

TURKISH COSMO GIRLS, SOAP FANS AND GUITAR HEROES:  
RESISTIVE PLEASURES OF TURKISH WOMEN CONSUMING AND PRODUCING  
TRANSNATIONAL AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE

BY

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## **Vita**

Aslıhan Tokgöz Onaran was born on December 26, 1976, in Istanbul, Turkey. She received her Bachelor's degree in English Education in 1997, in the Department of Foreign Language Education at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul. Prior to her Ph.D. studies, Aslıhan served as Lecturer in English at the Department of Foreign Languages of Doğuş University for three years, during which time she received her Master's degree in American Culture and Literature at Istanbul University. She then moved to the United States for her Ph.D. degree in the Department of American Civilization at Brown University under the supervision of Professor Susan Smulyan. Aslıhan's research and teaching interests in gender politics and the localized actualizations of global cultures are informed by her subjectivity as a transnational feminist. Throughout her life, Aslıhan has observed, participated in, been intrigued by and critically investigated the multivalent local manifestations of imported cultures such as television shows, women's magazines and pop music, particularly in terms of their relationship to gender, sexuality and national identity in Turkey, the United States and beyond. At Brown, Aslıhan's graduate studies focused on popular culture studies, "women's genres," theories of globalization, media flows, audience studies and identity politics as well as feminist theory and ethnography. Her preliminary research fields included transnational popular cultures; representation of race, gender and nation in U.S. film, national and "third" cinemas; twentieth century American literature with a focus on ethnic and women's literatures; and, Feminist and Postcolonial Studies (with a regional focus on the Middle East).

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6. 1998. American Adam Under Threat: Revitalization of the Myth of the American Indian in Sherman Alexie's *Captivity*. *Doğuş University Journal* 1: 201-212.

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## INTRODUCTION

A few minutes during rush hour at the Bosphorus Bridge connecting the European and Asian segments of Istanbul serve as a vivid symbol of the complex processes of gender politics as they relate to popular culture in contemporary Turkey, the self-proclaimed link between the Muslim world and Western cultures. Similar to the daily traffic jam that causes a long pause here and there, Turkish people have routinely faced an ideological jam due to the state's changing citizenship regimes that further the tension between modernity and backwardness signified through the female body in Turkish gender politics. Like the drivers that see, yet cannot reach, the "Welcome to Europe" sign at the European end of the Bosphorus Bridge, Turkish negotiations of modernity, Westernization, its Ottoman past and its Islamic traditions remain unresolved or delayed at best. Similar to commuters who turn on the music in their cars to resist the frustrations of this jam, Turkish audiences as well as cultural producers turn to popular culture texts as counterspaces that resist the government's silencing regime. Deemed largely harmless due to their commercial and seemingly depoliticized nature, imported women's genres and youth subcultures serve as alternative spaces in Turkey.

Turkish appropriations of American cultural texts, in particular, reflect a critical engagement with an ever-present identity conflict in Turkey, one caused by the co-existence of West-oriented modernity, secularism, global consumerism, transnational culture flows, Islamism, and traces of feudal and capitalist patriarchies. This dissertation investigates Turkish redefinitions of traditional gender norms through the re-contextualizations of imported American culture in the period between 1988 and 2009. Turkish cultural producers' and audiences' complex negotiations of patriarchy in the

personal and public spheres manifest themselves in their deconstructions of industry norms, and in their ambivalent relationship to fixed notions of Turkish womanhood and feminism.

Through an interdisciplinary analysis of three mass cultural genres (originally imported and yet localized in their Turkish actualizations)—namely, American daytime television soap operas, the Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and Turkish rock music—as well as their producers and audiences, I illustrate culturally specific female agency as well as the processes and strategies of localization in the Turkish setting. Politics of representation, cultural appropriation and alternative forms of audience reception therefore emerge as central themes in each chapter. The major questions that I explore include, How can we approach the engagement of transnational genres and texts with shifting definitions of American and Turkish feminisms and femininities? How does the context of Turkish women's reading and cultural production practices reflect their appropriation of feminist modes of knowledge? What are the alternative readings of the dominant patriarchal discourse by the female Turkish producers and audiences? In what ways do Turkish women's complex negotiations and social uses of popular culture imports embody their varying degrees of critical engagement with the interconnected processes of Americanization, localization, Islamic patriarchy as well as the state's modernization project? What kind of a theoretical and methodological orientation proves most useful in exploring Turkish women's media experiences?

Through ethnographic, contextual and textual analyses, I address those questions and explore the historically specific politics of representation, cultural producers' roles in challenging proper female behavior, and the multiple experiences of female Turkish

audiences. Turkish women exhibit varying degrees of counterpatriarchal resistance informed by their negotiations of localized American culture. I argue that Turkish women audiences' readership, which ranges from oppositional to seemingly passive positions, illuminates the fluidity and so ultimately the inadequacy of active/passive binarisms, as women's contextual specificities and diverse uses of these forms in everyday life destabilize traditional Turkish codes of gender and of female sexuality. In the case of Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazine and rock music, for example, female cultural producers, through the contested images of Turkish womanhood they construct textually and in their public personas, play an important role in redefining female empowerment.

Turkish women's active and unanticipated readings and codings correlate closely with their pleasures from both the American and localized aspects of the imported genre and text. Varying degrees of localization connote different forms of resistance and pleasures for different demographics of Turkish women. Rural soap opera viewers exhibit oppositional viewing practices while also identifying as fans; *Cosmopolitan* readers demonstrate a passive readership pattern aligning themselves with the dominant neo-feminist tone promoted by the editors even as this might lead them to a more active resistance to other cultural forces in Turkey; and, rock fans demonstrate the most active form of reception by staking out a critical reading position in regard to musicians' performances and extramusical persona. Regardless of the diverse nature of audience decodings, localized American culture nurtures the conditions for formation of counterpatriarchal knowledge and practice in Turkey. Indeed, the present study reflects a transnational understanding of American popular culture as a dynamic space where capitalist patriarchal hegemony and various modes of female resistances and alternative

formations of reception and cultural production can and, most of the time, do co-exist. The following chapters attempt to re-conceptualize and apply an integrative theory that accounts for the diversity of contemporary Turkish women's experiences in regard to popular culture, globalization, patriarchy and feminisms.

Like the multifaceted Istanbul—with conflicting images of women from those in mini skirts to those in veils, and with conflicting spaces from highly-developed areas where women and the public space look no different from the way they look in New York, to squatter areas with no infrastructure where women experience remnants of feudal patriarchy—female subjectivities in the Turkish public sphere are never one-dimensional. Feminist activists, scholars, female politicians, sexually and financially liberated career women, “rebellious rockers,” rural, working class and immigrant women of all ages living with harsh patriarchal rules contribute to the complexity of the ‘woman’s question’ in Turkey today.

Since the late 1980s, the image of a Muslim-identified, career woman has also begun to occupy space in the mainstream discourse. The presence of these empowered Muslim women wearing the Islamic headscarf challenged the early republic’s secular notion of new Turkish womanhood which was juxtaposed to a monolithic image of the ever-oppressed Other, the Muslim Turkish woman.<sup>1</sup> While the secular, pro-Western New Turkish Woman image, promoted by the state's feminist project between 1920s and 1980s, assumed that an alternative feminism was unnecessary, the Islamist revival and its veiled female proponents destabilized secular visions of female empowerment.

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<sup>1</sup> The politicized use of “veiling” by young Turkish women of the post-1980s’ Islamist movement has been discussed extensively in Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (MI: University of Michigan P, 1996).

Movements of Islamization in the 1980s have thus impacted definitions of modern Turkish womanhood in relation to the nation and the public sphere.<sup>2</sup>

Shifting images of Turkish womanhood relate to redefinitions of such concepts as citizenship, nationality, modernity and tradition in Turkey. While Turkey remains the only Muslim-majority country in the Middle East that has pursued a constitutional policy to separate religion from the state, the constrained media and political environment in contemporary Turkey, under the strict surveillance of the Islamist Justice and Development Party, AKP, resembles the confined space of a commuter stuck in the traffic.<sup>3</sup> Due to the Islamic cultural revival in the mid-1980s and its current political dominance, AKP suppresses any hint of alternative movement or thought, particularly secularism, despite the fact that secularism represents a fundamental aspect of the Turkish Constitution and its modernization project. The current government's alleged claims, which have gone largely unquestioned by the media in Turkey and elsewhere, have constructed a coup plot aimed to overthrow the Islamist government by a group of civilian and military secularist individuals. Part of the international silence regarding the ongoing arrests relates to the government's justification of its actions as strategies in their attempts to enter the European Union and to transform Turkey into a more civilian society, one that does not fear a military coup every twenty years.<sup>4</sup>

While the imagined 'other' of the official secularist governmental ideology had before included ethnic minorities such as Kurds as well as the Islamists that each

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<sup>2</sup> Nilüfer Göle, "The Gendered Nature of the Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 10 (1997): 61-81, 61.

<sup>3</sup> AKP rose to political power as the leading political party in 2002.

<sup>4</sup> I should note in this context that while the military officials have historically had a problematic relationship to democracy, particularly in regard to ethnic rights and the 1960 and 1980 coups that they supported to suppress right-left terror, the Turkish army has remained the symbolic vanguard of secularism, which refers to the founding principle of the Turkish Republic. Secularism requires the structural and ideological separation of state and religion. For a brief review of the alleged claims, known as the 'Ergenekon case,' see, Dan Bilefsky, "In Turkey, Trial Casts Wide Net of Mistrust," *New York Times*, November 22, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/22/world/europe/22turkey.html>.

symbolized the anti-modern, the current political climate reflects a reversal of power relations. In line with their silencing regime, AKP controls secular thought, monitors everyone from their own staff to high-level justices, and makes drastic overnight changes to the Constitution to increase its power over the judicial and military systems. Anyone reported suspicious, including female and male intellectuals, writers, journalists and internationally established scholars, as well as high-level military officials, faces immediate imprisonment with no known cause or tangible evidence.

It is thus more important than ever to identify this historical juncture and the implications of this silencing regime for Turkish women's media experiences today. Turkish people have typically considered all popular culture—and women's genres, in particular—as merely mindless entertainment, but these cultural texts and genres currently remain one of the few spaces that can function in counterhegemonic ways in Turkey. Indeed, Turkish cultural producers' and consumers' diverse experiences of re-coding and decoding once-American genres and texts reveal a multifaceted process, one that embodies the discursive struggle in contemporary Turkey between Westernization and tradition as well as that between Americanization and local resistance.<sup>5</sup>

This dissertation illuminates this complex relationship between different demographics of contemporary Turkish women and American cultural imports. Turkish women's engagement, as producers and consumers, with U.S. imports, exhibits a transgressive potential, particularly in constructing and maintaining counterpatriarchal knowledge as well as challenging the Islamist citizenship regime that attempts to control

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<sup>5</sup> My use of the term, discourse, is informed by Michel Foucault's view that defines discourses as "meaning-producing systems which are both instruments and effects of power." From this perspective, Turkish women's negotiations of localized American genres and texts reproduce and represent historically shifting discourses of womanhood, modernity and citizenship that are constantly re-defined. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. I: An Introduction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 101.

the female body to maintain national (male) honor. Female agency emerges as a central theme through which to observe and investigate Turkish re-articulations of gendered subjectivities. Turkish women's redefinitions of feminine and feminist identities are closely informed by their negotiations of localized American culture and by their responses to the shifts in the political and historical landscape.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study rests on the assumptions that media-audiences relationships must be examined as context-specific and culturally dynamic. It looks at the diverse readings produced by varieties of historical audiences who locate pleasure through the multiple appropriations of cultural content into their daily lives. Overall, my argument is informed by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Stuart Hall's model of encoding/decoding, Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualization of polyphonic discourse, Miriam Hansen's theory of the alternative female public sphere, and Trinh T. Minh-ha's account of the quest for authenticity in ethnographic scholarship and media.

