

Turkish Occidentalism and Representations of Western Women in Turkish Media

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Abstract

“Occidentalism” is an umbrella term for various stereotyped images of the West. It is typically gendered, implying views of Western moral standards that are often filtered through a certain perception of Western women. We will look at the particular case of Turkish media representations of Western women from the point of view of occidentalism. Western women are described in positive terms when they choose to marry Turkish men, convert to Islam, and move to Turkey. On the other hand, when these women are described in their Western context, they are often portrayed as morally and sexually confused. We hypothesize that these descriptions of Western women exemplify a Turkish occidentalism, morally othering the West and Western women. While our material may not suffice to say anything about the representativity of these views, it is at least sufficient to confirm and illustrate a hypothesis that such an occidentalism indeed exists in Turkish media.

keywords: *occidentalism, Turkey, Western women, Turkish media, othering*

Résumé

Occidentalisme turc et représentations des femmes occidentales dans les médias turcs

“L’occidentalisme” est un terme générique pour diverses images stéréotypées de l’Occident. Il est typiquement sexué, impliquant des points de vues sur les normes morales occidentales qui sont souvent filtrées à travers une certaine perception des femmes occidentales. Nous examinerons le cas particulier des représentations média turques des femmes occidentales du point de vue de l’occidentalisme. Les femmes occidentales sont décrites en termes positifs lorsqu’elles choisissent de se marier avec des hommes turcs, de se convertir en Islam et de se déplacer en Turquie. D’autre part, lorsque ces femmes sont décrites dans leur contexte occidental, elles sont souvent représentées comme des individus moralement et sexuellement confus. Nous émettons l’hypothèse que ces descriptions des femmes occidentales illustrent un occidentalisme turc qui a moralement altéré l’Ouest et les femmes occidentales. Bien que notre matériel ne soit pas suffisant pour dire quelque chose sur la représentativité de ces points de vue, il est au moins suffisant de confirmer et d’illustrer une hypothèse selon laquelle un tel occidentalisme existe bien dans les médias turcs.

mots-clés : occidentalisme, Turquie, femmes occidentales, médias turcs, altérisation

Öz

Türk Oksidentalizmi ve Türk Medyasında Batılı Kadınların Temsili

“Oksidentalizm”, Batı hakkındaki çeşitli klişeleşmiş imgeler için kullanılan şemsiye bir terimdir. Batılı ahlak standartlarına ilişkin görüşleri, genellikle Batılı kadınlar hakkındaki algı üzerinden oluşturulduğundan tipik olarak cinsiyetlidir. Bu makalede, oksidentalizm bakış açısından Batılı kadınların Türk mediasındaki temsiline bakacağız. Batılı kadınlar Türk erkekleri ile evlenmeyi, Müslüman olmayı ve Türkiye’ye taşınmayı seçtiklerinde olumlu olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Diğer taraftan, bu kadınlar kendi Batılı bağlamlarında tanımlandıkları zaman, genellikle ahlaki ve cinsel açıdan şaşkın ya da akli karışık olarak resmedilir. Bu makalede Batılı kadınlar hakkındaki bu tanımlamaların, Batıyı ve Batılı kadınları ahlaken ötekileştiren bir Türk oksidentalizmini örneklediği hipotezini geliştirmekteyiz. Araştırma malzememiz bu görüşlerin genellenebilirliği hakkında herhangi bir şey söylemek için yeterli olmayabilirken, en azından bu tür bir oksidentalizmin Türk mediasında var olduğuna dair bir hipotezi doğrulamak ve örneklemek için yeterlidir.

anahtar kelimeler: oksidentalizm, Türkiye, Batılı kadınlar, Türk medyası, ötekileştirme

Fulya, why is he looking at me like that?
Christa,¹ a German undergraduate student, doing her internship
in Istanbul, Turkey in 2005.

Introduction

For a period of almost six years Fulya Tepe, one of the authors of this article, used to have European students as flatmates in her apartment in Istanbul. One of these flatmates was a blond female German student, whom we will call Christa. At one point Christa told Fulya that Turkish men were staring at her in the streets of Istanbul. Fulya did not believe her at first. Perhaps it was all just a matter of cultural misunderstanding. Later, however, as they were strolling around in the city, Christa showed Fulya how Turkish men indeed stared at her. Reacting to the persistent attention given to Christa by these men, Fulya on one occasion asked one of them, "What is wrong? Why are you looking at her like that?" The man did not answer, but continued to look at Christa for a little longer, and then turned his head in another direction. Obviously, he felt himself free to stare at Christa and even to smile at her in a way suggesting that he had sex on his mind. These men acted as if they knew her from somewhere and as if they also knew how to treat her. One possible reason for their behaviour that came to Fulya's mind at the time was that they might be identifying her flatmate with a particular image of Western woman existing in Turkish media. We now believe that this was a good guess. Moreover, it made us hypothesize that this specific Turkish media view of Western woman can be understood as a case of *Turkish occidentalism*.

