PREJUDICE IN WESTERN SOCIETIES – PICTORIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF TURKEY AND TURKISH PEOPLE IN WESTERN MAINSTREAM AND ETHNIC MINORITY MEDIA

1. Introduction:
Prejudice is one of the strongest forces that creates unrest in societies. With the advancements in technology, media became one of the strongest and most influential tools used by the public in order to get informed about the world. However, how media chooses to capture and present the reality of different cultures has different impacts on the audience. When we examine the Western Media in general, we see that Turkey and Turkish people are usually represented negatively as opposed to how they represent themselves in minority media outlets. These negative representations create prejudices and hinder integration in multicultural societies and lead to a cultural fear towards different countries.

Examining these stereotypical images in the countries they were situated, ethnic minority media organizations show a more balanced picture and try to erase the prejudices. However, their voices cannot be heard by the majority as they are not powerful enough to compete with the mainstream media. A balanced representation, free from ideologies is necessary to inform the citizens well. Otherwise, it helps nothing other than creating prejudices. In order to achieve this, Turkish academics and journalists should work hard to shake the rooted values by producing as many works as they can to reach as many people as they can from the Western countries.

In the first part of my paper, I will analyze the historical journey of Turkey, including the EU accession story to make clear the motives behind these stereotypical representations in Western media. In the second part, I will analyze the Western media environment to find out about the inner structure and workings of media companies and show examples to how Turkish culture and people are framed in the Western media. In the third section, I will explain how Turkish minority media outlets operate and give examples of how they choose to represent themselves as opposed to the Western media outlets. This will give the reader a chance to compare the different attitudes and lead to a conclusion about the possible solutions to the removal of the prejudices in societies.

2. A brief history
In order to understand the motives behind the misrepresentations of Turkey in Western media, we should keep in mind the influence of history. During the time of the Ottoman Empire, beginning with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, followed by the westward movement of the empire, adding to it victories like the siege of Vienna, Ottomans’ power in Europe and the Middle East was established. According to Kosebalaban, the failure of the Crusades and the Siege of Vienna urged the West, which was highly concerned and irritated by the ‘barbaric and brutal’ Ottoman threat to form a European, Christian identity against Turks. He further argues

1 The historical memory of the siege of Vienna is seen by some scholars as one of the main reasons of Austria’s rejection of Turkey’s EU membership (Kosebalaban 2008). Barbaric and brutal were the words used to describe
that from that time on, Europeans were trying to find ways to get rid of the Turks in Europe (2008). In time, the Ottoman Empire started to lose its power and the borders shrank. With the foundation of the Turkish republic by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923, the current borders of Turkey were drawn. During the Cold War, followed by the World War II, ‘the other’ of the West was replaced by the Soviet Union until its collapse at the end of the Cold War. (Kosebalaban 2008). After the collapse, Europe faced a strong cultural diversity with the arrival of the guest workers from Turkey. They contributed to the economy of many European countries, but it brought with it serious problems as well. In time, Europe, lacking ‘a new other’ gave Turks their adjective back (Kosebalaban 2008).

However, Turkey was not the same Ottoman Empire they were used to. With the guidance of Ataturk, many reforms took place including secularism, women rights and change of alphabet. It was giving promise as a modernizing country on contrary to its other Muslim counterparts. However these changes were not enough for Turkey to join the European Union (EU). The 48 year story, lasting until today, bringing with it endless discussions and meetings, reached no end and still offers a bleak future. The reasons for this is still a hot topic of debate among scholars and the most important claim is that Europe is not willing to include Turkey in their common religious and historical unity, which is based on the European Enlightenment (Kosebalaban 2008).

After the 9/11 attacks, the hatred towards Muslims reached its peak in the whole Western world. The U.S, with its war on terror, which was almost identical with the war on Muslims enhanced this hatred. The ‘new other’ of the century became the Muslims for many countries (Hussain 2000). Turkey, being a Muslim, but at the same time a secular country, drowned in the flood of the Arab-Muslim hatred. The word Muslim began to be used interchangeably with the word Turk in mainstream media. This strengthened all the historical stereotyping against Turks and hindered integration, especially in Europe significantly.

3. Western media environment

Van Dijk argues that in Western media, topics about ‘the other’ are usually negative and have a news value only if they are interesting (1995). With the information they choose to transmit, journalists are creating ‘a civic discourse, normalcy and common sense’ (Campbell in Fürsich 2002, p. 59). As a result of the outnumbered negative stereotypical images in mainstream media, Western citizens form biased ideas about the Eastern countries, specific groups of people and the ethnic minorities living in their countries in general2. At this point one wonders about how the Western media structure works, the answer of which is not hard to find.