Antonio Gramsci's approach conceptualizes hegemony as that forceful but not automatic persuasion emanating from the dominant controllers of culture to the less powerful masses of society. Gramsci uses the term bourgeois cultural hegemony to refer to the representation and naturalization of the bourgeoisie's beliefs, values and ideals as normal and legitimate although in fact they serve only the interests of the dominant class. Hegemony thus entails the dominance of one social class over others via the creation of consent among the marginalized, subordinate classes. The dominated groups, however, can take counter-hegemonic positions. Society is seen therefore as participating in a

constant struggle between ideologies that are competing for hegemony which leads to a negotiated mix of dominant containment and subordinate opposition.<sup>6</sup> Thus, while the uneven power relations and economic structure within global media privilege a uni-dimensional exchange from American to non-American settings, Turkish women's uses and localization of American cultural imports indicate a counterhegemonic struggle which at times challenges that system as well as the local hegemonies of the State and of patriarchy.

Stuart Hall has incorporated the Gramscian theory of hegemony into his model of diverse readership positions. Stuart Hall's notion of dominant/preferred, negotiated and oppositional reader/viewer positions and his recognition of the polysemy of the text prove particularly relevant in exploring Turkish women audiences' reading practices.<sup>7</sup> Hall describes preferred reading as a decoding in line with the dominant hegemonic codes in cultural texts. Preferred readings, he argues, "have the institutional/political/ ideological order imprinted in them."<sup>8</sup> Hall emphasizes his use of the term 'dominant' as opposed to "determined because it is always possible to order, classify, assign and decode an event within more than one 'mapping.'"<sup>9</sup> It is for this reason that alternative readings are possible. In the negotiated position, for example, the viewer accepts some definitions of dominant ideology but also recognizes exceptions to it. This produces a negotiated version that is "shot through with contradictions" and highlights the rupture in viewers' engagement with dominant discourses.<sup>10</sup> In an even more alternative reading, and thus

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<sup>6</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, trans. and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, [1973] 1993), 90-103.

<sup>8</sup> Hall, 98.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Hall, 102.

on a counter-hegemonic level, the oppositional reader “detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the oppositional viewer understands yet rejects the dominant codes and engages in a struggle to develop a different interpretation. Hall’s positions directly apply to the present study that investigates competing media constructions of womanhood as well as audiences’ diverse negotiations of, and pleasures from, hegemonic media texts.

Turkish cultural producers’ strategies of localization and audiences’ varying reading orientations toward American genres and texts further complicate discussions of transnationalism, globalization, Americanization, and active audience reception. I conceptualize transnational culture as a dynamic flow that comprises globalization (in the form of an Americanization in which American cultural and economic products gain domination through unequal exchange and the creation of consent) as well as diverse local responses.<sup>12</sup> While this ‘flow’ appears one-dimensional with almost no Turkish-appropriated American culture, or even Turkish culture itself, finding its way back to the States, the diversity of Turkish audiences’ and producers’ experiences of meaning-making reveals the potential of transnational American culture as a source for “pockets” of resistance and heterogeneity. From this perspective, transnational American culture in Turkey contributes to the maintenance and re-articulation of a unitary Americanness

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<sup>11</sup> Hall, 103.

<sup>12</sup> For discussions of cultural and economic imperialism through media see, for example, Peter Worsley, “Models of the Modern World-System,” in *Global Culture: nationalism, globalization, and modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990), 87; and Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, ed.s., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998). For a detailed discussion of global flows as diversifying processes, see, for example, Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” in *Global Culture: nationalism, globalization, and modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990), 295-310. For the only existing publication by a Turkish scholar that considers transnational flows and localization of media, see Suheyta Kirca-Schroeder’s article, “Medya Ürünlerinin Küresel Yayılımı, Yerelleştirilmesi: Ulusaşırı Kimliklerin Yaratılması” [“The Global Spread of Media Products and their Localization: The Creation of Transnational Identities”], *Doğu Batı* (Spring 2001).

while also allowing counterspaces that house multivocal Turkish appropriations that challenge transnational, national, and patriarchal hegemonic identities.

While the present study draws on previous cultural studies research that recognizes an active reception process that includes diverse uses of the cultural texts in everyday life and women producers' and audiences' pleasures from actively engaging with popular culture, it will also demonstrate the transgressive potentiality of seemingly passive ("preferred") or co-opted means of negotiation.<sup>13</sup> As the following chapters will illustrate, Turkish women's decodings of dominant textual messages may have resistive effects. A text that promotes conventional femininities and appears oppressive in a Euro-American setting and from a radical feminist perspective thus has different social implications in Turkey where particular groups of female audiences may use those meanings to question their given roles in the social realm. "Resistance," in the Turkish setting, thus connotes multiple levels of negotiation and addresses (social and textual). These include moving between talking about the acceptance of or resistance to the text itself (accepting or refusing the position of address that the text offers) and the acceptance of/resistance to dominant social norms (accepting or refusing the positions mapped by other social discourses). It is in the confrontation between these that the negotiations occur. From this perspective, this study will also demonstrate that oppositional agency and feminism cannot be located in a fixed position of active reception and production as previous theoretical models imply. As will be demonstrated, Turkish women's

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<sup>13</sup> For cultural studies research on active reception, see, for example, Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas* (London: Methuen, 1985); Mary Ellen Brown, *Soap Operas and Women's Talk: The pleasure of resistance* (London: Sage, 1994); Klaus B. Jensen, *Making sense of the news: Towards a theory and an empirical model of reception for the study of mass communication* (Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1986); David Morley, *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding*, (London: BFI, 1980); Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). For studies that analyze audiences' pleasures from popular culture, see Brown 1994; Dorothy Hobson, *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera* (London: Methuen, 1982); and Radway 1984.

oppositional positions do not simply depend on accepting or rejecting a text's mode of address, they also relate to the way in which the text fits into a whole cultural constellation and thus what sort of active negotiations might be made between and among various different texts and discourses, including those between conventional femininities and feminisms.

The terms feminisms, femininities, and patriarchies have diverse meanings in Turkey. By choosing to employ the plural over the singular, I attempt to avoid a monolithic, ahistorical use of each concept which in Turkey has multiple meanings as it is cross-cut by class, geographical region, sexual orientation and ethnicity. The term femininities refers to shifting notions of domesticity, ideal romance and beauty primarily based on heterosexuality, marriage, motherhood, self-sacrifice, fashion practices, and the absence of women's agency. "Feminisms" refers to any collective or personal position that seeks to identify and oppose patriarchy, by which I mean the historically specific, systemic, structural and ideological dominance of women, not just by men but by women as well. The terms anti-patriarchy or counterpatriarchy both refer to an ideological stance that incorporates any or all of the personal, cultural, and/or collective political feminist worldviews in response to women's oppression, from a radical feminism that rejects all femininities and exhibits a dualistic, political stance to a commercial neo-feminism that embraces the feminine as well as the feminist through commodifying each. Regardless of its diverse manifestations, however, feminism "articulates the particular form in which women in specific social settings are defined and oppressed."<sup>14</sup>

Turkish women's contextual specificities prove particularly important in exploring the complex social connotations of their media experiences as producers and consumers.

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<sup>14</sup> Nükhet Sirman, "Feminism in Turkey: A Short History," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 3 (Fall 1989): 1-34, 2.

Without directly challenging or discussing Turkish societal emphasis on female virginity as a prerequisite for marriage, the localized imports' focus on sexuality, self-assertiveness and female pleasures serves to naturalize women's agency. While I question the existence of a linear causal relation between the messages in the texts and the behavior of the audience members and producers, I will demonstrate that the texts have allowed for the public discussions of formerly taboo topics such as female sexuality. While the audience members do not share an identical cultural background, their remarks indicate their diverse pleasures from a shared counterpatriarchal position specific to the Turkish setting.

Turkish women's alternative experiences of American cultural imports also show the inapplicability and inadequacy of binarisms such as femininity/feminism, active masculine subject/passive feminine object, male producer/female consumer, first world/third world, and transnational/local in the Turkish context. The competing discourses in each cultural text can best be approached by using Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of polyphonic texts. According to Bakhtin, a text is essentially composed of multiple voices and perspectives.<sup>15</sup> These voices may be either 'monologic' or 'dialogic' and, through their interaction, prose discourse becomes a complex, 'polyphonic' dialogue of both types of voice. While Bakhtin writes specifically about literary texts, the application of these concepts in a study of the soap operas, magazines and rock music proves useful in the Turkish setting. These different forms similarly incorporate competing textual 'voices' that, in Turkey, address a diverse group of female readers with multiple subjectivities. An analysis of the contents of such voices therefore may provide a basis for the semiotic analysis, not only of their inscribed meanings, but also of the dialogue between conflicting voices in mainstream Turkish patriarchal discourse as well as of the

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<sup>15</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, [1963] 1984), 204.

exchange between Turkish and Euro-American feminists and that between global and local cultural producers.

The existence of oppositional voices within a single text and heterogeneous audience responses challenge the institutional theories of spectatorship that claim the existence only of a patriarchal hierarchy of vision that univocally constitutes the man as agent and the woman as prime object of the gaze.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the Turkish editors of *Cosmopolitan* argue that they attempt to shift these dynamics within the magazine text and in the individual interviews, and they acknowledge the ideological consequences of such textual reversals of patriarchal gaze structures. They not only want to empower their readers by overturning subject male-object female structures, but they also want to equip their readers with the ideological background to question that role reversal which, indeed, sustains subject-object structures by replacing the gazed with the male body.

As Miriam Hansen argues in her study of female viewers, categories of audience activity and passivity, when historically implemented, may be fluid, as in the case of the Rudolph Valentino films which have created a deviant form of female viewership within an alternative public sphere.<sup>17</sup> Hansen claims that cinema, through justifying passion and erotic reciprocity, presented the possibility of female desire outside of motherhood and family and thus led to a female subculture against traditional notions of erotic relations as well as relations of cinematic representation and reception. While Hansen's work looks specifically at film spectatorship and many feminist studies of other forms such as soap operas and romance fiction have theorized a feminine viewer/reader crucial to those texts, her notion of an alternative public sphere and the erotic gaze of female viewers remains

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<sup>16</sup> Psychoanalytic feminist theory is discussed and critiqued in Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 121.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Hansen, 1991, 1-20.

useful in exploring Turkish women's media experiences. The actualization of a powerful female homosociality among Turkish soap viewers, magazine readers and rock fans established through conversation, intimacy and joint ventures similarly furnishes the structural conditions under which alternative forms of reception and meaning can gain a public momentum.<sup>18</sup>

Yet while I am indebted to the work mentioned above for providing models of audience analysis, this study parts from earlier audience work, which merely gestures toward concrete historical specificity, in various ways. In its locating the diverse viewing/reading practices of Turkish women within their everyday lives and the historical/political climate, it will approach the 'everyday' from within the framework of changing national cultural discourses and policies, which provide the boundaries to the realization of Turkish feminist ideals. Studying real women in a non-Euro-American context underscores the limitations of transposing Western feminist theoretical constructs onto non-Western societies.<sup>19</sup> Unlike, for example, Janice Radway's study of female romance readers, which was limited to an analysis of the domestic sphere in the Western context, the present study accounts for the shifting national cultural context in Turkey.<sup>20</sup> As such, it explores the contextual specificities of Turkish viewership/readership, local cultural production and their diverse implications that remain unstated.

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<sup>18</sup> Hansen argued that Valentino's films and the surrounding fan discourses based on his sex appeal complicated formulations of the female spectator position as inherently passive. Hansen's analysis illustrates how the Valentino films focus on the gaze itself as an erotic object and how the desiring look of the female viewers *can* challenge the masculinization of the spectator position. Representation of Valentino as the erotic object for female pleasure also problematizes institutional theories that view the object position as essentially assigned to females in mainstream media. Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991). For a different analysis of a textually-inscribed female viewership, see, for example, Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Methuen, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 61-88.

