

## DRAFT PAPER

*For The Conference  
Time For Medialisation: Integrating Media And Transcultural Communication Research  
within Islamic and Area Studies*

*April 8 – 10, 2010  
Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Cultures and Societies*

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### IMAGES OF GENDER IN THE ISLAMIC NEWSPAPERS IN TURKEY

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#### **Abstract**

This contribution focuses on the images of gender in the two major Islamic newspapers in Turkey: *Zaman* and *Anadolu'da Vakit*. The newspapers are analyzed within the framework of a larger study comparing the visualization of gender in Islamic and secular newspapers in Turkey and the results pertaining to the Islamic newspapers are presented in this paper. *Zaman* is a moderate Islamic newspaper with a circulation of around 700.000 and it is currently the highest circulating daily in Turkey. *Anadolu'da Vakit* is a radical Islamic newspaper circulating around 60.000. In spite of its smaller circulation the newspaper is the epitome of radical Islamism in the Turkish press. The newspapers are compared with each in terms of the visualization of gender, particularly of the female and the headscarf. The images of gender in the two newspapers are compared both in quantitative and qualitative terms, using visual content analysis, iconography and semiotics. There are major differences between the moderate and the radical Islamic newspapers in terms of the ways they use gender images, showing different ways of defining Muslim identity in relation to secularism in Turkey.

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## Introduction

Contrary to the mainstream talk in Europe about Islam today, Islam is not a unified totality and a growing academic literature emphasizes the historical, economic, political, social, cultural as well as religious complexities in countries with a majority of Muslim population (Bullock 2000; Christensen 2006; Yılmaz 2007; Khiabany 2008). Islam becomes concrete in lived practice and different points of views compete with each other in Muslim lands in defining and filling out the contents of Islam. The media is an important arena where different versions and interpretations of Islam co-exist and reach audiences in national as well as transnational spaces. This contribution analyzes two different Islamic newspapers in Turkey in terms of their depictions of gender, and points the extent to which the term “Islamic” covers two divergent approaches with regard to the construction of gender in different Islamic newspapers.

Gender has been an important category in the analysis of newspaper content. Women’s representation in the news is typically less than men (Global Media Monitoring Project 2010 Preliminary Report), and this has been a major concern for feminist media scholarship since the inception of the discipline (Byerly & Ross 2006, p. 17; Van Zoonen 1994, p. 17). In addition to testing the hypothesis that women are underrepresented in the media, the studies analyzing Turkish newspapers wanted to see whether a religious/Islamic point of view leads to a more pronounced difference between the representation of the men and women in the newspapers. İmamoğlu, İmamoğlu, Gültekin, Köseoğlu and Çebi (1990) reported that independent of their political viewpoints (leftist, rightist or liberal), the Turkish newspapers helped to perpetuate traditional gender roles “in a subtle and consistent manner” (İmamoğlu et al 1990: 65). In another study Hortaçsu and Ertürk (2003) reported that Islamic newspapers contained more references to religion in general and female headscarf in particular (Hortaçsu and Ertürk 2003: 2032). Yet, these studies did not focus on the differences within religious/Islamic newspapers, overlooking the varieties among them. Another shortcoming of these studies is their neglect of visuals in newspapers. This is a serious shortcoming considering that Turkish newspapers in general are very vivid, colorful and full of visuals. A single newspaper issue in Turkey contains an average of 120 images (Özcan 2009).

Furthermore, visuals are not only illustrations, but also sources of information (Müller 2007), and they influence the readers’ perceptions in subtle ways (Messaris and Abraham 2001). Therefore, the analysis of images provides us with valuable insights about different ways of imagining gender roles and relations. Although there are clear differences in terms of their different positions towards the role of Islam in the modern world, the two Islamic newspapers analyzed here, *Zaman* and *Anadolu’da Vakit* (will be shortly referred to as *Vakit*), are usually lumped together in the public discourse in Turkey. Yet, as will be explained more in the coming sections, *Zaman* can be described as a moderate Islamic newspaper whereas *Vakit* is rather a radical Islamic newspaper. I argue in this paper that as opposed to *Vakit*, the moderate Islamic newspaper *Zaman* is, on the one hand, carving a modernized Muslim identity, and on the other hand, shaping new relations with the secular circles in Turkey. The analysis of gender images shows us the ways in which how the newspaper carves a modern-Muslim identity by using gender images. Analyzing the images in *Zaman* in comparison to the radical Islamic newspaper *Vakit* makes it easier to see how different Islamic projects employ gender images in constructing different versions of Islam.