As a result of commercialization, the work environment of the journalists, the commercial concerns of the companies they work for and the hierarchy in the newsrooms began to affect the stories journalists prepare (Tuchman 1972, p.664). With an aim of making the most profit in this globalizing world, companies are trying to reach the largest number of audiences and in the case

Ottomans at that time although ir was said to be otherwise by artists who were travelling to different locations in the borders of the empire (Kosebalaban 2008).

2 Research shows that in 80% of the news regarding minorities and ethnic affairs in the public service television news of Denmark had negative representations (Hussain 2000, p. 107).
of Western media, programs are usually directed at the white, heterosexual, middle class (Gross 1998, p.90; Young 1989). Parity in the newsrooms is another big problem that leads to biased representations in media. As Cottle (1998) states, the main Western media outlets like BBC are still dominated by middle class, white, males and the Kerner Report proves it to be the same way in the U.S (Wilson 2000). The racial parity record of the Western countries is still low and the media companies, which have an aim of increasing the number of people from diverse backgrounds, are imposing the norms of ‘professionalism’ on these minorities and they are mostly prevented to reflect their cultural differences in their works (Glasser & Awad & Kim 2006). As a result, they either leave their jobs or try to get used to the norms imposed on them (Wilson 2000). Consequently, the public is continuously receiving the biased point of view, created by the majority, for the mainstream, which leads to rooted prejudices in society against specific groups, countries and people.

4. Examples of ‘othering’ in the Western mainstream media

Edward Said, in his thesis about Orientalism argues that the process of othering is a concept based on the belief that Western people and cultures are superior to Eastern people and cultures (Said 1978, p.7). Moving on from their belief that Eastern people cannot represent themselves properly, he believes that Westerners feel the need of exploring, representing and classifying the Orient and circulating the increased stereotypes through mass media. Said underlines the fact that this is a discourse which has economical, scientific, aesthetic, political, military and administrative theories and practices behind it (Said in Marselis 2005, p.1). As we have seen in the previous chapter, as a result of Renaissance, Reform and Enlightenment, the West proved its superiority. With colonization it gained power and began to see the East as inferior (Said 1978). Turkey was not directly involved in the colonization process and after the retreat of Ottomans, the founders of the republic were engaged in the modernization of the country, which was in line with getting adapted to the Western standards. Thus, they accepted the superiority of the West at that time and made an effort to keep up with it in many fields of life (Kosebalaban 2005). On the other hand, the West, already confident about its superiority, did not hesitate to put Turkey in the same box with the other Eastern countries and chose to represent it in an Oriental way, which will be discussed next, together with some illustrations taken from the Western media.

(2 Faces of Modern Turkey / 19 July 2007, BBC News)

Analyzing the pictorial representations of Turks in Western media is problematic. The country is mostly represented in a very conservative Muslim fashion supported by mosques and women wearing headscarves or as Islamic and modern at the same time, supported by pictures of
women wearing bikinis and laying on the beach, which are shown side by side with the mosque visuals. One of the most famous Turkish authors, Elif Safak points out to this problem saying that in Western media, Turkey is divided in two poles with differing ideological and political views and it is shown as if there is a big conflict between these two. However, she underlines that people from different views are living in harmony and showing things as black and white is not the right way to reflect such a hybrid country which contains a mosaic of different cultures, actors and layers (2007).

Woehlert, discussing the different types of ‘othering’, talks about ‘The Contradictory Type’, which can be used to describe Turkey’s status. He argues:

Contradictory actors are ascribed with traits that do not necessarily seem compatible. They carry features of the Self as well as of the other, and those features contradict each other. Actors can be depicted as peaceful, diplomatic or pro-Western and hostile, politically passive, or terror supporting at the same time. Or they are pro-Western and against terrorism and, at the same time, support terror groups and act untruthful (2006, p. 14).

By choosing the topic, ‘The Two Faces of Modern Turkey’, BBC shows the contradictory image of a Muslim country where women wear sexy bikinis. According to Woehlert, this technique is used by the Western press in order to define the Western values (the Self). However, by undermining the similarities of the West and the Orient by showing the other contradictory part, the West proves the differences of its own Self from the Orient and keeps the distinction line strong giving the message that the Orient can never be the same as the West no matter how much it tries (2006, p.14). As Huntington argues: ‘We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against’ (in Hannerz 1999, p.394). This theory serves as a tool to understand the personal need of ‘othering’ different groups, countries and people in general. Citizens of the Western countries are alarmed by the constant reflection of these contradictions and have a chance to see their differences, although some commonalities exist. Festinger’s Theory of Cognitive Dissonance shows that people, while trying to fit the new information they receive in their minds, tend to pick the information which is in parallelism with their already existing beliefs (in Was Guckst Du? 2006, p.4) This idea serves the persistence of the stereotypes on people’s minds about the image of Turkey as a country that connects the East to the West and flawed in a way that it still carries elements that belong to the Orient.