<sup>20</sup> Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

The mode of address that assigns, in the personal interviews in particular, the superior, already-enlightened position to the cultural producers appears problematic as it envisions audiences in need of guidance by an outside source. From that perspective, the local musicians and editors exhibit similarities to that of Euro-American or Western-inspired state feminists.<sup>21</sup> White, middle-class, Euro-American women's recruitist view, in first-wave feminism, of the 'ordinary women' and the colonialist as well as developmentalist approaches toward non-Western nations and women often intersect. From those perspectives, the female body becomes central to the contested definitions of modernity and 'backwardness.' In both models as well as in Turkish radical feminism of the 1980s, there is a suggestion that the subaltern is in need of enlightenment from external sources. Western feminism's view of Muslim women as passive objects, and Turkish 1980s feminism's recruitist account of ordinary women as the oppressed 'other' subjected to media messages that, in this type of account, simply reinforce patriarchal hegemony, exhibit similar problems of a one-dimensional approach that disregards the multiple forms of agency Turkish women exhibit.

While Western feminisms have provided an important framework for the independent Turkish women's movements, feminists-of-color in the West as well as non-Western and Muslim feminists have, indeed, offered many critical studies of white Western feminism. These recent analyses challenged feminists such as Susan M. Okin, whose essay, "Is multiculturalism bad for women?" represented white Euro-centric feminism's problematic universal sisterhood as a model that excludes race, class and

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<sup>21</sup> Euro-American or Western feminism, while largely essentializing toward non-Western women, has incorporated multiple orientations. My use of the term Euro-American or Western feminism, in no way, intends to disregard the movement's different "goals, interests or analyses" recognized by non-Western feminists as well. See, for example, Mohanty 1988, 61.

imperialism as important dynamics of patriarchy.<sup>22</sup> Nima Naghibi's study of Iranian women and Western feminism also sheds light on the problematic relationship of global sisterhood models to Western cultural imperialism in the Middle East. Naghibi questions Western and Western-oriented feminists' commitment to an image of themselves as "an intellectual and political vanguard at the forefront of history" against the image of the ordinary or "eastern woman who belongs to a more primitive era."<sup>23</sup> She proposes a self-reflexive and interdisciplinary approach to attend to the plurality of Muslim women's experiences. These critical studies, however, do not provide relevant tools to explore Turkish women's specific experiences of localized American popular culture.

I should note here a self-reflexive perspective relevant to the following chapters. My personal pleasures from all three genres and texts explored in this study inform my analysis.<sup>24</sup> My multiple subjectivities as "Turkish woman from Istanbul/scholar teaching in the United States/mother/transnational feminist" inevitably affect my positioning. My training at a formerly American college in Turkey, followed by graduate work in American Studies in the States also influences my research.

The fact that, for this project, I go back to study part of my "own" culture, at first glance, also gives me a certain level of authority as an "authentic insider," entitled to

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<sup>22</sup> Susan M. Okin, "Is Multiculturalism bad for women?" in *Is Multiculturalism bad for women?*, ed.s Joshua Cohen et al (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), 7-26. Other critical studies by women-of-color feminists, include, for example, Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, "Challenging Imperial Feminism," *Feminist Review* 17 (1984): 3-19; Hazel Carby, "White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood," in *Theories of race and racism: a reader*, ed.s Les Back et al (London; NY: Routledge, 2000), 389-403; Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (NY: Vintage Books, 1981); bell hooks, *Feminist theory from margin to center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Audre Lorde, "The Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," in *Feminism and "race"* ed. Kum-Kum Bhavnani (Oxford; NY: Oxford UP, 2001), 89-92. The ethnocentric tendency of Western feminisms has also been challenged by Western feminists. See, for example, Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> Nima Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> I should note that I am inspired by earlier research by several feminist media scholars who have expressed their personal engagement with the texts and genres that they investigate. See, for example, Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today* (London: Paladin, 1984); Ros Ballaster et al, *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Women's Magazine* (London: Macmillan, 1991); Joke Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use* (Oxford: Polity and Blackwell, 1995).

represent as well as critique a Turkish ‘Other’ for a primarily Euro-American academic audience. Supposedly, an authentic insider, as Uma Narayan discusses in relation to pre-given roles assigned to Third World feminist intellectuals by the West, is able to emerge as a spokesperson licensed to criticize and represent the ‘other’ culture.<sup>25</sup> Yet the role of authentic insider given to diasporic feminists or those writing from within the other culture remains problematic in that an individual cannot represent the entire continuum of female experiences in her society, just her lived and perceived portion of that culture. My acknowledgement of my multiple positionings that may or may not coincide with the women that I write about informs what I envision as my ‘authentic voice,’ just one among the many authentic visions of the ‘other’ culture. I will attempt, in the following chapters, to deconstruct a fixed notion of authenticity and location, as well as the a priori view of the monolithic category of ‘Turkish woman.’

Ethnographic analysis plays a crucial role in highlighting the lived experiences of Turkish women informed by their struggle between individual agency and patriarchal, capitalist domination. Recognition of the complicated individual articulations as well as the complex patterns and processes of Turkish women’s negotiations of their identities expressed throughout this study thus serves as a conscious attempt simultaneously to account for questions of social and economic structure instead of a romanticized

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<sup>25</sup> Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), 142-157. While I resist such rigid categories as “third world,” I find Narayan’s discussion of third-world-identified feminists useful in presenting my own conceptualization. In addition to an “authentic insider,” Narayan identifies two other pre-given positions, namely, that of an “emissary” and “mirror to the West.” The emissary is expected to give an idealized, positive picture of the Third World in the West. The mirror functions as a critic of the West particularly in terms of the effects of its colonialist history on the non-West, and its contributions to non-Western women’s oppression. The mirror thus assigns all responsibility to the West and does not account for any agency or resistance on the part of the “Other” culture. As such, neither the emissary nor the mirror positions allow the non-Western feminist intellectuals to voice a critique of their own cultures. Narayan 1997, 121-142.

celebration of women's pleasures.<sup>26</sup> An acknowledgement of the multi-vocal nature of women's voices and the occasional lack of consensus helps complicate the story of women's pleasures gained from meaning making and from socialization around their media experiences.

As Trinh T. Minh-ha has put it in relation to Western-identified scholarship and media engaged in representing the experiences of an authentic other,

The subject, even if s/he is an insider, is no more authentic and has no more authority on the subject matter than the subject whom the questions concern...“I” is not unitary, culture has never been monolithic, and is always more or less in relation to a judging subject. Differences do not only exist between outsider and insider – two entities –they are also at work between the outsider or the insider -- a single entity.<sup>27</sup>

Highlighting the “multiple ‘I’s’ confronting ‘multiple ‘I’s’ in the Other,” Trinh attempts to transcend Western binarisms.<sup>28</sup> As E. Ann Kaplan has noted, “[Trinh’s] image of the relationship between two cultures, or two ‘I’s’ from different cultures was that of two spirals moving constantly...sometimes they touch, sometimes they don’t.”<sup>29</sup> Trinh’s conceptualization proves useful in theorizing the positions of Western-trained or diasporic scholars that go back to study their “non-Western” cultures for a predominantly Euro-American audience.

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<sup>26</sup> For a neo-Gramscian conceptualization that highlights the importance of ethnography in exploring the complexity of popular culture, see, Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 27, 39. Regarding overpoliticization of female pleasures, see Charlotte Brunsdon’s discussion of Ien Ang’s critical views in Charlotte Brunsdon, *The Feminist, The Housewife, and the Soap Opera* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13.

<sup>27</sup> T. Minh-ha Trinh, “Outside In Inside Out,” In *Questions of Third Cinema*, eds. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: BFI, 1989), 146.

<sup>28</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking For the Other: Feminism, Film, and The Imperial Gaze* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 199.

<sup>29</sup> Kaplan, 199.

This account, in the present study, of my shifting subjectivities as outsider *and* as insider attempts to challenge static notions of authenticity as well as of the subject-object binarism and the accompanying privileges of location that Trinh, among many others, problematizes.<sup>30</sup> My imagined location(-s), as well as those of the study participants, inform the theoretical and ideological orientations within this study. This integrative approach gets its ideological impetus from an account of my shared pleasures with and differences from the study participants. The multiple “I’s” that I inhabit have at times intersected with those of the women that I met during the course of the present study. When they have not, I acknowledged the plurality of their identities as evidence of the non-unitary nature of Turkish women’s experiences of media and feminism.

Feminist practice in Turkey, as in most other societies, operates on several levels: daily life, collective action, and the promotion of theory, pedagogy, and textual creativity aimed at the production and interrogation of knowledge. A successful transnational feminist project should lead to diverse women’s equal access to resources *on all these levels* and to a freedom for women to conceive of their own lives and bodies in the personal and the public spheres in their specific cultural settings. Such a model has to identify the different ways in which Turkish women exercise social and individual agency, and it can best be achieved by an interconnected project of theory and history. An ethnographic analysis of Turkish women audiences and cultural producers, combined

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<sup>30</sup> Rey Chow and Gayatri Spivak have also discussed the ‘authentic insider’ role of the diasporic, non-Western feminist, however from different angles. While Gayatri Spivak argues that academic intervention by postcolonial feminists remains crucial, Chow finds an assertion of Otherness problematic within Western academia. In reference to Chinese-identified intellectuals, Chow calls for a “loosening” of the fixity of the sign “Chinese” and an avoidance of essentialist tendencies and political rhetoric. Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), 93; Gayatri Spivak, “Diasporas old and new: Women in the Transnational World,” In *Class Issues: Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, and the Public Sphere*, ed. Amitava Kumar (New York and London: New York University Press, 1997), 87-116.

with a historically aware textual analysis, can thus lead to culturally specific feminist theories appropriate to the particular experiences of Turkish women.

The selection of American soap operas, the Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and Turkish rock music with different demographics of audiences and producers incorporates discussions of “scattered hegemonies,” of age, class, gender, geographical region and, to a lesser extent, religion as factors affecting Turkish women today.<sup>31</sup> Rogaia M. Abusharaf, in a discussion of Western critiques of third world patriarchy, describes how in most of those societies, “the woman’s question is also the man’s question.”<sup>32</sup> I find this view especially relevant in transitional societies, like Turkey where several layers of hegemonies operate alongside patriarchy. Such an approach acknowledges a shared female oppression reinforced by different carriers of patriarchy and incorporates an understanding of the various positions of Turkish women consumers and producers as well as feminist researchers in relation to class, historical context and the multiple levels of hegemonies (global, local/state, feudal) that perpetuate, and at times destabilize, patriarchy within the Turkish setting.

### **The Turkish Context**

Women’s oppression in Turkey, as elsewhere, cross-cuts with other types of dominance, primarily related to class, religion, and geographical region (which is usually a signifier of ethnicity as well). While Turkish women from different backgrounds have historically experienced varying degrees of subjugation by men, their shared experience

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<sup>31</sup> Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, ed.s, *Scattered Hegemonies: postmodernity and transnational feminist practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> Rogaia M. Abusharaf, “Revisiting Feminist Discourses on Infibulation: Responses from Sudanese Feminists,” in *Female “circumcision” in Africa: culture, controversy, and change*, Bettina Shell-Duncan et al ed.s (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 151-166, 157.

of the tension between pro-West modernization and tradition remains a fundamental aspect of their oppression and a source of their diverse codings and decodings of popular culture.<sup>33</sup>

In contemporary Turkey, gender politics and Turkish women's redefinitions of gender norms can often be best seen in popular culture, which, as I argue in this dissertation, has allowed women an alternative space to negotiate the tensions between modernity and Islamism as well as feminism and patriarchy. Turkish cultural producers' and audiences' media experiences of constructing, re-constructing, and resisting counterpatriarchal texts and social spaces, indeed, illuminate the fluidity of categories such as "modern," "Western," "backward," and "Muslim." The present study illustrates an anti-dualistic approach that views the complementary nature of these concepts in contemporary Turkish women's lives.