This media version of Turkish occidentalism involves a narrative, according to which Western women are sexually promiscuous and morally confused, but also possible objects for Turkish male moral rescue operations. The moral rescue operations in question involve Western women marrying Turkish men and converting to Islam.

In order to substantiate our hypothesis about the existence of such a narrative, we searched for Turkish media representations of Western women during the ten year period of 2006-2015. We found sixteen news items in different Turkish main stream media describing Western women in various ways suggestive of occidentalist stereotypes. We did not find in these media any news items concerning Western women that directly contradicted or rejected such stereotypes. Of course, we cannot claim that these sixteen news pieces are *representative* of Turkish media in general. However, they are at least sufficient to confirm and illustrate the actual *existence* of occidentalist stereotypes of Western women in Turkish mainstream media. Further research

1 "Christa" is a pseudonyme.

would be required to find out whether these occidentalist stereotypes are also representative or perhaps even dominant in these media.

It should also be noted that our findings correspond with those of a previous study of the representation of foreign women in local Turkish newspapers in the Antalya region, made by Emine Uçar Ilbuğa and Tülin Sepetçi. In their study, which did not refer to the concept of Turkish occidentalism, Ilbuğa and Sepetçi found that “foreign women are mostly presented with headlines alluding to prostitution, lying, cheating or eroticism” and when foreign women are presented in a more positive light, this refers to cases in which they had married Turkish men, “becoming home-makers and converting to Islam” (Ilbuğa and Sepetçi, 2010, pp. 41-42). These views on foreign women belong to that cluster of ideas that we will call Turkish Occidentalism, and we will show how similar views are expressed in other Turkish media as well.

The Concept of Occidentalism

The term “occidentalism” in academic literature is used in two internally inconsistent ways. On the one hand, we have scholars like Couze Venn, who by “occidentalism” refers to a particular Westernized discourse of modernity:

Occidentalism ... is the conceptual and historical space in which a particular narrative of the subject and a particular narrative of history have been constituted; these have become hegemonic with modernization, having effects throughout the world because of the universal scope of the project of modernity and the global reach of European colonization. (Venn, 2000, p. 2)

On the other hand, we have a view of occidentalism as something very different, namely, a particular stereotyped view of the West, embraced by non-Western traditionalists of various kinds. This is the view made famous by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, who have defined “occidentalism” as a “dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies” and made up of a “cluster of prejudices” (Buruma and Margalit, 2004, p. 5).

The historical background here is, of course, Edward Said’s conceptualization of “Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said, 2003, p. 3). What Buruma and Margalit have done is to reverse the discussion from one about Western stereotypes of the Orient, to one about oriental, or at least non-Western stereotypes of the West.

Interestingly enough, however, there exists in the literature also a use of the term “occidentalism” that is actually almost identical with Said’s use of “orientalism”. Claudia Brunner, for instance, talks of “an occidentalist order of knowledge” according to which Western analysts “turn difference into hierarchy” by situating female suicide bombers and their families “within an orientalised

framework" (Brunner, 2007, pp. 958, 960). Here the choice of "occidentalism" is motivated by the Western background of persons allegedly misrepresenting Arabs or the Middle East. It has nothing to do with the alleged misrepresentations of the West discussed by Buruma and Margalit.

These conflicting understandings of occidentalism is nicely summed up by Katherine Allison. Beginning by noting that "[o]ccidentalism refers to the creation of an essentialised West", she then distinguishes between two versions of occidentalism:

In the first, Occidentalism broadly functions as Orientalism in reverse. It explores the ways that Eastern societies have created and utilised stereotypical representations of the West. The second addresses how the West creates and reifies its own essential identity (Allison, 2013, p. 670).

