



REPRESENTATION OF THE WOMEN IN THE TURKISH MEDIA

Nevin ARVAS

*Marmara University Faculty of Communication
Department of Radio Tv and Cinema*

Abstract: This study proposes to analyze the representation of the headscarf dispute in the Turkish media in 2009. This study also aims to examine how news photos affect news' information, message, and structure. With this study, it is tried to figure out the conformity between news photos and news' message, information, and structure when the retrievers get the news about the headscarf dispute.

Key Words : Women, Turkish Media, Headscarved Women, Message

TÜRK BASININDA KADININ TEMSİLİYETİ

Özet: Bu çalışma 2009 yılında Türk medyasındaki başörtüsünün temsiliyeti tartışmasını incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Ayrıca bu çalışma haber fotoğraflarının nasıl haberin bilgisini, mesajını ve yapısını etkilediğini incelemektedir. Bu çalışma ile başörtüsü tartışması ile ilgili okuyucuya ulaşan haberlerdeki haber fotoğrafları ile haberin mesajı, bilgisi ve yapısı arasındaki uyum araştırılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kadın, Türk Medyası, Başörtüsü, Mesaj

INTRODUCTION

Since establishment of the Turkish Republic state in 1923, there have been strong movements in every area of the society. One of the most important areas, revolutions by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his friends was the role of Turkish women, which has still been debated currently. Republicanism, populism, secularism, reformism, nationalism, and statism are the primary principles of the Turkish state. In the article of Kovanlıkaya (2004), she says:

“The first era is the period between the

two world wars during which single party regimewas in rule in Turkey...The multi-party regime and its related dynamics with regard to economic and social promises mark the second era (1950). The last era is the late 1968's where one observes totally different dynamic sunder the restructuring of the political and economic system in the Republic” (p. 1).

Turkey had a democratic country, but there have been some main problems, including the role the status of Turkish women in the society. In addition to the terms of role and

status, clothing has been a huge topic for debate for years in Turkey. Even though Turkey is secular country, wearing the headscarf, which is one of the main principles of Islam, has been a big problem among secularists and religionists.

According to secularism, people have their own rights such as voting rights and clothing rights. However, today, in the governmental offices, women who are wearing headscarves are not allowed to wear headscarves while serving in these jobs. We have tried to solve this problem for 25 years, but it can be clearly said that headscarves have become one of the most crucial problems on Turkey's bulletin.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Olson (1985), the conventional wearing of a headscarf has been one of the most debated issues in Turkey for 25 years when some women wanted to wear headscarf while going on with their education. The article "A New Islamic Individualism in Turkey: Headscarved Women in the City" Genel and Karaosmanoglu (2006), say:

"The increasing visibility of the Islamic way of life in the urban Turkish landscape provokes fears on the part of a certain group of people in Turkey who define themselves

as secular, modern Turks. Up until recently, Islam in Turkey was to be found only inside the home, in the village, and confined to certain districts within the city, never daring to step out into demarcated areas of the metropolis. All symbols of Islam—be it the headscarf of a university student, a mosque in the middle of the city, or the presence of a black-veiled woman at the bazaar—constituted a threat to the "Western" image of secular Turkey, an implicit threat to "modern" lifestyles. For these people, any manifestation of Islam in the city was associated with political Islam, which in turn meant a ban on alcoholic beverages, the segregation of women and men in public places, an end to expressions of art, compulsory praying five times a day, the full covering of women, and a whole range of proscriptions in contradiction to the principles of the republic of Atatürk." (p. 474)

After being seen in the public area more than before, the administration, which was governing Turkey in 1998, decided that headscarved students were banned from attending universities as covered because of threat to secularism (Turunc, 2007). After this regulation, the headscarf has caused many conflicts between secularists and Islamists in Turkey; in fact, not only citizens of Turkey, but also the media's foundations have departed from each other. However, in this context, Ozyurt (2009) says:

“Together with the extension of human rights and democratic values, while identifying the rights and freedom of their citizens, nation states take the universal ethical values into consideration more than before. In this way, the concept of universal citizenship is added to literature of politics and sociology.” (p. 159)

According to Gorvett (2008), this clash among secularists and Islamists has been handled not only by the Turkish government but also by the Turkish media. More than only being an issue of one’s own preference or religious assurance; the headscarf became a significant topic of dispute among the habitual Islamist part and the secular part of Turkish culture. Because of the modernization development conducted as a consequence of the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, women were encouraged to take off their headscarves. In spite of the fact that there had been no law banning the head covering for women in the early years of the Republic, women were encouraged to adopt Western style clothing and to unveil their heads. In fact, the directors of Turkish Republic celebrated women wearing “Western” clothes in public. In addition to that, the number of bareheaded women increased in the Turkish society because being unveiled woman in the society became easier than being headscarved (Olson 1985).