Turkey remains one of the most unique examples of state-enforced feminism translated into innovative legislation and public policy.<sup>34</sup> With the adoption (with modifications) of the Swiss Civil Code in 1926, Turkey "became the first Muslim country to eliminate as a whole the rules of the Sharia, the Muslim legal code which advocates sex segregation and unequal legal treatment."<sup>35</sup> The major rights granted to Turkish women, however, resulted from the secularist reforms of "a small 'revolutionary elite,'

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<sup>33</sup> Turkish women of all classes have historically experienced varying degrees of male dominance. Upper-class women in Ottoman Turkey, for instance, were more heavily subject to social seclusion, as compared to peasant women. See Fanny Ellsworth Davis, "Two Centuries of the Ottoman Lady" (Ph.D diss., Columbia University, New York, 1968). Lower-class Turkish women have additionally been "exploited economically, a condition that they shared with men of the same class." Binnaz Sayari, "Religion and Turkish Women," in *Women in Turkish Society*, ed. Nermin Abadan-Unat (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 283. For a Marxist analysis of Turkish patriarchy, see Aytunc Altindal, *Türkiye'de Kadın: Marksist bir Yaklaşım* ("Women in Turkey: A Marxist Approach," Istanbul: Birlik Yayınları, 1975).

<sup>34</sup> Nermin Abadan-Unat and Oya Tokgoz, "Turkish Women as Agents of Social Change in a Pluralist Democracy," in *Women and Politics Worldwide*, ed.s. Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 718.

<sup>35</sup> Nermin Abadan-Unat, "Introduction," in *Women in Turkish Society*, ed. Nermin Abadan-Unat (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 1.

rather than large scale demands by Turkey's female population."<sup>36</sup> State-sponsored feminism of the early twentieth century emphasized a kind of "equality feminism" that supported equal legal and social rights for all women. Central to the Western-oriented national project stood women who, with their Western attire, symbolized modernity and liberation. The Turkish revolutionaries' emphasis on women's rights signified their conscious attempts to detach themselves from the political and ideological structures of the Ottoman state in which Islam remained the hegemonic power over women.<sup>37</sup> The leader of the Turkish Independence Movement and reforms, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) made it evident in his 1925 statement that he led an ideological war against the veil as well, proclaiming: "Let women see the whole world with their own eyes; and let the whole world see their faces."<sup>38</sup> As such, the unveiled Turkish female body emerged as an important signifier of the modernity discourses of the new nation-state. Women's political rights, in particular, played an important symbolic role in constructing a positive image for the new regime, demonstrating the democratic nature of the Turkish Republic.<sup>39</sup> Yet while the government's reinforcement of equality feminism allowed Turkish women significant legal rights, it disregarded other significant markers of oppression, such as class and geographical region as well as the prevalence of Islamic patriarchy.

Feminist political scientist Sirin Tekeli notes that the present position of Turkish women has been influenced by four major forces: the sex-segregated, patriarchal structure of Ottoman society in the period before the Tanzimat Reforms (1839); the

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<sup>36</sup> Nermin Abadan-Unat, "Turkish Women and Social Change," in Abadan-Unat, 1981, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Sirin Tekeli, "Women in Turkish Politics," in Abadan-Unat, 1981, 296-7.

<sup>38</sup> Atatürk cited in Tekeli, 1981, 297.

<sup>39</sup> Tekeli, 1981, 299. Atatürk had also encouraged "women to participate as candidates in the 1935 elections, the result of which was the election of a high number of women deputies with no counterpart in Western democracies." Tekeli, 1981, 299.

process of Westernization after the reforms until the end of World War I during which women's associations began for the first time to protest patriarchy; the establishment of the new republic in 1923 that brought a series of legal rights to women (such as the right to vote, equal rights to divorce, equal pay for equal work, the abolition of polygamy, equal rights in inheritance, compulsory civil marriage); and the period of fast social change due to internal migration from rural areas to modern cities since the 1950s.<sup>40</sup>

Many other structural and ideological obstacles have contributed to the delay of the full integration of women's legal rights and feminist ideas in Turkish society. Structural obstacles have included the continuing Ottoman legacy of sex-segregation, underdevelopment, and high rates of illiteracy among rural women. In addition, the post-1960s leftist movement, which considered feminism a Western import and bourgeois deviation, caused a major ideological obstacle. Granting Turkish women legal rights therefore did not necessarily lead to implementation of equal rights in the domestic sphere or rural regions.

The official feminist model, based on the Western-oriented image of the 'New Turkish Woman' further led to a suppression of women's independent activism until after the 1980 military coup which prohibited openly right-wing or socialist organizations. Since the military government did not consider women's issues as politically subversive, women began freely to discuss feminist ideologies through informal meetings, press commentaries, the publication of reviews and magazines, and the creation of women's associations and shelters. Following the feminist consciousness raising movements of the 1970s in the West, Turkish feminists in the 1980s began to highlight the links between

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<sup>40</sup> Sirin Tekeli, "Women in the changing political associations of the 1990s," in *Turkish State, Turkish Society*, ed.s Andrew Finkel and Nukhet Sirman (New York: Routledge, 1990), 268-274.

the personal and the political. Activists emphasized that despite the legal implementation of women's rights in the public sphere, numerous undebated issues such as domestic violence and the lack of women's resource centers pointed to the pervasiveness of patriarchy. However, a communication gap existed between activists and their intended constituencies. Most activists came from middle or upper-middle class backgrounds and shared little with working-class and/or rural women. Also, media representations of feminists, as in the West, usually included negative stereotypes, particularly the 'man-hating' aggressive women which led to an aversion among women to feminism. These portrayals created fossilized images about feminists and feminism so much that even well-educated women of the 1990s, including most female cultural producers interviewed for this study, did not want to associate themselves with feminism.<sup>41</sup>

The depoliticized context of 1980s also saw the emergence of new media forms. Women's private lives—and their sexuality, in particular—became central to both mainstream and alternative media discourses.<sup>42</sup> Turkish feminists such as Nermin Abadan-Unat and Oya Tokgoz have observed that the current Islamist “emphasis on domesticity prevents any large-scale rooting and spreading of political awareness among women.”<sup>43</sup> The emergence of Islamist women activists and their alternative feminisms

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<sup>41</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci, Former Editor-in-Chief of the Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and pop rock musicians Nil Karaibrahimgil and Ozlem Tekin exhibit in interviews and their public personae an ambivalent relationship to feminism. Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey; Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>42</sup> Arzu Ozturkmen, “A Short History of Kadinca Magazine and its feminism,” in *Deconstructing Images of “the Turkish Woman,”* ed. Zehra Arat (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 278.

<sup>43</sup> Nermin Abadan-Unat and Oya Tokgoz, “Turkish Women as Agents of Social Change in a Pluralist Democracy,” in *Women and Politics Worldwide*, ed.s Barbara Nelson and Najma Chowdhury (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 709.

have problematized such perspectives that detach domesticity from politics and consider the personal sphere and the act of veiling as necessarily anti-political.<sup>44</sup>

Still, Turkish radical feminists' focus on the borrowed 'personal is political' motto and images of sisterhood persisted as the 1990s generation of women producers and consumers of popular culture adapted these models. Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazine editors, for example, share the view that a textual focus on 'private' matters such as individual choice (over decisions concerning singlehood or marriage, domesticity or career, sexual liberation or virginity) may function in subversive ways in the Turkish setting. Rural viewers of American soaps further demonstrate the counterpatriarchal modes of knowledge and practice that their personal media experiences elicit. Turkish pop rock musicians such as Nil Karaibrahimgil also exhibit a self-reflexive perspective about the political nature of one's personal choices. What is more, audiences from diverse backgrounds (including rural soap opera viewers; urban, well-educated magazine readers; and rock audiences) exhibit a sense of a sisterhood-type solidarity around the genres, texts and celebrities they follow.

The image of the well-educated, professional Turkish woman as a symbol of modernity remains key to the Turkish nationalist project. Yet this has never completely been enforced or become a reality at the periphery of society. Moreover, most Turkish women's accounts of feminism as "hatred toward men" further complicate the applicability of any project affiliated with feminism. The present study thus does not pose "feminism" as an absolute, and it refuses to view domesticity and political power,

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<sup>44</sup> Nilüfer Göle notes, for instance, that voluntarily-veiled, well-educated women are "empowered by an Islamism that assigns them a 'militant,' 'missionary,' political identity, and by secular education which provides them a professional, 'intellectual' legitimacy. The new public visibility of Muslim women, who are outspoken, militant, and educated brings about a shift in the semiotics of veiling, which has long evoked the traditional, subservient domestic roles of Muslim women." Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (MI: University of Michigan P, 1996), 25.

conventional femininities and feminist activism, or modernity and Islam as opposite ends of a continuum but rather approaches all of these as interconnected categories that might sometimes conflict but might also complement each other in the Turkish setting.

### **Existing Scholarship on Turkish Women and Popular Culture**

Turkish women audiences and their experiences of American popular culture constitute a unique pattern, which remains virtually unexplored. Turkish audiences, cultural producers and Turkish women's experiences of popular culture have only recently been discovered as a topic of scholarly research in women's studies, sociology, Communications, and Cultural Studies that have taken the media effects, production and/or textual analysis approach. Popular culture remains a new area for Turkish scholars of American Studies who have until recently focused on literature as their primary focus. Almost totally avoiding interdisciplinarity, and excluding audience analysis and contextual specificities, existing scholarship provides limited insight into an analysis of Turkish experiences of American popular cultural forms.<sup>45</sup>

Major arguments in existing scholarship draw on cultural imperialism models, viewing American popular culture as a serious threat to what Gulriz Buken calls the "retainment of Turkish cultural heritage by the younger generation."<sup>46</sup> Another study of urban viewers, by Sitki Yildiz, employs quantitative methodology to explore the impact

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<sup>45</sup> See for example Gulriz Buken, "Backlash: An Argument Against the Spread of American Popular Culture in Turkey," in *Here, There and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*, ed.s Reinhold Wagneitner and Elaine Tyler May (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of Massachusetts, 2000), 242-50; Nezih Erdogan and Dilek Kaya, "Institutional intervention in the Distribution and Exhibition of Hollywood Films in Turkey," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22 (2002): 47-59; Suheyra Kirca-Schroeder, "Sinema Endüstrisinin Pazarlama ve Promosyon Stratejilerinde Yönelimler: Amerika ve Türkiye," ["New Perspectives in Marketing and Promotion Strategies in the Film Industry: USA and Turkey"], *Türk Film Araştırmalarında Yeni Yönelimler* 3 ["New Perspectives in Turkish Film Studies"], ed., Deniz Bayraktar (İstanbul: Bağlam, 2003); Hulya Tufan-Tanrıover and Ayşe Eyuboglu, *Popüler Kültür Ürünlerinde Kadın İstihdamını Etkileyebilecek Oğeler* ("Elements of Popular Culture that may Impact Women's Employment") (Ankara: Turkish Republic Prime Ministry Directorate General On The Status And The Problems Of Women, 2000).

<sup>46</sup> Buken, 2000, 242.

of entertainment programs, quiz and reality shows on Turkish culture.<sup>47</sup> Based on 795 questionnaires, fifty-seven percent of whom include females, Yildiz finds that male audiences exhibit the most reaction to the potentially negative impact of such television programs on traditional family structures.<sup>48</sup> Although Yildiz looks at urban and highly-educated audiences, his research provides useful evidence shedding light on some rural men's protests against their wives' soap opera viewing, which they similarly perceive as a threat to their traditional culture.

Recent scholarship in Cultural Studies attempts to challenge approaches that fail to account for Turkish viewers' agency. Suheyly Kirca-Schroeder's research, for example, on the re-contextualization of American popular music in the Turkish music industry questions theories of cultural and economic imperialism by considering local agency in the re-appropriation of American popular culture.<sup>49</sup> Other studies on potential audience engagement include an article by Ayse Oncu that explores the subversive role of the diversified televisual landscape in challenging the unified definitions of Turkishness, and transnational case studies by Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins that investigate immigrant Turkish audiences' diverse experiences of Turkish satellite television in Germany.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Sitki Yildiz, "Televizyonlarda Yayınlanan Magazin, Eğlence ve Yarışma Turu Programların Toplumsal Kültür Üzerine Etkileri- Kirikkale ve Ankara Örneği." ("Impact of Television Entertainment programs, quiz and reality shows on Turkish culture.") *Eğitim* 57 (November 2004): 173-178.