The focus of Buruma and Margalit on militant Islamism as a case of occidentalism has also been criticized by Akeel Bilgrami for ignoring a justified criticism of Western colonialism and racism that may well be "occidental" in the relevant sense, but which is not necessarily violent. Bilgrami notes that Gandhi, famous for his non-violent resistance against the British in India, is indeed "the anti-Western figure who comes closest to the form of intellectual critique that Buruma and Margalit label Occidentalism" (Bilgrami, 2006, pp. 393-394). Bilgrami hence does not reject the term "occidentalism" itself, but rather questions its application to certain persons and movements rather than others.

In the more recent literature, the ambiguities of the concept of occidentalism have been accepted to such an extent that Meltem Ahiska in her study of occidentalism in Turkey has distinguished between an occidentalism of the West and an occidentalism of the non-West. While the occidentalism of the West is "embedded in the historical context of colonialism and modernity" and "the making and representing of the West", the occidentalism of the non-West "is a means of performing Western modernity, while at times resisting its colonising move". Although this occidentalism of the non-West occasionally refers to the non-West as a victim of Western domination, it also "utilises the status of the victim to build a certain regime of power and to constitute itself as a hegemonic discourse" in the process of which it also creates "a nativism by which other Others are produced, judged and marginalised" (Ahiska, 2010, pp. 6-7).

Now, it could be argued here that the "hegemonic discourse" of this occidentalism of the non-West is a mere rhetorical device which should not be allowed to obscure the more substantial political and economical hegemony exercised by the West over the non-West. Rather, this discourse, with its depiction of the Western world as decadent, weak and morally confused, could be seen as a defiant reaction of a marginalized non-West, trying to

reverse relations of power by othering the West just as the West in the past have othered the non-West. Such a strategy of reversal could be considered as confirming rather than challenging the superiority of the West, as it merely mirrors the rhetoric of Orientalism. However, the purpose of the present study is not to assess actual relations of power underlying the discourses of orientalism and occidentalism, respectively. Instead, the present study has the more limited purpose of showing how the concept of occidentalism can be usefully applied to describe certain representations of Western women in Turkish media.

Now, according to Ahıska, occidentalism when applied to the Turkish context – which will be the one relevant for the present article – involves an ambiguous attitude to the West: “‘The West’ has either been celebrated as a ‘model’ to be followed or exorcised as a threat to ‘indigenous’ national values” (Ahıska, 2003, p. 353). This line of argument is also taken by those who relate the discussion of orientalism and occidentalism to the issue of post-colonialism. Nükhet Sirman, for instance, argues that “in spite of the fact that Turkey has never been formally colonized, it can be argued that social practices, especially those related to the position of women in the society, are assessed and rendered meaningful only in relation to those in the developed West” (Sirman, 2004, p. 40).

When the term “occidentalism” is used in this article, it will refer to the kind of nativism described by Ahıska above. However, the purpose of this article is not to discuss occidentalism in general, but rather to present a specific occidentalist discourse in Turkish media pertaining to Western women. Here it is relevant to note how the West often has been presented as a moral Other, in fact, as a place of moral weakness and confusion, in the media of the Middle East:

News of scandal, rape, drugs, murder and molestation in the West occupy considerable space in the major news media of the Arab Middle East. Such problems are rarely commented upon, a very effective mechanism by which Eastern conservatism is maintained. Common sense and public oratory lead people to believe that they are spared the social problems of the West because of their religion. (Nader, 1989, p. 327)

This way of making the West appear as lacking in moral standing can be seen as an integral part of occidentalism. It also functions as a way of making the alternative perspective of Islam appear as a solution to the problems inherent in a world dominated by Western materialism:

Thus, for Islamist intellectuals, the occidentalized West has been, to a large extent, an imagined entity whose hegemony serves the resurrection of Islamic civilization in modern times. Islamist essentialization of both “the West” and Islam has been mainly derived from a perception of difference. (Duran and Aydın, 2013, p. 484)

Here it is also relevant to emphasize what previous studies of occidentalism has underlined, namely, that “[t]he issue of women is not marginal; it lies at the heart of Islamic Occidentalism” (Buruma and Margalit, 2004, p. 128). Hence, when the West is made into an Other, the depiction of Western women as different from Muslim women is likely to play an important part. This also underlines an important aspect of orientalism as well as of occidentalism, namely that they both involve a *sexualized* conceptualization of the world. As Meyda Yeğenoğlu argues, “the Orient as it figures in several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European texts is a *fantasy* built upon sexual difference”, paying special attention to the “veiled Oriental woman” as “signifying the Orient as feminine, always veiled, seductive, and dangerous” (Yeğenoğlu, 1998, p. 11). Likewise, the occidentalist representations of Western women discussed in the present study frequently refer to the sexual agency of these women. If Yeğenoğlu is right, this should be no coincidence, but rather what we should expect from an occidentalist discourse that cannot but reproduce the orientalist discourse that it is trying to reverse. Occidentalism would then be caught up in the discursive strategy of orientalism, repeating a reversed version of the latter’s sexualized stereotypes.

