syria continues to be war and conflicts. But in the midst, ongoing violence in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq as well as poverty in Kosovo lead them to be the leading numbers that applied for asylum in 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Although the “refugee crisis” or “migrant crisis” are used interchangeably in public but in political discourse they are intermittently distinguished that led to different reactions toward their beings as well as different amount of political and media attention<sup>2</sup>. The phrase “migrant crisis” subtly delegitimizes calls for protection<sup>3</sup>, whereas the phrase “refugee crisis” reinforces it.<sup>4</sup> So, since both refer to same people, one connotes a negative perspective toward refugees and other provides a positive connotation that underlies a profound bottom-line of ideological orientation.

The main characteristics that are associated with refugees are described in the refugee status by UNHCR. Pursuant to Article 1A (2) of the 1951 Convention, the term “refugee” applies to:

a person who... owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or unwilling to return to it.

International conventions establish refugees as *involuntarily* and *forced* displaced by political circumstances, including war and violence as well as natural and anthropogenic disasters.<sup>5</sup> However, response to refugee crisis in Europe is two folded. Parties are either in favor of generous policies or more restrictive or anti-migration policies. Evaluating the reasons why some parties are in favor of limiting the number of refugees and some posit positive attitudes, uncovers four major aspects each group take side with: economic issues, social and cultural issues, Political issues, safety and security issues.

### 1. *Economic issues*

By focusing on refugees’ burden upon Europe, opponents believe that refugees impact negatively on the economic cohesion by highlighting the fact that Europe has more crucial problems to solve like unemployment or lack of resources for European citizens that refugees compete with the native population for that resources.<sup>6</sup> In other words, anti-refugees consider refugees as the threat to European economy.<sup>7</sup> They highlight this threat for labor market by focusing on the “split labor market” that refugees create by competing with the dominant group for the jobs. They claim that refugees are low-skilled and consequently, they work for lower wages and in a long run they weaken the economy. They also believe that refugees are not well qualified to participate in developing market and firms.<sup>8</sup> But rather they are passive receivers of contributions of welfare state that local citizens paid tax for.

In contrast to what opponents believe, pro-refugees focus on the fact that refugees tend to be human resource. As a result, they provide manpower for destination countries, doing the jobs that the locals are not willing to do and bring about a positive competitive environment in labor market.<sup>9</sup> Aside

from that, they believe immigrants are consumers of the goods and facilities that are produced by the destination countries and thus contribute to the growth of local industries.

## **2. Social and cultural issues**

Anti-refugees by underlining the European culture, highlight refugees different ethnical and traditional backgrounds and claim that refugees neither accept the culture of host countries nor expose themselves to integration in their cultures.<sup>10</sup> In addition, they claim that newcomers have to learn unfamiliar languages, cope with completely different set of social and cultural expectations and develop new identities that seems impossible for many of them.<sup>11</sup> And in return, because immigrants are newcomers, residents are often unaccustomed to their presence and find it difficult to cope with refugees. As a result, neither refugees feel at home nor citizens who feel their way of life are endangered. Consequently, these social and cultural concerns have led opponents to be in favor of more restrictive mono-culturalistic policies that foster the sense of European cohesion and unit.<sup>12</sup> Metaphors like “open doors” or “open windows”<sup>13</sup> also conveys the same threat that need to be secured or closed, otherwise it result in unknown future for Europe.

Instead, pro-refugees believe that refugees by opening a window to their homelands, provide an opportunity for European citizens to understand their cultures in the process of intercultural communications. Also, they claim that the exchange of refugees’ values in this platform will result in the empowerment of European culture.<sup>14</sup>

## **3. Political issues**

Opponents believe that Islam is not welcomed. The reason for their orientation is that they are concerned about the demographical situation in Europe, by saying that if they open Europe’s border to refugees, Muslims endanger Christian identity of Europe.<sup>15</sup> In addition, another critical issue that stands for both opponents and supporters is one of the European fundamental principles namely as Free Movement. While, opponents argue that refugees cause controversy over the European Refugee policy, they endanger European unity by bringing out the sense of national identity first and European identity second. While pro-refugees support European Refugee Policy in favor of European identity first and national identity second. In sum, they both believe that European key policy of Schengen visa is at risk.<sup>16</sup>

Aside from that, supporters focus on their duty to implement EU humanitarian aid policy to help refugees who have suffered from vast devastation, intense wars and conflicts and they should save their lives and protect them.

## **4. Safety and Security**

Opponents emphasize on the fact that welcoming refugees increase the crime rate as experienced in Italy, Greece, and Sweden. Also, as reflected in the recent sexual assault in Germany.<sup>17</sup> Opponents argue that refugees flow facilitates the emergence of terrorists and extremist that threaten unique safety and security of EU. However, Supporters in opposite believe that terrorism and extremism have nothing to do with religion.