## **The Press in Turkey and Islamic Newspapers**

Today's press in Turkey can be characterized by a divide between secular and Islamic newspapers. The secular newspapers range between strictly anti-Islamic newspapers such as *Cumhuriyet* to newspapers in which religion is rather a non-issue. Some secular newspapers publish pages on religion or excerpts from the Koran only during the month of Ramadan. For newspapers that can be characterized as "Islamic" religion is a more permanent issue, and part of the identity of the newspaper. Compared to secular newspapers Islamic newspapers in Turkey have a smaller market share. Calculated from the circulation figures, by March 2010, 24 percent of the newspaper market in Turkey can be identified as "Islamic". Islamic newspapers started to gain momentum particularly after the 1980s and until 2000s there was no Islamic newspaper among the top five highest selling newspapers in Turkey. The Islamic press in itself is quite diversified as well. As Cihan Tuğal notes: "[d]ue to the diversity in the movement, the Islamist press is the home for a wide range of (frequently diverging) opinions" (Tuğal 2002: 93).

What makes a newspaper "Islamic" in Turkey? For this study, I used four criteria to identify a newspaper as "Islamic" or not. First of all, the content of the newspaper gives important clues. The existence of permanent pages allocated to the discussion of religious issues is an indication that religion constitutes an important part in the newspaper's identity. The Islamic newspapers have pages devoted to religious issues. The language used in the newspaper to address an imagined community of readers also gives clues about the position of the newspaper. Secondly, the way the journalists and columnists refer to their own newspapers and others on the market is another indication showing the journalists' sense of belonging. In the Turkish press the language of the columnists are decisive in creating a sense of "we" versus "them". It is very common in the columnists' language, working either in secular or Islamic newspapers, to refer to different "neighborhoods" in the Turkish press, namely Islamic and secular. Thirdly, the columnists' background, whether they are involved in Islamic movements in Turkey or not and their previous publications is an important indication to categorize the newspaper. Finally, the newspaper's ownership, whether it is owned by an Islamic group plays a role. Yet, the ownership structures in the press in Turkey today is not as clear cut as it used to be five years ago. There are now newspapers – such as *Sabah* – owned by business enterprises known to have links with pro-AKP Islamic groups, but with a different content than the Islamic newspapers. In the Turkish press there are also other newspapers that defy categorization, blurring the boundaries between the different "neighborhoods" in the press.

## **Zaman and Vakit as two Major Islamic Newspapers in Turkey**

Zaman appeared on the Turkish newspaper market on November 3, 1986. It started as a black and white community newspaper with a small circulation of 30.000. After a short while the newspaper changed hands and was bought by Fethullah Gülen community, which is one of the largest Islamic communities in Turkey. Today it is owned by Feza Group that keeps its links with the Fethullah Gülen movement. Zaman's circulation today is reported to be around 770.000 readers and it is currently the highest selling newspaper in Turkey. Zaman is among the few newspapers in the Turkish press that has a subscription system for its distribution. Because the newsstand sales are the main form of distribution in Turkey and the subscription system is rather unusual, the sale reports of Zaman is a source of controversy. Some

columnists in the secular newspapers totally disregard Zaman's subscription sales and find the figures unreliable. While the newspaper's subscription figures should be handled with care at the absence of an audit institution, it is wrong to disregard these figures altogether.

During the 1990s Zaman changed its whole graphic design and visual appearance, a change that corresponded with the newspaper's changing perspective towards journalism. The newspaper aimed to reach compromise between enlarging its readers among different segments of the population and keeping a Muslim identity. According to Yavuz, Zaman "offers a distinctly Muslim voice on political and social issues. Nevertheless, not all of its views and positions are predictable" (Yavuz 2003: 191). The newspaper today can be described as a moderately Islamic liberal daily. It is not confrontational to the secular establishment in Turkey, and avoids binary oppositions openly caricaturizing the Other (Taş and Uğur 2007: 313). Another characteristic of the newspaper is that it invites and sometimes transfers leading liberal or left-wing columnists from the secular press, transgressing the boundaries between the Islamic and the secular media. Its coverage of arts and culture appeals even the audiences antithetical to anything Islamic.