Now, occidentalism should not be reduced to a specifically Muslim perspective on the West or on Western women. For instance, it has been pointed out that also in Japanese media there exists an occidentalist view of Western women and that “[i]n ways parallel to Western orientalism, Japanese occidentalism also involved a sexual projection of the other, particularly the allure of the occidental woman” (Creighton, 1995, p. 144). Now, this rather ambiguous admiration for Western women was expressed in advertising campaigns, in which Western women could appear nude, while it would be unthinkable to have “an open, nude presentation of Japanese women to advertise ‘respectable’ brand-name products or a major department store” (Creighton, 1995, p. 146).

For the purpose of the present study, however, it will be relevant to remain within a Muslim or Islamic version of occidentalism. As for previous work on occidentalism and Turkish media, Ahıska (2010) is an important contribution. However, Ahıska’s work is about Turkish radio broadcasting between 1927 and 1940 and it does not deal specifically with the perception of Western women.

Methodology

The present study is based on a selection of Turkish newspaper articles. The selection has been guided by headlines or contents referring to news pieces about Western women in general or about women living in particular Western countries. Once again, we would like to point out that the aim of the study is not to say anything representative about Turkish media in relation to Western women. The aim is the more limited one of illustrating a hypothesis about the

existence of occidentalist stereotypes of Western women in Turkish mainstream media.

Our study is inspired by constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and feminist methodology. Grounded theory aims to inductively develop theories from collected data. In the present case the data collected originate from texts published in newspapers rather than from interviews. The constructivist approach emphasizes the interaction between researcher and research subject and also the impact of the context (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). In the present case, the origin of the study was the experience of one of the authors of having a Western roommate who was being exposed to the gaze of Turkish males in a way that suggested a view of the Western woman as an Other. In terms of data analysis, the constructivist approach of grounded theory aims to understand assumptions underlying data (Charmaz, 2000, p. 525). Our exploration of Turkish occidentalism is intended as such a way of making sense of the experiences made by persons like Christa above.

Feminist methodology has a lot in common with constructivist grounded theory, but adds a focus on gender perspectives in general and the perspectives of women as agents and recipients of various social identities in particular. The combination of constructivist grounded theory and feminist methodology seems to make possible a more systematic interpretation of the data collected, focusing on male–female interaction along the lines of an occidentalist worldview. Moreover, the present study also relates to the field of feminist media research, in which scholars try to establish how the visibility or invisibility of women in media can be understood against a background of patriarchal or sexist assumptions and stereotypes (Byerly, 2012).

The newspaper pieces selected here were published between 2006 and 2015. They were all found on the internet. The only criterion that was used in the search and selection of articles was that they should be about Western women. By the term “Western women” is meant women coming from Western Europe, North America, and Australia. News items about high profile political women like Angela Merkel or Condoleezza Rice were intentionally left out, since it could be assumed that their political standing would have a distorting impact on how they were represented in the news. The background assumption here is that choosing news about ordinary female citizens will tell more about the way Western women are perceived in Turkey.

Our search resulted in the following sixteen news items which are here presented in a chronological order. The numbers in square brackets preceding each item will be used to identify them in the following analysis.

[1] Two lovers met 23 years later with the help of *Hürriyet*, *Hürriyet*, World section, 13 March 2006.²

[2] Spanish women found salvation in Turkish men, *Yeni Şafak*, Agenda, 17 March 2007.³

[3] German woman who came for holiday chose to become a Muslim, *Haberler*, 29 June 2007.⁴

[4] German woman wanted to be buried according to Islamic rules, *Yeni Şafak*, 9 July 2007.⁵

[5] Half of Danish women cheat, *Hürriyet*, Life section, 5 September 2006.⁶

[6] The weirdest family in England, *Hürriyet*, World section, 19 July 2007.⁷

[7] Canadian woman became a Muslim, *Zaman*, 17 August 2013.⁸

[8] She made 1,000 people Muslim, *Sabah*, 12 July 2014.⁹

[9] Portuguese woman found peace in Islam, *Milliyet*, 19 August 2014.¹⁰

[10] British woman married herself, *NTV*, 8 October 2014.¹¹

2 İki sevgili, 23 yıl sonra *Hürriyet* sayesinde buluştu. <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=4068744&tarih=2006-03-13> *Hürriyet* is a mainstream liberal Turkish newspaper.