<sup>48</sup> Yildiz, 2004, 177.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Suheyly Kirca, "Changes in the International Music Industry and Subsequent Consequences on Music Cultures, the Case of Turkey," *Çalıntı* (1993); and, Suheyly Kirca-Schroeder, "Küreselleşen Kulüp Kültürünün Ticari ve Kültürel Ağları: İstanbul Durağı," ["The Global Financial and Cultural Networks of Clubbing: the Istanbul Stop"], *Cultural Changes in the Turkic World*, eds. Filiz Kırıl et al (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag Würzburg in Kommission, 2007). Kirca-Schroeder's conference papers also explore global music networks and their effects on Turkish music cultures: "Politics of Entertainment Culture in Istanbul and its Interaction with Global Networks," (paper presented at the "Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference," Tampere, Finland, 2002); "Local Responses to Global Musical Networks: 'East2West: Ethno- Electronic Tales from Istanbul'," (paper presented at the "Globalization, Americanization and Contemporary Popular Culture International Conference," Istanbul, May 2004); and, "Global Electronic Dance Music Meets Anatolian Local Music: Ethnographies of "glocal" Music Cultures," (paper presented at the "Reconfiguring, Relocating, Rediscovering" Conference organized by the Association for the Study of Popular Music, Nashville, TN, February 2006).

<sup>50</sup> Ayse Oncu, "The Banal and the Subversive: Politics of language on Turkish Television," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 3 (2000): 296-318; Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins, "Thinking Across Spaces: Transnational Television

None of these studies, however, accounts for or contextualizes the role of gender in Turkish producers' codings/recodings and audiences' multiple decodings of cultural texts. Suheyra Kirca's doctoral dissertation comparing the content of British and Turkish women's magazines and their industries, and her research on the relationship between femininity and feminism attempt to consider women's reading experiences, by referring to the possibility of feminist empowerment via feminine genres.<sup>51</sup> Her work, however, excludes the historical experiences of readers. Similarly, a study by Turkish feminist scholar, Yesim Arat, focuses on the Islamist journal *Kadin ve Aile* ("Woman and Family") but disregards the historical experiences of the Muslim-identified female readers.<sup>52</sup>

### **"Counter-empty-spaces": The Case of Localized American Culture**

Turkish women's "real" or lived media experiences have remained an "unimportant unknown," or "a mental empty space," as Dubravka Ugresic puts it.<sup>53</sup> The present study aims to deconstruct that "empty space" by identifying its counterhegemonic qualities

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from Turkey," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 3(2000): 343-365; "Parting from Phantoms: What is at issue in the development of transnational television from Turkey?" in *Worlds on the Move*, ed.s., Jonathan Friedman and Shalini Randeria (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 179-208.

<sup>51</sup> Suheyra Kirca, "Popularizing Feminism: A Comparative Case Study of Turkish and British Women's Magazines" (Ph.D diss., The Centre for British and Comparative Cultural Studies, University of Warwick, U.K, 2000); "Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture," *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* 5 (1997): 39-47; "Popular Culture: From Being an Enemy of the 'Feminist Movement' to a Tool for Women's 'Liberation'?" *Journal of American Culture* 22 (1999): 101-107; "Kim and Kadınca: Bridging the Gap between Feminism and Women's Magazines," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 22 (2000): 61-84; "Popular Culture and Globalization," *Arka Plan* (February 2004), <http://www.foreignpolicy.org.tr/arkaplan>.

<sup>52</sup> Yesim Arat, "Feminism and Islam: Considerations on the Journal *Kadin ve Aile*," in *Women in Modern Turkish Society*, ed. Sirin Tekeli (London: Zed, 1995), 66-77.

<sup>53</sup> Dubravka Ugresic uses the phrase "mental empty space" in reference to the Western world's indifference to and ignorance of Eastern Europe. Kevin Robins adapts this phrase in his analysis of Western scholars' indifference to Turkey and Turkish media. I find the concept an effective metaphor in the Western and Turkish scholars' ignorance of Turkish women's lived media experiences. I coin the term "counter-empty-space" to additionally refer to the counterpatriarchal aspects of the cultural production and reception of popular culture forms that Turkish people have typically considered depoliticized, mindless and thus empty. Dubravka Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays* (London: Phoenix House, 1998), 239. Cited in Kevin Robins, "Turkish (Television) culture is ordinary," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 3 (2000): 291-295, 291.

informed by the multiple female voices, visions, re-articulations and decodings of womanhood and modernity that reside in it, yet remain unexplored.

Chapter One investigates the viewing practices, pleasures and specific contexts of rural female viewers of the American soap opera, *The Bold and the Beautiful* (“Cesur ve Guzel”).<sup>54</sup> Through focus group studies, individual follow-up interviews, and participant observation of viewers’ social uses of soap operas in everyday life, as well as through textual and historical analyses, I explore the following questions: “What makes an American soap opera so appealing to rural Turkish women?”<sup>55</sup> Can we view the TV genre of soaps as corresponding to the social and psychological needs and habits of this particular group of female viewers, regarding them as active participants? Do these soaps lead viewers to question their traditional roles? How, for example, does viewer identification with a female character committing adultery disrupt traditional gender norms in a community where an act of adultery may lead to an honor killing?”<sup>56</sup>

Drawing on extensive ethnographic data, I demonstrate the existence of an alternative viewership pattern as well as the counterhegemonic ways in which soap viewership can function in the real lives of Turkish women. Rural Turkish women’s soap

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<sup>54</sup> Ethnographic fieldwork for Chapter One was conducted in Alandere, Fasulyelik, and Selahiye villages of Adapazari, in the Black Sea Region of Turkey, Summer 2005.

<sup>55</sup> In addition to *The Bold and the Beautiful*, other American soap operas discussed or extensively referred to by study participants include *The Young and the Restless* (*Yalan Ruzgari*– “Wind of Lies”) and *Generations* (*Hayat Agaci*).

<sup>56</sup> An honor killing refers to the “premeditated murder of women of all ages, by one or more male members of her immediate or extended family. A family council decides on the time and form of execution due to an allegation, suspicion or proof of sexual impropriety by the victim. Acts or accusations may range from going to movies without approval or a chaperon, to kissing, holding hands, dating or having intercourse with a man who is not one’s culturally or legally sanctioned husband” as well as the woman’s refusal to marry her rapist. (Leyla Pervizat, “Honor killings,” Paper presented at the United Nations Commission of Human Rights, 54th session (1998) cited in Aysan Sev’er and Gokcececek Yurdakul, “Culture of Honor, Culture of Change: A Feminist Analysis of Honor Killings in Rural Turkey,” *Violence Against Women: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal* 7(1999): 964-999, 964. See also, Dicle Kogacioglu, “The Tradition Effect: Framing Honor Crimes in Turkey,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 15: 2 (2004): 119-151). Recently, to avoid imprisonment, such Turkish families have begun to force these women into suicide, introducing the ‘forced suicide’ phenomenon. I should note in this context that honor killings or forced suicides, are not found exclusively in Turkey or in Islamic patriarchies. As several studies have shown, honor killings pre-date Islam and are not promoted by the Koran. For a survey of relevant studies and a detailed historical and political analysis of honor killings in Turkey, see, Sev’er and Yurdakul, 1999.

viewing practices have the potential to challenge traditional gender codes, not only due to pleasures associated with the generic and textual codes and the stark contrast between these women's constrained lives and the diegetic lives of the soap characters, but also because of the social pleasures connected to their viewership habits. Textual pleasures and the emerging feelings of counterpatriarchal social awareness become most vivid in the case of the teenage girls who actively read the text in unanticipated ways and use the ambiguous textual messages of soaps as strategies to establish themselves as 'liberated girls' receiving high school or college education despite a lack of familial history of female schooling.

Rural Turkish women's viewership positions and pleasures correlate closely with the perceived Americanness of the soap opera narrative and characters. This perceived foreignness lays the groundwork for a non-threatening viewing setting which opens up possibilities for active viewership positions and allows for the production of counterpatriarchal awareness in soap viewers' lives inside and outside the living room. Women's soap viewership habits, and the surrounding discourses used by women to talk about the soaps, as well as the textual pleasures associated with the anti-traditional textual world, all function in interrelated ways to contribute to the creation of an empowering female sphere, a safe female forum for free speech. I illustrate in Chapter One the multiple levels through which this alternative sphere is socially constructed, and explore the intersection of television viewing, American soap opera as genre and text, individual agency, domestic power relations, and counterpatriarchal awareness in the daily lives of rural Turkish women.

Investigating the post-1990s deconstructions of Turkish ‘new womanhood’ that redefine conventional femininities and the role of religion as well as the varying responses from secularists to independent activists, I explore in Chapter Two the incorporation of feminist discourses in the women’s magazine *Cosmopolitan*, the Turkish version of its American counterpart, which, in Turkey, is targeted to an urban, middle-class, professional audience.<sup>57</sup> Since the magazine’s launch in 1992, the local content has offered Turkish women—both magazine editors and readers—a textual repertoire (including both written and visual elements) about how to be a liberated Turkish woman in a particular historical period. As I will argue in reference to the period 1992-2005, Turkish *Cosmopolitan* has represented an unresolved discursive fight over the shifting definitions of modern Turkish womanhood. I will also illustrate the “semi-local” aspects of the magazine content and editorial business decisions that allow the magazine to blend in as well as subvert the gendered Turkish setting.

Considering the national, cultural and contextual specificities of the production and reception processes, I will argue that *Cosmopolitan* exhibits and reinforces a “neo-feminist” ideology. Through textual analysis, production ethnography and reception study, I will demonstrate that the neo-feminist ideology reinforced and administered by *Cosmopolitan* editors and accepted by the readers entails the discursive privileging of female agency in the magazine text which, through the ‘voluntarily’ uncritical (‘preferred’) reading position of Turkish readers, allows for the naturalization of

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<sup>57</sup> Analysis of readers’ letters and editorial content of Turkish *Cosmopolitan* demonstrates, however, a more diverse reader profile, particularly since 1999. Letter writers include middle-class professionals, devoted fans of *Cosmopolitan* who self-identify as stay-at-home mothers or housewives, girls who have been introduced to the magazine by their mothers as well as rural women and, occasionally, men.

alternative worldviews.<sup>58</sup> The neo-feminist potential of *Cosmopolitan* specifically relates to two factors: Local editors' construction of an anti-dualistic text that incorporates a consciousness-raising subtext with features on female sexuality and career success as well as on patriarchal femininities; and, readers' implied acceptance of the magazine content as indicated in the readers' letters. Features that make the magazine anti-traditional include a textual focus on female agency and on formerly taboo topics of sexuality as well as the editors' enlightening mode that challenges industry regulations of what a commercial women's magazine traditionally signifies to Turkish readers.

Turkish women's preferred readership position correlates with their real or imagined agency and allows for a resistive potentiality. Reader agency within the Turkish context can take the form of allegiance to the textually privileged ideologies embedded in the locally produced content. Through the construction of a non-intimidating feminist text that does not necessarily oppose femininities, Turkish *Cosmopolitan* editors have adapted and re-defined the magazine according the broader power relations of a given period. From this perspective, *Cosmopolitan* has served as a counterspace in which Turkish women producers and readers continually negotiate and re-envision their gendered identities and their relationship to globalization and Turkish patriarchy.