Vakit started in September 12, 1993 although with a different name, Akit. The name change occurred in December 2001 because the newspaper declared bankruptcy due to large amounts that it was obliged to pay by court decision for the libel and defamation cases brought to the courts by high military officials. Very soon after the bankruptcy the same cadre of journalists made a little twist in the name and started publishing Vakit. Vakit's sales fluctuate between 50.000 and 65.000. Unlike Zaman the newspaper is directly confrontational to the secular establishment in Turkey. The newspaper has a whole page devoted to mocking and criticizing news articles and photos published in secular newspapers. Its headlines are sensational and according to Tuğal "Akit [Vakit] does not have as much economic and political institutional support as Milli Gazete, Zaman and Yeni Şafak [other Islamic newspapers in Turkish press], but the activism of its audience renders it widely influential" (Tuğal 2002: 94). The newspaper has been blamed several times of provoking violence against top judges and bureaucrats. Anadolu'da Vakit also publishes in Europe and since 2005 it has been banned in Germany because of its anti-Semitic content. Zaman is available in Europe as well but only with subscription. It is not available at the newsstand.

In terms of its visual design Zaman can be defined as a more serious newspaper than Vakit. Zaman avoids very large sensational and colorful headlines whereas for Vakit, this is not the case. Overall, Vakit contains more visuals than Zaman. On average Vakit contains 132 images per issue, while Zaman has an average of 86 images per issue (Özcan 2009).

## **Method**

The newspapers analyzed are sampled during July 2005. The sample included secular newspapers as well which will not be covered in this paper. Zaman and Vakit are selected among the other Islamic newspapers because both of them are typical in their own respective category.

The newspaper issues are from a randomly selected calendar week (22–28 July 2005). Seven issues of Zaman and seven issues of Vakit are analyzed for their depictions of gender by using quantitative and qualitative methods. Visual content analysis is used as part of quantitative analysis. An original, detailed coding sheet is developed to extract quantitative information

from the images. I will present here the results from the following categories: the number of females and males depicted; the number of females wearing headscarf, and the number of males with beards. The category of the female headscarf included further sub-categories: Islamic and traditional. These categories are developed on the basis of literature. They also correspond to a misleading but nevertheless persistent distinction common among the secularist circles in Turkey. In the secularist imagination the partial visibility of the hair or the neck signals traditional ways of headcovering as opposed to the political and “dangerous” Islamic covering, which is stricter in covering all the hair and the neck. Traditional forms of headcovering are more lenient towards the visibility of the hair and the neck.

In the qualitative part of the study selected typical images were analyzed in depth by taking into account the use of photographic techniques such as shot angle and frame, as well as the news stories the images accompanied and their place on the page.

In the following I will first present the results of quantitative analysis. I will first compare the newspapers in terms of the representation of the females and males in numbers. Then I will move on to the representation of headscarf and the male beard in two newspapers. In the qualitative part I will present the differences between the newspapers in terms of using the images of females with headscarves.

### **Visualization of Gender in Zaman and Vakit**

The representation of the females and males in quantitative terms is measured on the category of gender gap which is defined as the difference between the numbers of male and female images appeared on different types of images in newspapers. The two Islamic newspapers are compared with each other to see whether the difference between the male and female images is large or small. The results showed that there is a significant difference between Zaman and Vakit in terms of the number of female images that they contain. The gender gap is much larger in Vakit than in Zaman. In that regard Zaman is no different than the secular Turkish newspapers whereas this is not the case for Vakit. The radical Islamic position of Vakit makes a difference on the representation of the females in numbers, while this is not the case for the moderate Islamic newspaper Zaman.

In Vakit the females with headscarf constitute almost half (43%) of the females depicted in the newspaper, and in Zaman females with headscarf constitute 20% of the females seen in the newspaper. 20% is still higher than the rates in secular newspapers. The headscarf types are analyzed further by dividing them into Islamic and traditional headscarf types. Vakit depicts a higher number of females with Islamic headscarf, the style of headscarf that is strict in its interpretation of covering the all hair and the neck. The moderate Islamic newspaper Zaman is not different than the secular newspapers in terms of depicting Islamic headscarf.

Vakit also scores higher in terms of the number of bearded males seen in the newspaper. For the radical Islamic newspaper Vakit, beard is as strong a symbol as headscarf, and it differs significantly from the other newspapers in the sample and Zaman. Zaman has the smallest mean number for the same category. It seems that Zaman avoids publishing a high number of bearded males.