3 İspanyol kadınları kurtuluşu Türk erkeğinde buluyor. <http://www.yenisafak.com/aktuel/?t=17.03.2007&c=5&i=35563&İspanyol/kadınları/kurtuluşu/Türk/erkeğinde/buluyor> *Yeni Şafak* is a conservative Turkish newspaper.

4 Tatil için Gelen Alman Kadın Müslümanlığı Seçti. <http://www.haberler.com/tatil-icin-gelen-alman-kadin-musulmanligi-secti-haber/> *Haberler* defines itself as “the most comprehensive news portal of Turkey”.

5 Alman Kadını İmam Ddefnetti. <http://www.yenisafak.com.tr/aktuel/alman-kadini-imam-defnetti-55125>

6 Danimarkalı kadınların yarısı aldatıyor. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yasam/5030775.asp>

7 İngiltere'nin en tuhaf ailesi. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/6919941.asp>

8 Kanadalı kadın müslüman oldu. http://www.zaman.com.tr/dunya_kanadalı-kadin-musulman-oldu_2120501.html *Zaman* is a conservative Islamic Turkish newspaper

9 Bin kişiyi müslüman yaptı. <http://www.sabah.com.tr/dunya/2014/07/12/1000-kisiyi-musulman-yapti> *Sabah* is a socially conservative Turkish newspaper.

10 Portekizli kadın huzuru İslam'da buldu. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/portekizli-kadin-huzuru-islam-da-buldu-sinop-yerelhaber-343768/2014> *Milliyet* is a centre-right nationalist Turkish newspaper.

11 İngiliz kadın kendisiyle evlendi. <http://www.ntv.com.tr/arsiv/id/25542929/> *NTV* is a nationwide Turkish television news channel.

[11] Became a woman at the age of 81. Became the oldest sex reassigning elderly in Britain, *Milliyet*, 13 October, 2014.¹²

[12] Decided to be a woman while at war, *Hürriyet*, 19 January 2015.¹³

[13] Three Austrian women became Muslim at a ceremony, *Akşam*, 22 February 2015.¹⁴

[14] British woman gave birth to her grandchild, *Hürriyet*, 5 March 2015.¹⁵

[15] British women gave birth to her siblings, *Radikal*, 09 April 2015.¹⁶

[16] British woman found her husband's second wife through Facebook, *Cumhuriyet*, 21 April 2015.¹⁷

All news articles were published in Turkish. The newspapers selected include conservative Islamic ones, as well as centre-right, centre-left, Kemalist (that is, adhering to the secularist principles of Mustafa Kemal, the founder of the Republic), and liberal ones. In addition to the newspaper material, there is one piece selected from a nationwide Turkish television news channel. However, it is important to remember that the primary goal of this study is not to connect occidentalist views to a particular ideological stand, but rather to show simply that they exist and that they apply to the representation of Western women in Turkish media. Only in four cases could the names of the journalists be found: two of whom were Turkish males while two were Turkish females.

Results: Occidental Representations of Western Woman in Turkish Media

Western Women in Relation to Turkish Men

In two news articles, above numbered as [1] and [2], Western women are presented in a context also involving Turkish men. The Western women in question are white and heterosexual. They are not presented in negative terms.

12 81 yaşında ameliyatla kadın oldu. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/81-yasinda-ameliyatla-kadin-oldu-dunya/detay/1953651/default.htm>

13 Savaşırken kadın olmaya karar verdi. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/avrupa/27999865.asp>

14 3 Avusturyalı kadın törenle müslüman oldu. <http://www.aksam.com.tr/dunya/3-avusturyali-kadin-torenle-musulman-oldu/haber-384115> *Akşam* is a centre-right Turkish newspaper.

15 Torununu doğurdu. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/saglik/28358096.asp>

16 İngiliz kadın "kardeşlerini" doğurdu. http://www.radikal.com.tr/dunya/ingiliz_kadin_kardeslerini_dogurdu-1332112 *Radikal* is a liberal Turkish newspaper.