Chapter Three investigates the localized and gendered meanings produced simultaneously by female rock musicians and their female fans in the period between

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<sup>58</sup> Production ethnography includes participant observation (during a period of three weeks—two weeks in March 2005, and one in August 2005—at the editorial offices of the Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazine in İkitelli, Istanbul, Turkey as well as personal interviews with four Senior members of the Editorial Board. Interviewed editors include former Editor-in-Chief, Leyla Melek Ciftci; former Editorial Director (Second-in command), Aysun Orhan; and former Senior Editors Ceyda Asar (arts and media culture, travel) and Sibel Kilimci (Literature, Women's Rights). While all of these respondents, at the time of this research, served on the Editorial Board, they do not currently work at Turkish *Cosmopolitan*. The research sample for text analysis includes eighteen issues published between 1992 and 2005, and reception study is based on an analysis of 231 readers' letters and e-mails sent to the *Cosmopolitan* editor(s), and a personal interview with the sender of the only critical letter in the sample.

1988 and 2009.<sup>59</sup> I argue that contemporary Turkish rock culture allows for the flourishing of a fully localized space of resistance, one that allows musicians and their fans to challenge and, at times, deconstruct traditional Turkish gender norms in the industry and society. Musicians' use of intertextuality, as well as their redefinitions of femininities and feminisms in the context of Turkey contribute to their deconstructions of music industry regulations and Turkish gender codes. As the musicians re-articulate what rock culture signifies in contemporary Turkey and blur genre boundaries with their engagement with global and Turkish genres, they contribute to the construction of a localized music culture that has dropped its connotations of Americanness. Turkish rock music today, indeed, functions, at times, as a reactionary means to resist American imperialism, globalization and capitalist patriarchy. This localized culture is most visible through musicians' subversion of genre boundaries, their use of the Turkish language, Turkish cultural references, and traditional Turkish rhythms and instruments, all of which point to the musicians' agency in appropriating and reconceptualizing a former U.S. import.

Turkish rock music also provides a participatory culture in which the female audiences interact with and produce their own versions of Turkish rock. Most importantly, through their interaction with this rebellious culture exemplified by strong female musicians, female audiences appropriate their own versions of the image of an empowered Turkish woman, that comprises one or more of the following: re-claiming as well as questioning femininities, motherhood, and domesticity as well as asserting their right to occupy the traditionally male-only spheres of rock bars, music, criticism, and

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<sup>59</sup> The chapter focuses on pop-rock musician Nil Karaibrahimgil, and the solo careers of Sebnem Ferah and Ozlem Tekin, formerly of the first all-female Turkish underground rock and metal band, Volvox (1988-1994).

business life. To illustrate the locally specific nature of Turkish rock, I explore the communicative roles of Turkish rock music and female rockers; the means by which music gets transmitted; and the ways in which listeners interpret and use rock culture in a variety of contexts including daily life, music festivals, albums, fan and official websites, blogs, fan art, and video/audio sharing websites such as the YouTube. I also examine lyrics, musicians' public performances, music videos, stage costumes, and media coverage to present an in-depth analysis of the full integration of rock into underground and mainstream Turkish cultures, as well as the gendered meanings and oppositional uses of rock culture by female musicians and their fans.

By simultaneously considering texts, their female audiences and producers, contextual and cultural specificities, broader historical and economic structures, strategies of localization *and* the impact of patriarchal gender divisions, each of the following chapters explores the complex processes of Turkish women's re-codings and decodings of American cultural imports as they relate to redefinitions of Turkish womanhood and feminisms in contemporary Turkey. With an integrative approach that accounts for the differences among Turkish women from the perspective of class, geographical region, and age, the present study aims to illuminate the complexity of women's situation in a society in which the official rhetoric of Turkish modernity as symbolized by the liberated Turkish woman continues to inform Turkish women's media experiences while honor killings also remain a reality.

## CHAPTER 1

### **“Pink Serials,” Gendered Textualities, and Complicated Pleasures: Rural Turkish Women Watching American Day-Time Soap Operas**

“As I see these American women’s lives on soaps, I have more self-confidence and self-respect in my own potential. I start thinking, ‘My life is in my own hands.’ Here, if a woman is scared that her husband may beat her up, she probably won’t say such things out loud, but can still begin to dream.”

Respondent, Adapazari, Turkey, 12 July 2005

During my fieldwork in a rural part of the Black Sea Region in northern Turkey in the summer of 2005, I encountered a Turkish man, who, upon listening to my research interests and rationale, responded, “What is it that you’ll find? That these soaps stupidify women?”<sup>1</sup> This statement does, in fact, sum up the general opinion in Turkish media and cultural studies scholarship as well as in popular discourse that questions the legitimacy of studying soap operas and women’s pleasures, in particular. Charged with a univocal dismissal of Turkish women as a monolithic group of mindless, passive followers of an imported American text, the above statement attempts to make invisible the complexity of Turkish women’s media experiences and their potential agency as diverse individuals negotiating gendered hierarchies in their multiple interpretations of media representations, in their viewing arrangements, and in their daily lives.

This ethnography of female rural viewers when added to an analysis of their multiple interpretive and viewing pleasures gained from daytime soaps has allowed me to

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<sup>1</sup> S.C., in a conversation with the author, August 1, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey. [Translated by the author. All quotations from Turkish sources in the present chapter are translated by the author.]

challenge such assumptions that rural Turkish women lack agency.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the present study of Turkish women's diverse experiences of soap operas, or "pink serials" as they are called in Turkey, reveals a more complex story.<sup>3</sup> Turkish women view American soaps and their role in their real lives in contradictory ways as they negotiate and continually reproduce definitions of womanhood and sexuality. Agency, in rural women's cases, may thus have multivalent forms and effects that challenge the active (male, Western)/passive (female, non-Western) binarisms used to approach women and non-Western audiences. Women's soap viewership habits and the surrounding discourses used by women to talk about the soaps, as well as the textual pleasures associated with the anti-traditional, foreign diegetic world, function in interrelated ways to contribute to the creation of an alternative female sphere, a relatively safe forum for free speech. This chapter illustrates the multiple levels through which this alternative public sphere of Turkish soap viewers is socially constructed and explores the intersection of television viewing, American soap opera as genre and text, domestic power relations, consumerism, and counterpatriarchal awareness in the daily lives of rural Turkish women.<sup>4</sup>

Through a series of focus group studies, individual follow-up interviews, and participant observation as well as through an account of the text and its historical and cultural contexts, this chapter investigates the viewing practices and specific social

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<sup>2</sup> Ethnographic fieldwork for this case study was conducted during a three-month period (June-August 2005), in Alandere, Fasulyelik, and Selahiye villages of Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> The American soap operas discussed or referred to in this chapter are *The Young and the Restless* (*Yalan Ruzgari*—"Wind of Lies"), *The Bold and the Beautiful* (*Cesur ve Guzel*) and *Generations* (*Hayat Agaci*).

<sup>4</sup> My conceptualization of the potentially oppositional aspect of rural Turkish women's soap viewing contexts, their erotic gaze directed toward the American male characters, and women's soap-related networks of conversation draws from Miriam Hansen's notion of the "alternative public sphere." Hansen coined this term in her 1991 study of female fans of Rudolph Valentino. Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991). I should also note, in this context, that Hansen's work looks specifically at film spectatorship before the advent of television, and many feminist studies of television and soap opera scholarship, in particular, have theorized a female gaze that is crucial to the soap opera text and informs part of the textual analysis in this study. See, for example, Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Methuen, 1982); and, Charlotte Brunsdon, "Crossroads: notes on soap opera," *Screen* 22 (1982): 32-7.

contexts of female soap opera viewers in Anatolian villages in northern Turkey. Simultaneously considering text, context and viewers, I explore the following questions: Why is an American soap opera so appealing to rural Turkish women? How does rural women's soap viewership illuminate their complex negotiations of global flows as well as local patriarchies in their daily lives? Can we view the TV genre of soaps as corresponding to the social and psychological needs and habits of these female viewers, regarding them as active participators? Do these soaps lead Turkish women to question their traditional roles? How, for example, does viewer identification with a female character committing adultery disrupt traditional gender norms in a community where an act of adultery may lead to an honorkilling?

Rural Turkish women's soap viewing practices reveal women's diverse negotiations of their televisual encounters with global, national, local and commodified gendered identities. Soap viewership in the Turkish setting involves nuanced balances, responding to a range of tensions made available by the soap text, viewing contexts and viewer specificities. As will be elaborated, soap operas, indeed, enforce certain power dynamics (such as patriarchy, American imperialism, and consumerism) in one regard while challenging them on another. A study of Turkish women's viewership reveals the multiple ways in which audiences use the soap texts as a resource to resist oppressive constructs in their family relationships, marriages and daily life, while they also align themselves with notions of capitalist heteropatriarchy, which may nonetheless have resistive implications in their specific contexts. Behavioral changes that rural women ask from their husbands as in the several cases of rural women requesting romantic gestures, in the form of going out for a date at the village tea garden or flowers, indicates a

complex mixture of meanings balanced out by women, rather than a simple reproduction of American consumerism and the myth of ideal romance.

Female viewership reveals the challenges of the soap form, text and narrative to traditional gender norms, not only due to negotiated pleasures associated with the generic and textual codes and the stark contrast between rural women's constrained lives and the diegetic lives of the soap characters, but also because of the social pleasures connected to viewership habits. Textual and social pleasures are often intertwined. Textual pleasures and the emerging feelings of counterpatriarchal social awareness become most vivid in the case of the teenage girls who actively read the text in unanticipated ways and use the ambiguous textual meanings of soaps to establish themselves as 'liberated girls' receiving high school or college education despite a lack of familial history of female schooling.

Turkish women's active, unanticipated, and, at times, oppositional viewership positions and pleasures correlate closely with the perceived Americanness of the soap opera genre and text. Rural Turkish women identify an inherent Americanness in the soap genre and text, which lays the groundwork for a non-threatening viewing context that opens up possibilities for active viewership positions. Textual features that the respondents viewed as "American" include depictions of female sexuality, agency, and, at times, the lack of agency; the diegetic representation of a drastically different way of female living as conveyed through the tropes of career and relationships; the presence of the foreign man as spectacle; representations of alternative masculinities (such as depictions of male characters as gentle, romantic, and understanding); and the glamour of American consumer lives. As anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod notes in relation to Egyptian audiences and the role of television, "television gives women, the young, and

the rural as much access as urban men to stories of other worlds.”<sup>5</sup> Rural Turkish women’s engagement with the soap operas’ “American” elements similarly gives them access to worlds, perspectives and stories drastically different from those in their lived reality.

Turkish women’s viewing pleasures reveal a careful balancing act of several tensions made available by the soap opera genre and text: the mutual appeal of the domestic and the non-domestic spheres in the soap narrative, of the foreign yet accessible text, and its “educational” yet escapist elements. It is crucial, however, to avoid falling into the trap of overpoliticizing women’s viewing pleasures. As Ien Ang, in the conclusion to her book on *Dallas* and its appeal in the Netherlands, writes, “The personal may be political, but the personal and the political do not always go hand in hand.”<sup>6</sup> Recognition of Turkish women’s complicated individual articulations as well as the complex patterns and processes of negotiating identities expressed throughout the fieldwork allows this study to avoid the overpoliticization of women’s pleasures.

Turkish women’s negotiated and/or oppositional interpretation of soap opera meanings made available by their historical specificities lead to alternative decodings of soap operas. As conceptualized by Stuart Hall, textual messages encoded in one way can always be decoded in an alternative way.<sup>7</sup> Hall describes the negotiated position as one in which the viewer accepts some definitions of dominant ideology but also identifies breaks from it. Stuart Hall’s notion of multiple decodings is useful in investigating the contextually and culturally specific ways in which diverse experiences of female viewers

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<sup>5</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, “The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian television and the cultural politics of modernity,” in *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*, ed. Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1995), 191.

<sup>6</sup> Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 136.

<sup>7</sup> Stuart Hall, “Encoding, Decoding,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, [1973] 1993), 90-103.

challenge binarized approaches that view encodings/decodings as necessarily patriarchal or counterpatriarchal. Also crucial in any analysis that accounts for an alternative gaze structure for women is bell hooks' conceptualization of the "oppositional gaze" in her discussion of black female spectators of American cinema. In her influential essay, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," hooks claims that "the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency."<sup>8</sup> hooks describes an "oppositional gaze" as one that requires black women to "interrogate the work, cultivate a way to look past race and gender for aspects of content, form, language."<sup>9</sup> While hooks writes specifically about film spectatorship in relation to race, Turkish women's critical stance toward certain representations and formal elements in the soap operas reflect a similar position.