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## Depictions of Headscarf in Two Newspapers

The Table 1 below summarizes the qualitative differences between the two Islamic newspapers in terms of depicting the female headscarf. In both newspapers the Islamic, religious meaning of the headscarf is more dominant. Yet, the newspapers differ from each other in terms of the female role models with headscarf, and in terms of their placement of the news about the headscarf ban in Turkey. Vakit shows females often together with Koran, while reading or studying it. Rural women and Islamic activists wearing a headscarf are the main female role models in the newspaper. The newspaper publishes the news about the headscarf ban from the front page whereas this is not the case for Zaman. Zaman places more emphasis on the girls as individuals suffering from the ban while Vakit emphasizes the institutional supports behind them.

The role models wearing a headscarf in Zaman are educated, urban women. The newspaper publishes interviews with women writers, successful women working in non-governmental organizations and presents women with headscarf in a wider variety of contexts. Yet, the newspaper places an emphasis on motherhood in these news reports about successful women wearing a headscarf.

Table 1. Depictions of Headscarf in Zaman and Vakit

| DEPICTIONS OF THE FEMALE HEADSCARF |   |   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Newspapers                         | Themes and Contexts   | Primary emphasis  |
| Vakit                              | Role models   | Exaltation of the headscarf. Islamic, religious meaning more dominant |
|                                    | Females reading Koran   |   |
|                                    | Rural women   |   |
|                                    | Radical Islamic activists wearing large and extensive headscarves                               |   |
|                                    | Demonstration and protest   |   |
|                                    | News given on the front page  |   |
|                                    | Institutional support behind the women is emphasized  |   |
| Zaman                              | Role models   |   |
|                                    | Urban women, writers, professionals wearing stylized headscarf (with an emphasis on motherhood) |   |
|                                    | Demonstration and protest   |   |
|                                    | News given in inside pages  |   |
|                                    | Less emphasis on institutional support behind the women   |   |
|                                    | Headscarf in beaches  |   |

An example showing the emphasis on motherhood can be seen from an interview published on July 23, 2005 with a female author on the Woman & Family page in Zaman. The report is an example showing the subtle conflict between the subject position of the author and the report itself. The title of the report is: “When you are a mother, you feel responsible for every

single victim of violence and injustice.”<sup>1</sup> The female interviewed on the page, Yıldız Ramazanoğlu, is a writer and a pharmacist. She wears a headscarf and the Muslim identity is important for her. She is very well educated, and a traveler who has been in cities ranging from Yerevan and Iskenderiye to London, Frankfurt and New York. According to the news report her book is about the cities she traveled (the title of her book is *The cities that went through me/İçimden Geçen Şehirler*). She is also a mother of two daughters and the report conveys the impression that she values and enjoys being a mother. But, when we read her own words in the report, we see that she is critical of the exaggerated, traditional model of motherhood, argues for the need for a woman’s own space outside of the family. She argues for opening up space for Muslim women and she sees it her mission, as an educated Muslim woman, to help create the Muslim elite. Yet, neither the main heading, nor the sub heading give a single clue about her critical position to traditional motherhood, rather there is a strong emphasis and mystification of motherhood in the titles. In other words, in spite of the fact that Ramazanoğlu could make it to the news, the ideological stance of the newspaper and the style of the reporting shadow the very criticism that she directs to the ideology of motherhood that the newspaper seems to value.

### **Summary and Conclusion:**

The differences between the two Islamic newspapers can be summarized as follows:

1. The Islamic newspapers examined in the study differ from one another in terms of the quantitative representation of the female. Vakit has much fewer numbers of females than Zaman.
2. There are basic qualitative differences in the ways the two newspapers depict females with headscarf. The images of females reading the Koran do not exist in Zaman, while they are encountered often in Vakit. The contexts of headscarf depictions differ in two newspapers.
3. There are stylistic differences between the newspapers when they address the same issues or report the same news. The headscarf ban is an issue for both newspapers. Yet, while Zaman focuses only on the individual women in visuals, Vakit focuses on the institutions supporting them, mostly headed by males, as well.
4. The female role models the newspapers promote are different from each other. The role models that the moderate Islamic newspaper Zaman promotes have more similarities with the successful secular republican women.

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<sup>1</sup> In Turkish: “Anne olunca, zulme uğrayan her bir insandan kendini sorumlu hissedersin”

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