17 Facebook'ta eşinin ikinci karısını buldu. http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/yasam/259289/Facebook_ta_kocasinin_ikinci_karisini_buldu_.html *Cumhuriyet* is a centre-left Kemalist Turkish newspaper.

On the contrary, they are represented as positive, active, rational beings who are capable of making choices. But these active and rational beings are also portrayed as desiring and longing for “rarely found Turkish men” [1]. The positive representation of Western women hence correlates to a description of them as affirming the value of Turkish men. Hence, while “Western” values such as agency and rationality are endorsed, these values are attributed to women who allegedly desire Turkish men. Implicit here is the assumption that Turkish men have something that Western men lack and which Western women cannot find in their home countries. More indirectly, the West itself is portrayed in negative terms. The West and Western men are by implication presented as something that Western women have a reason to leave behind. As the headline of one news article states, “Spanish women found salvation in Turkish men” [2]. The quasi-religious term of “salvation” underlines the positive significance of Western women attaching themselves to Turkish men.

The result of the contrast mentioned above is clarified in the following table:

Table 1. Representations of Turkish and Western men

In the news articles, Turkish men are represented as	In the news articles Western men are represented as implicitly
superior/better.	inferior/worse.
desirable for Western women.	non-desirable for Western women.
something that Western women long for.	

Western Women in Relation to Islam

In six other news articles, above numbered as [3], [4], [7], [8], [9], and [13], German, Canadian, Belgian, Austrian, and Portuguese women are presented in relation to Islam. Again, the articles are about white Western women. In the first news piece, above numbered as [3], a German woman has chosen to convert to Islam. This choice of hers has been strongly influenced by a Turkish man, working in the hotel where she was staying during her holiday in Turkey. Hence, the significance of the Turkish man is underlined. But the stronger emphasis is on the woman’s decision to convert. Here again, the German woman is represented in positive terms, finding the right path for herself, leaving the wrong one behind. Thus Western culture and Christianity are implicitly presented as less valuable than Islam.

The second story [4] is about a German woman who died in her home in the south of Turkey. In accordance with her wishes she is buried according to Islamic traditions. In this article, her sympathy for Turks and for Islam is being

emphasized. Here the Western woman, the Turkish people, and Islam are all presented positively, while the West and Christianity are being othered and implicitly presented as something less valuable and as something this woman has left behind.

In the third news item [7], a Canadian woman marries a Turkish man working in the construction business. After the marriage, she visits her husband's home town and there she converts to Islam. She assumes a Turkish name for herself, corresponding to Mary in English, and is given the Qur'an as a present. The news article reports that "The Canadian muslim bride said that she was very happy and that she will try to understand Islam better by reading the Qur'an she was given as a present". Here too, the Turkish man is given an important role. However, the stronger emphasis is on the bride's conversion and the happiness she experiences as a result of it.

The fourth news item [8] is about a Belgian woman who started to do research about Islam at an early age, being influenced by the ways of life of the Muslim friends she studied with, and who converted to Islam after having found the answers she was looking for. According to the article, after her own conversion and over a period of eight years she convinced one thousand people, including her own family members, to convert to Islam. With her family, she established a non-governmental organization (NGO) called "New Muslim Siblings". Her family turned the ground floor of their house into a centre where Muslims can convene for educational purposes, charity and other activities. The Belgian woman reported that she initially had a lot of difficulties. Many people regarded her as strange but she tried to allay the prejudices by explaining Islam in a patient and determined way. In this news article, the Belgian woman is represented as an agent, searching and finding the best religion for herself. Islam is presented as the preferable religion in comparison with the woman's previous faith.

The fifth article [9] is about a Portuguese woman, aged thirty and working as a pre-school teacher. She married a Turkish man living in Germany. Later they went to Turkey for her conversion, had their ceremony and received a copy of the Qur'an as a present. This story underlines, as do the previous ones, that marriage with a Turkish man means conversion to Islam. Implicitly, Turkish men and Islam are celebrated as enablers of a better life.

The sixth news item [13] reports that three Austrian women converted to Islam in a ceremony held at a mosque in Austria. The newspaper also mentions that this took place in the presence of a crowd of women and that the happiness of the converted women attracted attention.

The above representations are summarized in the table below:

Table 2. Islam and non-Islamic values

Islam is	Implicitly Western non-Islamic values are
preferable.	left behind.
more valuable.	less valuable.
likeable.	not sufficiently attractive anymore.
taught by a Turkish man.	