Although Turkey is reflected with both images, the Islamic images seem to be outnumbered compared to the modern images of the country. Women with headscarves are usually used to report on any issue about the country. Islam is also a topic of political cartoons.
Analyzing the cartoons on Turkey in the United States and Europe, Erensu and Adanalı claims that, “Islam is portrayed as the primary identity of Turkey and Turks; certain symbols that are associated with Islam are frequently used in these cartoons. Minarets, ‘bearded men’, veiled women, praying people and ‘backward’ religious images are some signifiers for Turks” (2004. p.62). Turks are usually represented in Ottoman costumes, with swords in their hands, forcing the doors of the EU or the differences are made visible by direct comparisons like we see in the cartoon by Cristina Sampaio, which earned her the Stuart Award 2006 for the best Portuguese press cartoon. The other cartoon found on the website that provides cartoons for leading newspapers and magazines like Reader's Digest, The New Yorker, The Spectator, The Times, The Guardian and many others, presents the president of the Turkish republic, Abdullah Gul as a religious extremist.

The first example, shows the striking differences between a European man and a so called Turkish man, who is actually dressed up as an Ottoman. As Husband argues, in a changing and globalizing world, it is hard and unhealthy to classify people in order to define ‘the other’ in a general sense (2005, p.466). As if it is only the West that is changing, this cartoon disregards all the modernization movements after the foundation of the republic, reminding the reader of their historical experiences with the Turks during the time of the Ottomans. It also reminds us of Said, who talks about the Western view that the Orient is incapable of representing itself (1978). In this example, Turks are shown as having a flawed idea of who they are since they see themselves as Europeans when they look at the mirror although there seems to be a huge gap in between. The cartoon as a whole also gives the message that Turkey is different from the other EU countries by creating a stereotypical EU image, in the shape of a modern, white, Anglo Saxon man, which represents the majority of the Western civilization (Young, 1989). Considering the award she has received, it is not hard to tell that the ideology of the people who have voted for her were in line with her argument.
The second cartoon from the U.S is dangerous and misleading as well in a way that it represents the president of the Turkish republic as a religious extremist. By doing so, it moves one step further from portraying the country as Islamic by leading it towards an extremist point. The fear after the 9/11 in the whole world against Islamic extremists reached an enormous scale, and as a result of the biased representations in the Western mass media, prejudices against the Muslims got combined with the fear of terror and all Muslims began to be seen as extremists. A current example is the movie prepared by the Dutch politician, well known for his opinion against Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands. In his movie Fitna, by showing Qur’an as a book that leads people to terror and evil, he generalizes and stereotypes the believers of Islam as potential terrorists. In this cartoon example too, Gul’s shadow is in the shape of the devil that reminds the reader of the speeches of George W. Bush about the war against evil. Gul, together with Turkey -as it is claimed to be governed by a religious extremist in this case- are shown in the shape of the devil and as a potential threat to the West.

Another example comes from the German comedy show ‘Was guckst du?’, which is presented by a Arabic-Turkish man. There are little sketches, in which the presenter pretends to be a Turkish, Italian and Indian man. In the Turkish sketches, Turkish men are depicted as macho, aggressive, rude. Turkish people are shown as poor, uneducated, eating only Turkish food and killing their time in coffee houses playing cards. They either own kebab shops or they are criminals. People laugh at these and at the same time constantly receive stereotypical images and form an opinion about the country and its people without even going there. A German research conducted to compare the images children and adolescents have in their minds with the images they see on TV proved that TV, as a highly visual medium, has a remarkable effect on the reinforcement and creation of stereotypes (Was guckst du? 2006, p.6). This example is significant as the presenter is half Arabic and half Turkish. He reinforces the prejudices in society by using them in his comedy show. Already having identified the general stereotypical characteristics of the Turks and the mainstream opinion about them, he serves the majority of the audience who finds it funny. He, having accepted these stereotypes as a half Turkish man, increases the credibility and the truth value of the portrayal in the eyes of the German citizens. The presenter’s aim of showing the negative aspects of the group he belongs to, makes him accepted in the German society (Was guckst du? 2006).

