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Philanthropic Activities During Conflict: The Case Study of The Expatriate Syrian Business Community*

Ching-An Chang**

Abstract

This paper analyzes the ways in which the expatriate Syrian business community engages in philanthropic activities to provide help to its fellow countrymen in host countries. Why and how did this group of people, after experiencing the brutal war and losing their assets and families, decide to provide a giving hand to others after relocations? And why did some others not? The mainstream media and reports usually describe the refugees as aid receivers who are disadvantaged or lacking resources. However, the case of the expatriate Syrian businesspeople, who fled from Syria to neighboring countries due to the conflict, show that there are various groups of Syrian philanthropic organizations funded by those businesspeople to give help and aid to other Syrians in host countries. Their philanthropic aid is not limited to material goods, but also includes religious courses, education, and employee training. The paper argues that although refugees are usually considered to live in a poor or weaker condition, economically strong expatriates (mostly businesspeople) among them can have a positive effect on the overall difficult humanitarian situation.

Keywords: Syrian Refugees, Refugee Businesspeople, Philanthropic Activities, Transnationalism, Diaspora

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Çatışma Bağlamında Hayırseverlik Faaliyetleri: Suriyeli Göçmenlerin İş Dünyasından Örnek Vaka İncelemesi*

Ching-An Chang**

Abstract

Bu makale, göçmen Suriyeli iş dünyasının bulunduğu ülkedeki yurttaşlarına yardım sağlamak için organize ettiği hayırseverlik faaliyetlerini analiz etmektedir. Bu insanlar, savaşın acımasız yönlerini deneyimledikten, sahip olduklarını ve ailelerini kaybettikten sonra, göç ettikleri yerlerde başkalarına yardım etmeye neden ve nasıl karar verdiler? Bazıları, aksine neden bu tür girişimlerde yer almadı? Ana akım medya ve araştırma raporları genellikle mültecileri dezavantajlı veya imkandan yoksun, muhtaç kişiler olarak tanımlıyor. Ancak, iç savaş nedeniyle Suriye'den komşu ülkelere kaçan Suriyeli göçmen iş adamlarının örneği, ev sahibi ülkelerde diğer Suriyelilere yardım ve destek sağlamak için kurulan çeşitli Suriyeli hayırsever grupların varlığını göstermektedir. Bu yardımlar sadece maddi değildir, aynı zamanda din eğitimi kursları ve mesleki eğitimleri de içermektedir. Makale, mültecilerin zayıf veya muhtaç bir konumda yaşadıkları yönündeki genel kanının yanı sıra, aralarındaki ekonomik açıdan güçlü üyelerin (çoğunlukla iş adamları) insani krizlerin hafifletilmesinde katkı sağlayabildiklerini göstermektedir.

Keywords: Suriyeli Mülteciler, Mülteci İş Adamları, Hayırsever Faaliyetler, Ulusaşırılık, Diaspora

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1. Introduction

Most studies generally label war-induced forced migrants as refugees and consider them as poor, lacking resources, or in a disadvantageous position. The Syrian refugees who left Syria and relocated into host countries are usually depicted as aid receivers. Nevertheless, among the millions of Syrian refugees in the region, various charities and philanthropic activities have been established, funded, or run by expatriate Syrians including the Syrian businesspeople who left after the 2011 Syrian conflict. Until the beginning of 2019, there were at least 806 Syrian-established NGOs aiming to provide support to their fellow countrymen who have been suffering from the conflict.¹ Their philanthropic aid includes education,

Businesspeople providing help to needy people is not a unique behavior, especially for Syrians. Prior to the eruption of the 2011 Syrian revolution, charitable activities within the Syrian business community were prevalent. The aid from the business community to needy people inside the country has been considered as one of the important elements that could complete the government's weak performance in social welfare. Nevertheless, the point worth further analysis is why and how businesspeople, after experiencing the brutal war, losing their assets and families, and being forced to flee their home country, continued to provide help to others. And why did some others not continue to do so? Thus, the aim of this paper is to analyze the ways in which the expatriate Syrian business community engages in philanthropic activities for providing help to their fellow countrymen in the host countries.

The data in this paper is based on field research conducted by the author between 2014 and 2015 in Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. During the field

¹ NGOSyria, accessed January 20, 2019, <http://ngosyria.org/>. (The website is an electronic statistical database service for providing information on Syrian non-governmental organizations).

² Ibid.

³ Interviews by the author.