Acknowledgement of multiple voices and subjectivities of the respondents also gives authority to the diversity of Turkish women's voices and challenges essentialist notions of Turkish womanhood. This study attempts to challenge the cause-and-effect studies of foreign audiences of American popular culture. As such, it explores the fluidity of the viewers' own perceptions of their viewing experiences and questions the binarization of Western/non-Western, and female/male viewers as reductive approaches that do not attend to the multiple effects of soap opera viewing in the Turkish setting. The present study thus demonstrates the multiple points of tension that Turkish women experience and exhibit in regard to their shifting views of patriarchy, counterpatriarchy, female empowerment and cultural imperialism.

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<sup>8</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 116.

<sup>9</sup> hooks, 122.

As I will argue, soap viewing functions in rural women's lives by granting them different forms of historically specific agency both inside *and* outside the living room. From this perspective, soap opera-related female agency connotes new forms of text-based knowledge, thought and/or action as well as new ways of viewing as reflected in the voyeuristic pleasures rural women experience in sexually inflected scenes and in their occasional oppositional viewing positions that destabilize textual and extra-textual patriarchies. Agency may also extend to the social sphere and it can be manifest in women's daily lives. Such daily manifestations of agency include women's temporary rejection of assigned chores, requests for behavioral changes from male family members and future husbands, pursuing higher education and success in the public sphere, and collaborative meaning-making in homosocial viewing settings which allow for an alternative public sphere. This new female community makes possible a relatively safe space for discussing taboo issues such as sexuality, desire toward male characters, and new forms of femininity and masculinity.

Study participants sometimes proudly, and at times critically, re-tell the stories of certain housewives, who, supposedly under the influence of American soap operas, openly confronted their husbands, refused to do the expected house chores and actively demanded to leave the domestic sphere to work for themselves. The factual reliability of such mediated narratives about those "other" women can easily be challenged. But respondents recognized the extratextual ways these soaps functioned in the lives of women of similar backgrounds. When re-telling and commenting on this mythic story of Turkish women who challenge stereotypes by actively connecting the soap opera plot to their lives, the respondents' statements, however contradictory at times, revealed more of

a symbolic realization of their own dreams than disdain for the rebellious women. A temporary, but similarly counterhegemonic act of rejecting housework is seen when women choose to set aside time for themselves to watch their soaps. However temporary it may seem, rejection of housework, the expected primary role for these women along with motherhood, provides the kind of pleasures associated with counterpatriarchal acts.<sup>10</sup> Women's direct connection of the plot or the subplot to their own lives goes one step further by helping women deal with problems similar to their own.

The social aspect of the actual soap viewing process needs to be explored in relation to the transgressive ways soaps function in rural Turkish women's real lives. As the respondents come together in a (mostly) all-female space to watch their favorite soaps, at times criticizing the characters and sometimes crying for them, as they gossip in their gardens, the stable, fields and their living rooms about the American characters' lives and relationships, as they describe the unruly Turkish women whose soap viewership is said to have provided them new perspectives, there emerges an alternative female sphere within the broader hegemonic space of traditional Turkish patriarchy. Turkish viewers' socialization around soap viewing thus allows them to use the text as a legitimate resource in their social interactions. Ellen Seiter *et al*, in an ethnographic study with American female soap opera viewers, have argued that "Soap opera texts are the products not of individual and isolated readings but of collective constructions—collaborative readings, as it were, of small social groups such as families, friends, and

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the potentially resistant aspect of women's reading/viewing pleasures, see Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); and, Andrea Press, *Women Watching Television: Gender, Class, and Generation in the American Television Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

neighbours...”<sup>11</sup> Turkish viewers’ communal experiences of meaning-making and their socialization around soap viewing function in similar ways. Yet Turkish women’s viewing positions exhibit no univocal structure. Multiple decodings, from dominant to resistive and, at times, oppositional viewing positions, present themselves within the women’s collaborative and individual engagements with the text.

An analysis of the text and of Turkish women’s textual pleasures reveals a complexity of meaning that can help explain the alternative readings and uses of these soap operas in women’s real lives. The excerpts viewed during the focus groups, points, on one level, to a textually privileged female viewership, as described extensively in feminist scholarship on television.<sup>12</sup> Earlier accounts of television viewing and of soap viewership, in particular, focus on their gendered nature with a predominantly female address and with narratives and a structure that resemble women’s daily lives and require female competencies for viewing pleasures. As Tania Modleski has argued, soap opera’s feminine address represents a break from the Hollywood narrative and structure in its construction and reinforcement of a textual spectator position as female, as “ideal mother.”<sup>13</sup> While this viewing position requires a passive subjectivity that women are conditioned to occupy in their identification with the different characters, Modleski sees

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<sup>11</sup> Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth, “Don’t Treat Us like We’re So Stupid and Naive: Toward an Ethnography of Soap Opera Viewers,” in *Remote Control*, ed.s, Ellen Seiter *et al* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 233.

<sup>12</sup> Television and soap opera studies have argued, from different angles, for the existence of a female gaze that is privileged in television that, unlike cinema, offers a structure of feminine visual and narrative pleasures. Tania Modleski, in particular, has argued that the soap operas are feminine texts that specifically address women. Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Methuen, 1982). See also Charlotte Brunsdon, “Crossroads: notes on soap opera,” *Screen* 22 (1982): 32-7, and Christine Gledhill, “Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 337-386. These studies have demonstrated the existence of a privileged female viewership in television and in soap operas. Earlier psychoanalytical feminist studies of film, however, argued for a masculine-identified gaze and a voyeuristic male position as inscribed by mainstream cinema. See Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16 (1975): 6-18; and Laura Mulvey, “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*,” *Framework* 15/16/17 (1981): 12-15.

<sup>13</sup> Modleski, 1982.

some feminist potential in the privileging of the feminine. An analysis of Turkish women's text-based pleasures illustrates the multivalent effects of the soap texts in the Turkish setting. American soaps offer a female-centered, yet historically and culturally specific, textual mode of address that offers more than one fixed (ideal mother, feminine, feminist) viewing position with complex social and ideological connotations.

Textual strategies reveal the contradictions of active female spectatorship and the cultural hierarchy of gender in the visual field. Soap operas depict female characters, for instance, as active agents in their decisions about their domestic or professional lives (a characteristic perceived by the study participants as evidence for female empowerment) while also representing them as wives, lovers, and mothers, hence in constant need of male presence and domestic bliss for happiness. Yet rural Turkish women read such female characters, and the textual depiction of their lives, romances, and pre-marital relationships in unanticipated and, at times, contradictory ways. On the one hand, participants in the present ethnography viewed the foreign textual world as a source for personal role models and for symbolic realizations—fantasy actualizations of their desires through an intense engagement with the text. On the other hand, they actively challenged certain representations of American women they sometimes saw as disempowered. For example, one of the respondents, Yesim, voiced the concerns of several other respondents when she challenged the character Stephanie from *The Bold and Beautiful* for remarrying her former husband who had cheated on her. “Oh, this poor woman,” she said. “How can you forgive your husband who slept with your daughter-in-law? Unless, of course, you have no home and no money. No Turkish woman as rich as Stephanie would

ever get such a man back. Never!’”<sup>14</sup> While only two respondents expressed a neutral response to Stephanie’s decision, thirty-eight of forty respondents clearly noted that even though they did not have the same resources, they would still leave their husbands; even if that meant going back to their “father’s home.”<sup>15</sup>

This chapter thus examines American soap opera as gendered text and genre; Turkish women as viewers of the multiple encodings present in the narrative and as meaning makers of diverse decodings, processes that directly relate to their culturally, historically and contextually specific backgrounds and viewing settings, and viewers’ own perceptions of the metatextual aspects of the soap operas. As such, the following account illuminates the fluidity of such constructed binarisms as mindless fans/sophisticated viewers, feminine/feminist, and Western imperialism-core/vulnerable Turkish culture-periphery and instead proposes a multi-faceted approach to explore Turkish women’s complex experiences of a major American cultural import.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a methodology that combines textual analysis with media ethnography. The aim is to account for text, context and viewers while also paying attention to the viewers’ perceptions of the cultural producer(-s). Textual analysis serves as an integral part of the audience reception analysis, to provide an additional lens through which to analyze the respondents’ comments that are also viewed as texts. Textual analysis of the soap operas is limited to a study of the excerpts viewed by the

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<sup>14</sup> Yesim (respondent), focus group discussion conducted by the author, July 8, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey. From here on, to protect participants’ confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used whenever a respondent is quoted. Since all focus group discussions are conducted by the author, that information will not be included in the following notes for purposes of brevity.

<sup>15</sup> Inci (respondent), focus group discussion, July 20, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

respondents prior to the focus groups and surveys the storylines as well as the characters and their relationships. By demonstrating the means by which rural women, due to their cultural and contextual specificities, make unexpected uses of the text in their daily lives, the textual analysis supplements the focus group evidence.

The ethnographic portion of this study involved forty women. The fieldwork consisted of participant observation of rural women's viewing practices; ten focus groups and individual follow-up interviews all conducted in Turkish.<sup>16</sup> Although American daytime soap operas have been extremely popular across social strata in Turkey, I choose to focus on rural Turkish women because their extremely constrained lived experiences exhibit the most contrast to the fictional lives depicted in the textual narratives. Rural women are also the most skeptical of any official or alternative feminist ideology. Women's discourses around the soaps demonstrate, however, the existence of an alternative female public sphere which allows female viewers to detach themselves from the periphery and enjoy the pleasures of active spectatorship otherwise denied them. This makes these women a valid and important constituency to address.<sup>17</sup>

The study participants exhibit multilayered subjectivities. One respondent, Katibe, perfectly illustrated the multiple identities with which these women grapple. At the end of the focus group, Katibe asked to have her photograph taken with her husband, who had come to pick her up. For the photo, Katibe took off her headscarf, saying that "If Americans see my photo, they shouldn't think we are all like that! [wearing the

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix A- III for the focus group and interview questions in English.

<sup>17</sup> Of the 40 respondents, 38 were from a particularly conservative background. Of the 40, only eight were not wearing the Islamic headscarf while thirty-two wore it the whole time. It is also worth noting that not all these women are necessarily identified as ideal viewers/fans. 16 were average viewers; and 3 claimed no interest in soaps. See Appendix A- I for detailed respondent profiles.

Islamic headscarf]”<sup>18</sup> This move is important for several reasons. She had never taken off her headscarf in the village (unless she was at home or with other women), but she had no problems with her photo being seen by Americans, both women and men.<sup>19</sup>



Katibe's position also indicates her sophisticated understanding of the powerful role of representation. Further, her decision to take off her headscarf points to the ambiguity around the complex identities of rural Turkish women. The respondents perceived themselves as more empowered than the Eastern Anatolian rural women, but were well-aware of their limited lives in relation to American as well as urban Turkish women. Hence, Katibe decided to gain some leverage by, at least, getting rid of what she knew signified backwardness in Turkish official discourse.

Unlike urban migrant communities, who have some experience of the 'other' culture via their encounters with 'modern city life' and images of the 'new Turkish woman,' the focus group participants' only experience of images and discourse of

<sup>18</sup> Katibe (respondent's real name), in conversation with the author, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>19</sup> Reproduced here with the respondent's explicit permission.

modern Turkish women, at the time of their soap viewing, were solely via the medium of television, and occasionally through their interaction with local tourists from big cities. Moreover, unlike the negative reaction to some of those so-called modernized Turkish women on TV, the female characters in American soaps function in a less threatening way since they are non-Turkish. Despite their unacceptable wrongdoing from a Turkish perspective, everything the American characters do or say is justifiable to the extent that respondents can, at times, imagine themselves in their place.