Moreover, if we spotlight the studies about perception of women of out headscarves, it can be clearly seen that bareheaded women believe that the headscarf should be considered to be not only a practice of women of older ages but also a practice of agricultural regions.

After 2002, when Justice and Development Party (AKP) won the administrative election in Turkey, the clash reached its last step because AKP had Islamic view in its administration methods. Therefore, some parts of the Turkish society felt uncomfortable themselves about Turkey’s future. They believe that Turkey would become like Iran and was governed *Seriat*, which is an administrative form of the Islamic rules. However, the Turkey’s economy and cultural activities such as tourism have developed after AKP’s period. Then, 2007 AKP won the election again, and the headscarf dispute came to the Turkish bulletin again. Star (2008) says:

“Turkey’s Islamist-rooted ruling AK Party and a key opposition party agreed yesterday to co-operate to lift a ban on the wearing of the Islamic headscarf in universities. The move is sure to anger the secular elite - including army generals, judges and university rectors - who view the ban as vital for the separation of state and religion.”

This clash among secularists and Islamists has been handled not only by the Turkish

government but also by the Turkish media. If we spotlight image of women wearing headscarves, we can present many instances from the Turkish media. Due to fact that the Turkish media has presented headscarf dispute from different perspectives, it is obligatory to observe at least two newspapers deeply from Turkish media. This study aims to examine how news photos affect news' information, message, and structure. I am going to try to figure out the conformity between news photos, news' message, and information (O'connor, Kearns, & Anderson 2008). According to Greisford and O'connor's article titled "Modelling what users see when they look at images: A cognitive viewpoint," "If a picture is worth a thousand words to one viewer, it is worth a million words to 1,000 viewers" (2002). Due to that reason, it is important to analyze the impact of the news photos to the news. I, therefore, will analyze the same topic: the image of the headscarf dispute in different newspapers, which are published in Turkey. First of all, it is important to explain what information is, how information can be presented, how viewers retrieval this information, and how a photograph can be one of the most important provocations during getting information progress (O'connor, Kearns, & Anderson 2008). After that, I am going to analyze newspapers, which are published in Turkey by elucidating news photos about

the headscarf, called also *turban*. I believe that news photos about the headscarf dispute are taking shape the purpose of the news, which is determined by journalists and newspapers' editors.

Is any information necessary for people? Or should people know any information about issues? People who are interested in getting information from different sources need to understand how they can retrieval that information which is sometimes out of the universe. First of all, we should highlight that when people are getting information, they must concern about the several aspects of this representation, one of which is intention of the representation (O'connor, Kearns, & Anderson 2008). In addition to this aspect, people who are trying to get appropriate information must consider that there is no image, information, or depiction without using a code.

Every image, information, or representation carries a code which was already ascribed an implication in specific or general concept. With the light of this cognizance, we can conclude that the headscarf dispute could be presented with a code by the international media. This representation can give by using photograph, text, or video by international mass media. On the other hand, a reader or viewer must consider about information, which is presented to her/him. As

I mentioned before, I will focus on the impact of the news photos on the news about the headscarf. According to O'connor and Greisdorf (2002), when a viewer, reader, or receiver is searching, getting, or looking for an image, there are some levels of perception, including primitive features, which contain color, shape, and texture. The other level of perception is an object, which comprise person/thing, place/location, and activity. Last level of perception is inductive interpretation, which includes symbolic value and prototypical displacement (Greisdorf & O'connor, 2002). It can be clearly said that when a viewer look at the image of the headscarf in the newspaper, her/his perception probably will depend on those levels of perception. As a result, when we analyze the impact of the news photos, we should not ignore those important levels of perception.

According to King and Lester (2005), "pictures often affect a viewer emotionally more than words alone, pictorial displays often have the weight of established facts. Ted Spiker wrote, 'The images in the news can stir emotions and foster public outcry like no other means of expression photographs in news reports, even those that are descriptive, are 'more than décor.' While journalists tend to think more about page-design criteria or the news in the story than about the impact of the photo, the impact of the story is more often determined by the pho-

tograph than the story itself.' By choosing to use and choosing how to use photographs, photographers and editors can implicitly and explicitly add and direct meaning to a photograph. For wartime photographs in particular, that's especially true (p. 626)."

We can conclude that images do not always have huge meanings; in fact, groups charge meaning into them. Nevertheless, for instance, headscarf photos can be carry great meaning for people who care that women wearing headscarves should enter the universities with their headscarves, while a headscarf can be carry no meaning for people who had not seen any covered women in their lives, while it can be only a piece of cloth for another woman who does not know anything about headscarf or Islamic values. On the other hand, it can be clearly seen that despite the fact that meaning is not actually message, news have a message; consequently, every news photo carries a message for a retriever.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Due to fact that the Turkish media has presented headscarf dispute from different perspectives and has had one of the most significant powers to shape people's opinions in Turkey, this study aims to look at all photos of women, to see when/how/why women are depicted in headscarves. There-

fore the questions are,

RQ₁: When photos depict Turkish women wearing headscarves, what is the nature of these representations?