5. Turkish minority media’s representations

A research about the minority related news in British and Dutch media showed that the top five topics include immigration, violence, crime, riots, and other forms of deviance, ethnic relations, cultural differences, and especially in the U.S, music and sports (Van Dijk 1995, p.8). The negative characteristics of the minorities are constantly stressed and as discussed before, the ‘us-them’ distinction is made clear by comparing the positive image of ‘us’ with the corrupt nature of ‘them’. However, topics concerning the everyday concerns of the minorities are usually neglected (Van Dijk 1995). Shortly, it can be said that minorities in media are either invisible or represented in rooted stereotypes (Gross 1998, p. 89).

Many ethnic minority outlets, feeling uneasy about the prejudices, decide to form their own medium. If we take the Platform Magazine’s portrayal of Turkish women and compare it with the Western media, we see a more balanced representation. Being aware of the hybrid and changing nature and cultural mosaic of their countries, they prefer not
to go to extremes. Rather than showing a woman with a headscarf or a sexy woman sunbathing, they choose the image of an ordinary young woman, wearing jeans for their magazine advertisements.

Zaman newspaper, published in thirty five countries in more than ten languages, is also trying hard to stop the prejudices against Islam. It usually puts emphasis on the biased reporting in the Western media and proves its statement with research by publishing a big issue called ‘The West and Islamophobia’. One example can be given from a survey conducted to find the reason of the increasing Muslim hatred in England. The newspaper states that 92% of the Muslims living there put the blame on the mainstream media (Bațı ve İslamofobi 2006). Also against the opinion in the mainstream media stating that Muslims have a tendency to commit violence, they give various historical examples together with supplementary visuals like the one below to prove that it is not the case.

Owners of the Turkish minority media outlets openly state that they are following the mainstream media outlets in the countries they are living as minorities, and by picking the points they think are unfairly treated and reporting on these issues, they are trying to shake these prejudices. However, one of the owners of the Platform Magazine, Turgut argues that the majority of the country follows the mainstream media and as they have financial difficulties in publishing a Dutch version of their magazine, their audience
is limited to the Turks in the Netherlands. Zaman in this case has a wider audience as it is published in several languages. Among the topics minority media outlets cover, are the rights of minorities, their problems related to immigration, in addition to economical and social issues. Political news is also an important part of their productions.3

These ethnic minority media outlets have an aim to give voice to the minorities, who do not have a persistent voice in the mainstream media. However, Van Dijk states that minority organizations do not have enough access to media and they are not capable of competing with the mainstream media to change their portrayal (1995).

6. Conclusion:

We are living in an age of globalization and change. Things growing and transforming at such a high speed, lead to fluid identities. Together with increasing commercialization and advancements in technology like satellite and cable TV, media companies aim at attracting the maximum number of masses. Thus, they heavily rely on mainstream ideas and values (Fürsich 2002).

How Western media represents the Eastern countries is a topic hotly discussed by scholars. The Orientalism theory of Edward Said is an important tool to evaluate the Orient in the eyes of the West. To do that, historical background should be analyzed to search for the beginning of these prejudiced representations. In the case of Turkey, Ottoman history has a big influence over the country’s future representations in mass media and relations with the West.

Western media environment and the situation in the newsrooms are also worth exploring to find an answer to the reasons of biased reporting. On their decision making process, journalists rely on objectivity, but the lack of racial parity and the problems minorities face trying to represent themselves in Western newsrooms, result in the biased reflection of white and Christian Western values (Glasser & Awad & Kim 2006).

Politicians, elites and corporate media companies gain influence over the media content which is highly based on othering and stereotyping, as it is the easiest way to define ‘the self’ (Woehlert 2006). When the visual representations of Turkey in the Western media are examined, it is found out that they are usually depicted as barbarian, Ottoman, backwards, uneducated, Islamic, between the East and the West, and inclined to violence, which leads to problems about the integration of Turkish minorities living in the Western countries as well.

Turkish authors and the minority media outlets, after examining these biased representations, try to show the other side of the coin to erase these prejudices. However, their financial problems, disability to compete and work in the mainstream media and their limited number keeps their voices low.

Hussain believes that lack of human interaction constitutes the basis of prejudice as people rely on the media for everything they want to learn about ‘the other’ (2000, p.110). As a result of globalization, nowadays people have an easier access to distant countries and have more chance to experience their cultures. Internet is another tool widely used, which gives an extended possibility for human interaction. These improvements give hope for a better future.

It is not possible to say that there is a narrative unity in all the Western media outlets (Jacobs 1996). However, it is the duty of the academics to point out to the misrepresentations in order to inform as many readers as possible. How a country

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3 This part is based on a personal interview with Ebubekir Turgut on March 19, 2008.
represents itself is also an important issue that should be taken into consideration. Turkish journalists, academics and government should work harder to find different ways of introducing Turkish people, its changing culture and values to the West if they want to be understood better. However, the lack of journalists and academics in the field of Communications is a serious problem.

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