As the spokesperson of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva addressed, the recent movement of refugees to Europe include seven crucial features that are; Loss of hope, High costs of living/Deepening poverty, Limited livelihood opportunities, Aid shortfalls, Hurdles to renew legal residency, Limited education opportunities and unsafe Feeling.<sup>18</sup> By taking these issues into account, the crucial point is that whether the current refugee-crisis with the features

mentioned above is an occupation movement or not. This study aims to find out the answer to this question by evaluating the standpoints of pro and anti-refugee movement.

### **Occupation of Land**

This study shows that the reason behind the position parties take or the generous or restrictive policies they adopt regarding refugees are rooted in their fear of occupation.

However, when it comes to occupation, military occupation readily comes to mind. Historically, occupation was considered as conquest<sup>19</sup> but in the 19th century, it underwent fundamental change as Doris Appel Graber suggests<sup>20</sup>. In this respect occupation is;

Territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army. The occupation extends only to the territory where such authority has been established and can be exercised.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, Requisites of any kind of military occupation or presence of foreign force include in the presence of an armed force that controls the territory beyond its own borders and establishes an authority in that territory that is considered as the military occupation or what we call as occupation of land.

**Power+ Force + Control+ hostility+ territory= Occupation of land**

As it is stated before, most of those who have applied for asylum in EU are those whose lands are occupied. Evaluating the required characteristics for the occupation of land connotes this message that this current refugee crisis in EU will not end up in the occupation of land since refugee as individual or refugees as a group lack the conditions mentioned for occupation, mainly power and force.

### **From Occupation of Land to Occupation of Mind**

In contrast to occupation of land that has its own legislations and rules to be considered lawful which grows out of military as force might,<sup>22</sup> the idea of occupation of mind lies in the social movements. But it does not have real policies, beliefs or candidates but rather is a *floating signifier* as Ernest Laclau suggests.<sup>23</sup> In this way, occupation movement is considered as a way of expressing social, political and economic dissatisfactions by rejecting inequality and corruption that exist. This is what happened in Occupy Wall Street movement. The Wall Street movement began in New York City when thousands of protesters rushed to Wall Street, which was considered as the center of American financial sector, and by this occupying, protester wanted to highlight the widespread dissatisfaction with the economic system that dominated the 1% over the rest 99% of American.<sup>24</sup> In other words, while the same Wall Street was occupied by the protesters, it represented different ideologies. Wall Street as a symbol, signified global system of corporate capitalism for many of occupiers, the economic oligarchy that dominated both the economy and the political system for others and global capitalist system for the rest.

Occupy Wall Street was associated with Occupy Tahrir Square. People who surged against the 30-year regime of Hosni Mubarak occupied Tahrir Square, a major plaza in downtown Cairo. What Occupy Wall Street and Tahrir Square had in common was that the occupied places were not occupied for their own sake but rather they were the most compelling symbols for the ideology or

the representatives that people were against of. In other words, Wall Street and Tahrir Square changed to symbols of alternatives in which the occupiers could push their agenda into the attention of governments. By occupying those symbols, occupiers wished to convey their demands to government. Also, other important shared characteristics of occupy wallstreet and Tahrir Square is that they both have been leaderless movement, with spontaneous flow of individuals that believes, “*We are all leaders*” and the Individuals who prior to their movement, did not have the official set of demands, and no talking heads.<sup>25</sup>

The Occupy movement is an examination of participatory and collective democracy. Most of those who participate in occupying a symbol have a critical issue, problem or political idea that is meaningful to them, on which they have developed an expert knowledge. Occupy is both a concrete and virtual space where no one considers his or her problem more important than others and at the same time everyone has a certain perspective about the required outcome of occupying movement. To put it simply, occupation means different thing for different people. This study shows that unlike occupation of mind, occupation of land lacks the characteristics like force, power and leadership. Missing these characteristics, occupation of mind encompasses a group of values as well as demands that are embodied in a symbol, not in a geographical territory that should be occupied to call the government to fulfill occupiers’ demands.

Lacking features like force, power and leadership on one hand and outbreak of individuals demands in form of a movement toward symbol of EU on the other hand is what relates occupation of mind to current refugee-crisis. EU not as a group of geographical territories but as the representation of liberty, freedom, security and equality to protect refugees’ bare lives, what have been rejected by the occupier of their lands. In a nutshell, refugees’ movement toward Europe is not an occupation of a group of countries and lands, but it is considered as a movement toward the symbol of peace and security. As Kristeva explains European destiny, identity, residency and security, is the dream that drives the current wave of refugees.<sup>26</sup>