RQ₂: What are the messages of photos depicting women in headscarves?

METHOD

This study plans to examine the representation of the headscarf dispute in the Turkish newspapers, which are *Sabah* and *Radikal*. The data for this study will be collected operating qualitative method. In fact, the qualitative visual content analysis which “is one of very few research methods that can be employed qualitatively or quantitatively, opening up a wide array of methodological possibilities” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, p. 279), will be applied to 13 photos in this study. 13 photos will be chosen from two Turkish newspapers, which are top two newspapers in Turkey. Each photo will be coded (ground theory which “is a research method that operates almost in a reverse fashion from traditional research and at first may appear to be in contradiction of the scientific method. Rather than beginning by researching and developing a hypothesis, the first step is data collection, through a variety of methods. From the data collected, the key points are marked with a series of codes,

which are extracted from the text. The codes are grouped into similar concepts in order to make them more workable. From these concepts, categories are formed, which are the basis for the creation of a theory, or a reverse engineered hypothesis. This contradicts the traditional model of research, where the researcher chooses a theoretical framework, and only then applies this model to the studied phenomenon¹”). As it was mentioned before, codes carry some levels of perceptions including primitive features, which contain **color, shape, and texture**. The other level of perception is an object, which comprise **person/thing, place/location, and activity**. Last level of perception is inductive interpretation, which includes **symbolic value and prototypical displacement** (Greisdorf & O’connor, 2002).

The time period of the research was selected from April 1, 2009 to April 30, 2009. All photos (13) were analyzed in this period for this study. The unit of this study is photographs about the headscarf dispute. The selected newspapers’ websites and the electronic sources of University of North Texas, www.pressdisplay.com, were used to analyze news photos. This period was used because before these dates there was an election Turkey, and it was very crucial to see after AKP won council election in Turkey in

¹ Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grounded_theory

March 29, 2009, whether the media would continue to create stereotypical news about the headscarf and headscarved women.

RESULT/DATA

Radikal is also one of the most important newspapers in the Turkish written media. In fact, in Turkey, there is strong polarization among newspapers. Every newspaper has different news writing strategies, different page setting, and different photograph cropping because every newspaper has different publishing policy. The links of photos from *Radikal* newspaper are:

1. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=RadikalHaberDetay&ArticleID=933180&Date=12.05.2009&CategoryID=97>
2. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=RadikalHaberDetay&ArticleID=930048&Date=12.05.2009&CategoryID=98>
3. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=RadikalHaberDetay&ArticleID=929169&Date=12.05.2009&CategoryID=97>
4. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&ArticleID=930159>
5. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&ArticleID=930026>

6. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&ArticleID=931997>
7. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&ArticleID=924323>
8. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&ArticleID=931997>
9. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&ArticleID=930694>

For example, if we look at the first news photo of *Radikal* newspaper, we can say that even though it seems to be different topic, the physical characteristics of those images give a dark emotion to the viewers of this news about headscarf, especially black garment which is the common cloth in Islamic countries although it is rarely seen in Turkey (O'connor & Wyatt, 2004).

An event from Turkey is given in news. Centered news is given with black and white color, describing headscarved children in Turkey when they are celebrating the birthday of the *Prophet Muhammad* who is the last messenger of the Muslims. Another photo is describing headscarved girls. *Radikal* presented this event in a pessimistic

atmosphere because its purpose is to create a perception on viewer. Because “photography is a highly sophisticated form of communication” (O’connor & Wyatt, 2004), it can be said that in this news, verbal description is presented as less important factor than visual description.

Sabah can be described as a secular newspaper; therefore, I found more negative news about headscarf than others in it. As a color, text, shape etc., *Sabah* is more colorful than other newspapers because of its policy of broadcasting. The following news will help to understand deeply what the differences are. The links of news photo are:

10. <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2009/04/08/haber,8290719CE6AB44928C9DBEA662AA99AC.html>
11. <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2009/04/05/pz/haber,E2460ED09BD44291935C26005CB9ED48.html>
12. <http://libproxy.library.unt.edu:2580/pressdisplay/viewer.aspx#>
13. <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2009/04/17/haber,8EBFFE7CA49B48EDB38FD62D87CFD729.html>

When we look at those photos, we can realize that there are stories about headscarf, and if we consider those photos without their text message, we can understand that even though there is a good relationship be-

tween those images, for a covered woman, emerged story does not tell good things about herself.