As we have seen, Western women who choose Turkish men and Islam are all represented in positive terms. The Western woman leaves her country and gives up her religion because there are Turkish and Islamic alternatives that are better for her.

Western Women in Their Home Countries

To this category belongs five news pieces, above numbered as [5], [10], [14], [15], and [16]. First we have a news piece [5] about a study of Danish women's sexual attitudes and behaviour. The newspaper editor chose the following headline: "Half of Danish women cheat". This is a very provocative heading in a Turkish context, in which a woman's sexual infidelity is generally considered as worse than a man's and would in many cases also result in violent retribution for the sake of restoring the "honour" of her family. This is also reflected in Turkish popular media, where the infidelity or alleged infidelity of women is given more attention than the infidelity of men, "in contrast to the situation that is familiar to Turkish people" (Fişenk, 2004, p. 38), meaning that in real life it is men who are unfaithful to their wives rather than the other way round.

To a Turkish reader, this story represents Danish women as morally inferior. However, it does not specify exactly what is meant by "cheating" (does it involve sexual intercourse with a partner other than the one to whom one is married or engaged? does it merely involve having male intimate friends? or does it just involve keeping secrets from one's husband or partner?) or how "cheating" is understood in a Danish context. The news item hence ignores the problem of possible cultural differences, leaving Turkish readers free to interpret it according to their norms concerning marital sexual fidelity.

To better understand such a headline as "Half of Danish women cheat" in a Turkish context, one could benefit from a 2005 study made among Turkish high school students. In this study, 60.4 per cent of the research subjects stated that they feared that Turkey, in case it should join the European Union, would suffer a "moral degeneration" (Shkreli and Kucukural, 2008). One reason for this pessimist prospect seems to be an expectation that European values would have a destructive impact on Turkish values. And for a Turkish reader with this

kind of expectations, a news item like the one about the prevalence of “cheating” among Danish women would confirm his worst fears.

In addition to the above mentioned news item, there is a thread of news articles showing Western women as deviant or as living in strange family relationships. A recent news article of this kind was published in 2015, carrying the title “British woman married herself” [10]. In this news article, a thirty-one-year-old British woman sought the love of her life for six years without success. Then one day while sitting in a park she proposed to herself, being inspired by a song. She went through a regular wedding ceremony with a ring and a wedding dress, having invited her friends to take part in the event. According to the article, one of her friends commented that this was the best wedding she had been to. Now it could be argued that this particular news item would appear strange also to a Western audience. However, a Western audience would know from experience that this would be an unusual case. In a Turkish context this background knowledge cannot be taken for granted and hence the story could easily be taken as representative of Western women in general and their values, just as in the West Islamic extremism is often taken to be representative of Muslims in general.

Another article representing Western women in strange family relationships carries the title “British woman gave birth to her grandchild” [14]. The father of the baby in this story is the twenty-year-old son of the woman mentioned in the headline. Eggs from an anonymous donor were fertilized with sperm from the son and implanted in his mother. According to this news piece, the Supreme Court of Britain examined the incident, being reported as the first of its kind, and decided that the man can officially adopt his son who was born by his mother, even though the baby is also officially his brother.

A similar news article has the title “British woman gave birth to her siblings” [15]. In this case, the woman’s mother had her womb removed before her last marriage, but wanted to have a baby with her new husband. Hence, eggs from her daughter were fertilized with sperm from the woman’s new husband, and as a result twins were born, who were adopted by the woman and her husband. The twins are now twelve years old, and they know that their biological mother is their elder sister.

The last article in this category of stories has the title “British woman found her husband’s second wife through Facebook” [16]. In this news piece a thirty-nine-year-old British woman finds out from Facebook that that her husband is married to another woman as well. She learns that her husband has been cheating on her for six years, as far back as the beginning of their marriage.

In all these cases Western women are portrayed as being either immoral (cheating on their men), or erratic (marrying themselves), or blurring the borders

between generations (giving birth to their own grandchild or siblings), or themselves being the victims of loose morality (unknowingly living in polygamy). The message appears to be that the West in general and the women of the West in particular are morally depraved, socially alienated, and lacking in their conceptions of shame and honour. These representations once again manifest an occidentalist othering of the West.