### **Symbol+ Occupier = Occupation of Mind**

#### **Occupation and Pro and anti-refugees’ reactions**

Reviewing the opinions of pro and anti-refugee about current EU crisis shows a common bottom line that affects the way parties interpret refugees or make decision. The bottom-line is the presence of some values that are represented in the symbol and in this respect, refugees are considered either as the threat to be avoided or as the opportunity to be welcomed. In other words, politicians either frame refugees as the people whose life must be protected or framed them as threat to be turned away. Consequently, it could be stated that interpreting the same crisis differently, indicates the existence of a relative and unstable meaning of refugee in the form of “floating signifier that Ernesto Laclau elaborated in his *On Populist Reason*. The notion that came into being as an answer to the problem Saussure raised about the arbitrary and illusory unity of signified (object that is represented) and the signifier (its representation) and impossibility of a collective meaning.<sup>27</sup>

In return, Laclau explains that floating signifiers are the points de caption around which the entire system is stabilized. Under floating-signifiers a chain of signifiers takes a specific meaning and enable the creation of a ‘stable’ political field. But the crucial point is that although on one hand floating-signifiers are the signifiers that ‘hegemonize’ the system and offer stability, on the other

hand they are the denial of this stability. Since they are not grounded in reality or in a specific signified, in return, they are characterized by the lack of objective meaning. Floating signifier's content is always dependent upon the outcome of a continuous struggle of various alternative representations that compete over them and try to hegemonize by being the ones that give them meaning. The ones that can fill the floating form with meaning will prevail.<sup>28</sup>

### **Reading Pro and Anti refugee opinions in the framework of floating signifier:**

#### **1. Anti and pro-refugees and economic issues as the floating signifier;**

For opponents, economic cohesion, labor market and welfare system have been considered as the main elements of the economy or floating signifier which are in danger of occupation by refugees. While market competitiveness and market growth resulted by refugees have been focused as the floating signifiers of economy by supporters who believe the occupation of that symbol is an opportunity.

#### **2. Social and cultural issues as floating signifier;**

In ideological issues the same can be applied. For both anti and pro-refugees, European cultural identity is considered as the symbol, but opponents consider refugees as outsiders, danger and occupation as a threat. While pro-refugees consider occupying movement as an opportunity and welcome refugees to grasp it to empower European culture.

#### **3. Political Issues as floating signifier;**

Anti-refugees consider religion and tradition as their crucial symbols that occupying them endangers European identity. They also mark free movement as the symbol of European value that occupying it, risks European unity because it turns *national identity* first. Whereas supporters remark free movement as a symbol of European value, but they consider that sharing it with refugees helps to empower and expand that value and reverse it into a common refugee policy that results in European identity first.

#### **4. Safety and Security as floating signifier;**

Both opponents and supporters believe that safety and security are symbols of European peace and stability. While the opponents highlight movement of refugees toward Europe as the threat for spreading violence, extremism, and terrorism. Consequently, they claim that additional surveillance of refugees in EU for security purposes limits individual liberty. While supporters claim that violence, extremism and terrorism which opponents claim threatening Europe's safety have nothing to do with a specific religion and they believe embracing refugees in safety and security of the Europe is a unique opportunity for global peace and stability.

### **Conclusion**

Putting it all together, it can be said that ideas of both pro and anti-refugees are the double side of the same coin. Supporters and opponents both consider European Identity as a symbol, but one considers refugees' symbolic movement toward that symbol a threat to weaken and another considers this movement an opportunity to strengthen that shared identity. Saying it differently, both believe in the existence of the core meaning of refugee and both believe in the existence of their dominant socioeconomic and cultural ideologies in the form of symbols, but the difference is within their perspectives toward floating signifier of refugees.

This study suggests that the current refugee movement can be read through the critical term of “Occupation”. Likewise, it has been indicated that the way refugees are seen as a threat or opportunity by anti and pro-refugees, can be explained through the floating meaning of Refugees. And by applying the floating signifier to the ideas of pro and anti-refugees, it is shown that both opponents and supporters follow the same procedure to discuss refugee crisis. Evaluation of their ideas and reactions indicated that a value is considered as a “symbol” and symbolic movement of refugees was marked as a movement to “occupy” that symbol. In addition, by investigating the relationship between occupation of mind and refugees, this reading illustrated that floating signifier of refugee rather than its core meaning has been employed by politicians to interpret refugees themselves.

Moreover, it has been advised that refugee movement mainly toward EU, is an occupy movement. However, it is not a movement to occupy a group of territories (occupation of land) but rather, it is to embrace and occupy the symbol of European Identity as a resemblance of safety and security that refugees are deprived, to call on Europe to save their lives. Ultimately, the outcome of this research indicates that the actual meaning of refugees should be regarded as the primary pivot for judgment, not the different interpretations (floating signifier) used for the same phenomenon (refugee-crisis), since considering the floating signifier results in pushing aside the material heart of the crisis.

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