For instance, we can see a headscarved woman at the council saloon while she is looking at her around strangely in second photo. There are three bareheaded women in the photo, and we can conclude that headscarved woman stays alone in there. Also, there is a strange situation at the room because of headscarved women. When a reader look at the photo and think about this photo’s meaning, he or she can conclude why this woman is sitting over there. People can think in negative way because the photo and the news article do not give a positive effect about the headscarved woman.



Picture 2: The headscarf crisis at the council building

Another example is from fourth picture, one of the photos shows headscarved girls who seem to be sad for some reasons. However, the news is related to headscarf problem in Turkey. When we look at the photo, we can conclude that why these headscarved girls

are sitting the protocol seats. The message, which is given from photo, is very clear to understand for readers. The photo says if you are wearing headscarf, why you are sitting a protocol seat instead of sitting on the back of the room. In fact, if we spotlight this picture, we can create a story about headscarf.



Picture 4: *The headscarf holed the protocol ban.*

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, O’connor, Kearns, and Anderson state:

“We can say that photographs help to make document representation issues more obvious because of the very different ways in which pictures and words work. Word texts can be described with elements directly from the document and similar to daily speech acts. Thus the possibility for confusion of elements with topic and topic for aboutness runs high.” (2008)

After analyzing news and news photos, we can notice that photographs can assist to understand information easily, but it depends on how those photographs are used when they are presented to the viewers, readers, or retrievers. Any information is not given without a code, and if we accept that even though photograph is not a word, it carries a meaning, we can say that photographs can be more effective than words.

“In turn, representing pictures with words is a vexing challenge. Yet, people do, in fact, represent pictures with words,” say O’connor, Kearns, and Anderson (2008). As agreeing with those academicians, and by departing from my topic, the headscarf dispute, we can say that, color, shape, action, and location of a news photo can be more perdurable than words because human brain does not think words, but images. As a result, when we discuss the media representation of information, we can clearly see that images provocation power can be used as it was wished. The women wearing headscarves have been discussed not only in Turkey. However, representation of news and news photos are different from each other. Turkish newspapers are presenting covered women as a wronged situation because of their broadcast policy; in fact, their ideas, opinions or beliefs give shape to their news and news photos’ representations. Therefore my research questions,

RQ₁: When photos depict Turkish women wearing headscarves, what is the nature of these representations?

RQ₂: What are the messages of photos depicting women in headscarves?

can be answered by looking at these photos. The representation of wearing headscarves is portrayed as a wrong behavior for the Turkish society, and the messages of photos depicting are not positive about the wearing headscarf. There are more negative messages on the photos than positive messages on the photos.

REFERENCES

GENEL, S. and KARAOSMANOĞLU, K., (2006). A New Islamic individualism in Turkey: Headscarved Women in the City. Turkish Studies, 7(3), 473-488.

GOVERTT, J., (2008). Now Lifted, Headscarf Ban for University Students Still Controversial. Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, 27(3), 44-45.

GREISDORF, H. and O'CONNOR, B., (2002). Modelling What Users See When the Look at Images: A Cognitive Viewpoint. Journal of Documentation, 58(1), 6-29.

HESSE- BIBER, S. N, and LEAVY, P., (2006). *The practice of qualitative research*. Sage Publications

LABIA, A. (2008). When a Headscarf is More Than It Seems. Chronicle of Higher Education, 54(24), A21.

KING, C. and LESTER, P. M., (2005). Photographic Coverage During the Persian Gulf and Iraqi Wars in Three U.S. Newspapers. Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 82(3), 623-637.

KOVANLIKAYA, Ç., (2004). Narratives of the Historical Drama of Bulgarian Turks: Three Different Eras and Three Puzzles. XIII International Oral History Conference, Mimar Sinan University, Turkey.

O'CONNOR, C. B., KEANS, J. and ANDERSON, L. R., (2008). Doing things with information: beyond indexing and abstracting. *Libraries Unlimited*. p. 264.

O'CONNOR, C. B. and WYATT, B. R., (2004). Photo provocations: thinking in, with and about photographs. *Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press*. p. 169.

OLSON, E. A., (1985). Muslim Identity and Secularism in Contemporary Turkey: "The Headscarf Dispute." Anthropological Quarterly, 58(4), 161-171.

OZYURT, C., (2009). Küresel Vatandaşlığın Gelişimi, İmkanı ve Küresel Değerler Eğitimi, I. International European Union, Democracy, Citizenship and Citizenship Education Symposium, Uşak Üniversitesi, Avrupa Birliği Eğitim Araştırma Ve Uygulama Merkezi, p. 159.

STAR, T., (2008). Key Turkish Parties Agree to Lift Headscarf Ban. Newspaper Source.

TURUNC, H., (2007). Islamicist or Democratic? The AKP's Search for Identity in Turkish Politics. Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 15(1), 79-91.

WHITE, J. B., (2003). State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Women. NWSA Journal, 15(3), 146-159.