Representing Lesbians and Transgendered Persons

Here we have three news items, above numbered as [6], [11], and [12]. When Turkish media make Western lesbians news, they are depicted as deviants. The story from 2007 about a British lesbian couple wanting to be parents and finally finding a sperm donor in a transvestite singer is an example of this. A photo of the mothers, the father, and the children sitting outside, probably in a picnic area, shows them all very happy and healthy. However, the newspaper presents them as “the weirdest family in England” [6]. In this way, the newspaper places lesbianism in the conventional patriarchal heterosexual discourse, presenting it as abnormal. So while Turkish occidentalism generally ignores Western lesbians, once it does take them into consideration it presents them in a humiliating way, thereby confirming its own negative stereotypes of Western values.

On the other hand, two news articles published more recently, in 2014 and 2015 respectively, recount stories about transgendered people in a quite neutral manner. One of these news articles has the title “Became a woman at the age of 81. Became the oldest sex reassigning elderly in Britain” [11]. Here, a man who has retired from the Royal Air force is reported to be the oldest person in Britain having sex reassignment surgery. The news article reports this person as making the following declaration: “I always knew that I was in the wrong body; now I am happy”. In the news article, it is also mentioned that the fact that the surgery was paid for by the British public health care system received some public attention.

The other transgender news article, portraying a transgender individual in a neutral way, carries the following headline: “Decided to be a woman while at war” [12]. In this news story, a British man, while on duty as an army officer in Afghanistan, decides to become a woman. According to this transgendered individual, reassigning her sex was more difficult than fighting in Afghanistan. She mentions that she had to keep up appearances while being in the army shelter, with seven men living almost on top of each other: “I had no space to be myself at the time. In the end, I chose to come out and to change both myself and my life style”. In the news item his process of sex reassignment is described with some medical and social details. It is also noted that the army accepts this officer as she is, and that she is now happy. The style and the content of these news articles are not judgmental and do not suggest that these

transgender people are “weird” in any way. Perhaps the “weird” discourse of 2007 by 2015 has given way to a more neutral one in Turkish media. On the other hand, it is also possible that the othering of the West pursued by occidentalism in these cases works without any evaluative comments from the journalist or editor. In that case, the “weirdness factor” would operate without even having to be explicitly expressed.

The Whiteism and Homogeneity of Western Women in the News Articles

It might be worth noting that in the articles that appear on the internet and that explicitly deal with Western women, these women are all white. Except for the cases of certain celebrities (which are not included, since they are, by definition, not “ordinary” Western women), like former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, there were no news relating to coloured Western women, be they heterosexual or lesbian, in the news media studied. Hence, the category of “Western women” as represented here appears as ethnically homogeneous. Of course, this does not correspond with reality. However, it corresponds with the aims of occidentalism to present Western women as a unified and often alien Other.

Conclusion

This study has provided some illustrations of how Western women are being represented in Turkish media, based on an analysis of sixteen news articles appearing in Turkish newspapers as well as a television news channel website, during the years 2006-2015.

Of course, from such a limited number of news pieces, nothing definite can be asserted about their representativity or about the relative strength of occidentalist views in Turkish media or in Turkey in general. However, as has already been mentioned in the introduction to this paper, our results correspond to the findings of Ilbuğa and Sepetçi (2010) while also adding the conceptual framework of occidentalism. Moreover, the news pieces discussed by us suffice at least to confirm and illustrate a hypothesis about the *presence* of such a thing as an occidentalist view of Western women in Turkish mainstream media. In this way our article points to the need and value of further research, as well as to the need and value of refining the concepts and methods used to uncover occidentalist thinking.

The present study suggests that the perception and evaluation of Western women in Turkish news media is strongly influenced by the willingness of these women to embrace Turkishness and Islam. To be more specific: When Western women are represented as living in Turkey and in relationships with Turkish men, they are portrayed in positive terms as active and as making good choices for

themselves. Western women are also represented in positive terms when they are described as having sympathies for Islam as a religion, converting, changing their names, and helping others to convert. But when Western women are presented as living in a Western social and cultural context, they instead appear in a morally dubious light, being involved in controversial sexual and family relationships.

The present study could be further developed with more data coming from interviews with Western women in Turkey concerning their experiences as well as with Turkish men concerning their views about Western women. And, of course, studies of media representations of women like the present one could and should be extended quantitatively as well as qualitatively, to enable us to acquire a more firmly grounded knowledge about the impact of occidentalist views in contemporary Turkey.

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