Finally, unlike American viewers, rural Turkish women do not necessarily face the negative stereotyping and routine stigmatization seen in most popular media in the West. Since they are quite detached and do not read newspapers as much, rural women, unlike most urban Turkish viewers, do not have to encounter public condemnation by some Turkish intellectuals (including feminists and socialists) who occasionally comment about soaps in the popular press and on the Internet.<sup>20</sup> Although some respondents noted that their husbands did not approve their viewing preferences and tried to ban their soap viewing altogether, most of the respondents were not forced into hiding their pleasures derived from watching soaps. These women were thus able to freely express themselves without fears of much embarrassment.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For example, the socialist monthly, *Yeni Dünya İcin Çağrı* ("Call for a New World") called the soap operas "women's opium." *Yeni Dünya İcin Çağrı*, "Women's Opium: Pink Serials Etc" (October 1997), <http://ydicagri.com/Sayilar/005/05ykd.html>. The newspaper, *Ozgür Gündem* ("Independent Agenda") criticized soap fandom, and claimed that women were "becoming captives of soap operas." *Ozgür Gündem*, <http://www.ulkedeozgurgundem.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8133>. Another e-magazine presented soaps as an important part of the "magical force of television that turns people into brainless consumers." *Evrensel Mesaj Dergisi* (April 1999), "Tuketim Toplumunda Emperyalizmin Gorsel Buyucusu" ("The Visual Magician of Imperialism in Consumer Society"), <http://www.enfal.de/tele.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> It is important to note here that, throughout the chapter, I will use the words "woman/women/womanhood" to refer to both "woman/women/womanhood" and "girl(-s)/girlhood." The word "girl" will be used only when directly referring to a respondent who is unmarried and thus living with her parents. This, in no way, indicates an acceptance of this patriarchal division based on marital status, thus virginity. Rather, my use of the word "girl(-s)" is intended to contextualize and convey the respondent's self-perception within the patriarchal limits of her village. My choice of the word "women" over "women and girls" is an attempt to avoid this patriarchal binary, which cannot be completely ignored but, rather dealt with.

Another factor which played a crucial part in the study was the viewing context itself. The focus group settings ranged from living rooms, to front yards, balconies, patios, gardens, and, in one case, a “garden room” adjacent to the stable. The participants watched the excerpts from a notebook computer, which in itself was a new viewing experience for them. All attempts were made to make the rest of the viewing arrangement seem and feel like a real setting so that the participants could better recall their viewing experiences, if not completely relive them. As in most of their past viewing experiences, they watched the soap opera together while taking a sip from their tea in Turkish tea glasses; children kept running around; women occasionally “talked to” the on-screen characters; they were not warned to be attentive or quiet when they started talking amongst themselves to either ask each other about what happened prior to this episode, or to comment on another related event in the narrative history; and, most importantly, despite these seeming distractions, they could still retain their concentration during the viewing. When the focus groups took place in the evenings, there were occasional interruptions by husbands coming home, and a participant or two had to temporarily leave the group to fix dinner for the husbands. The questions in the study thus had to be free form, and not necessarily in a sequential order, to allow for those lapses or frequent absences.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The same fragmented nature applies for the participant observation part of the study where not all the participants were on time, and some had thus missed parts of the viewed episode prior to the focus group. In order to keep the viewing arrangement as natural as possible, no additional viewing was provided to the late-comers during the focus group. As would be the case if they had actually missed parts of an episode, these women then had to ask other participants to learn about the narrative, or guess on their own. They were allowed a second viewing only before the individual follow-up interview that was conducted immediately after the focus group study. The follow-up interview was intended to gather more detailed responses from the late-comers or those participants who thought it was disrespectful to speak out in the presence of older women, a common occurrence in most focus groups.

### **Rationale for Soap Opera Selections**

The selected episode viewed by respondents at the beginning of each focus group was from *The Bold and the Beautiful*, which was broadcast on Turkish Flash TV during Spring 2005.<sup>23</sup> Although there were constant references during the focus groups to older prime-time soaps such as *Dallas* as well as Mexican and Brazilian telenovelas that gained considerable popularity in the 1980s, I focus on *The Bold and the Beautiful* and other American daytime soaps primarily due to their offering both accessibility and foreignness, both an ongoing normative experience and unexpected novelty-defining features of their historically specific appeal in the early 1990s when they were first introduced.

My selection of American soaps is primarily based on a “foreignness” which involves both contextual/institutional elements (the fact that they first aired on and/or became popular through private channels, which were also a novelty in the early 1990s) and textual elements (the mise-en-scene, “look” of the soaps, their narrative themes and structure). These various foreign-identified aspects come together and contribute to the creation of an appealing text and form. For example, unlike the women in telenovelas who, according to the respondents, have a Turkish look and, like most of them, deal with real-life problems such as domestic violence or poverty, the female characters in the US soaps provide a more glamorous and different, if not dream-like, lifestyle to Turkish viewers. American daytime soap operas also connote a sense of novelty because of viewers’ association of the genre with private channels, the carnivalesque alternative to the state-run channel TRT. Moreover, TRT had previously broadcast several telenovelas, familiarizing the female audiences with the genre. As one respondent puts it, “Those

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<sup>23</sup> The episode originally aired in the United States, the week of 17-21 March 2003.

Brazilian serials are no different from Turkish movies or serials. There's the poor guy, rich girl or rich girl, poor guy. They are not as exciting. I love the glamour and unpredictability in those other soaps."<sup>24</sup> U.S. soap operas bring into Turkish living rooms an endless life experience each day, one that is "fascinating because it's American," as one respondent observes.<sup>25</sup> Although once Turkish viewers learn the generic conventions, the American soaps can be as predictable as the telenovelas or the Turkish serials, the respondents still associated American soap opera as genre and text with novelty and excitement.

The perceived foreignness of American soaps, which some husbands viewed as a direct threat to traditional gender roles, has thus made soaps more appealing to the respondents. As will be discussed in detail later, the perceived Americanness of the soap genre has constructed the groundwork for a viewing context in which the anti-traditional diegetic world opens up possibilities for alternative viewership positions and interpretations. Indeed, Turkish women's practice of this private, active viewership arrangement has at times allowed for the recognition and production of counterpatriarchal awareness in their daily lives.

Also important in my selection of these U.S. soaps is their accessibility across all social strata in Turkey. Unlike the Indian context, for instance, in which the undubbed U.S. soaps are accessible only via satellite and so appeal solely to urban middle-class women who can follow the English dialogue and who have the financial resources to subscribe to satellite TV, or the Egyptian setting in which viewers include middle-class women and men who can read the Arabic subtitles or follow the undubbed episodes aired

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<sup>24</sup> Nezihe (respondent), focus group discussion, July 21, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

during prime time, American soaps in the Turkish setting have been accessible to all types of audiences.<sup>26</sup> Broadcast in day-time slots on widely-available private channels, and dubbed in Turkish, the soaps were popular with a wide range of viewers, from illiterate rural women to well-educated, upper-middle class urban women.

Unlike prime-time soaps associated by my respondents with a “family viewing context” and thus with the presence of the male family members, day-time soaps also have a predominantly female audience, with the choice of an individual or homosocial viewing context allowing for the textual and social pleasures of women. David Morley concludes in his study of the family viewing context of *Nationwide* that, typically, male family members dominate program choices for family groups.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, daytime soap opera viewership, offers a private and predominantly female viewing experience. This homosocial viewing context and women’s control over the television set and over viewing choices challenge domestic power relations.<sup>28</sup> In the exceptional cases, when some of my respondents did watch soap operas with men, most women chose to watch soap operas despite the male family member’s presence and/or other preference. Yet some respondents quit their viewing precisely because their husbands would not allow them to watch American soaps which they perceived as potentially “dangerous” to traditional norms. Some women were thus forced by their husbands to go on outings with them to prevent them from watching soap operas.

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<sup>26</sup> Sauli Chaudhuri, “Watching *The Bold and the Beautiful*: Reception of an American Soap Opera by Women in India” (Master’s Thesis, The Ohio State University, 1995); Lila Abu-Lughod, “The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian television and the cultural politics of modernity,” in *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*, ed. Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1995), 200.

<sup>27</sup> David Morley, *The ‘Nationwide’ Audience* (London: BFI, 1980). See also David Morley, *Family Television* (London: Comedia/Routledge, 1986); and James Lull, “The Family and Television in World Cultures,” in *World Families Watch Television*, ed. James Lull (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1988), 9-21.

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that Morley’s study involved British viewers only and his conclusions about male dominance are complicated by the range of viewing settings experienced by the Turkish respondents during both day-time and prime-time television. Morley’s work also does not account for the strategies women employ during “family viewing” as well as the different kinds of pleasures they experience.

American soap operas have also been internalized in Turkish popular discourse, even vocabulary. The impact of dubbed American soap operas on Turkish language and vocabulary has been explored in a recent paper by Suzan Oniz.<sup>29</sup> In her analysis of *The Young and the Restless* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*, Oniz used ten “soap opera Turkish” phrases from the soaps, and she conducted a survey among seventy viewers to gauge their responses to the daily use of those phrases. She concluded that American soaps led to the emergence of a “soap opera Turkish, [...] creeping into Turkish despite the resistance of people.”<sup>30</sup>

Male and female audiences’ shared fluency in certain narrative histories also points to the complex nature of the processes of meaning making. For example, because of the localized meanings associated with the character Victor from *The Young and the Restless*, the name Victor, even years after the last broadcast of the serial, still refers to any man who is affectionate and understanding toward his spouse and children, despite its contrary or ambiguous implications in the soap text itself. One respondent, Leyla, provided a perfect example of such internalization. Referring to her requests for more affection and for help with their children, her husband responded, “Do you think I am Victor?”<sup>31</sup> This shared internalization illuminates the ongoing cultural role of American soap operas in the lives of Turkish viewers.

A full understanding of soap opera viewing in the Turkish context requires a historicized account that considers both the history of American day-time soap operas on Turkish television and the shifts in the Turkish televisual landscape since the early 1990s.

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<sup>29</sup> Suzan Oniz, “A Mini Survey on Whether Soap-Opera-English Has Found Its Way into Turkish,” (online paper, accessed 10 January 2005), <http://members.tripod.com/~warlight/SOAPS.html>.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Leyla (respondent), focus group discussion, July 7, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

Day-time soap operas entered Turkish media in 1988 and they rose to popularity with the 1992 debut of *The Bold and the Beautiful* on the private channel, Magic Box Star1 TV.<sup>32</sup> When television was introduced in 1968 and during the reign of the state-controlled channel, TRT (“Turkish Radio and Television Authority,” 1968-1994), foreign programming was already an essential part of television fare.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, in 1992, more than half the weekly programming was made up of American and Latin American series since the financial pressures due to limited advertising revenue had resulted in cost reduction schemes, and led to an increase in the importing of cheaper foreign programming.<sup>34</sup>

As a period of unprecedented transformation in the media landscape of Turkey, with new private channels constantly coming on air, the early 1990s opened up a commercial space which ultimately diversified television programming.<sup>35</sup> Private television channels, with their blend of diverse local and American programs, re-defined TRT-approved images of Turkish womanhood, femininity, masculinity, and sexuality. American daytime soaps, with their particular representations of gender, have contributed

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<sup>32</sup> The first daytime American soap opera to air on Turkish television was *The Young and the Restless*, which first appeared on TRT2 (a state-controlled channel less popular than the main TRT1) in 1988, and it was transferred to the private channels in early 1990s. Respondents associated the genre and its popularity with the rise of new private channels and reportedly began watching the soaps exclusively on private channels.

<sup>33</sup> In 1985, almost half of television programming was made up primarily of Western (and Asian) TV programming. E. Ozden Cankaya, *Türk Televizyonunun Program Yapısı, 1968-1985* [The Structure of Turkish Television Programming], (Istanbul: Mozaik, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> Haluk Sahin and Asu Aksoy, “Global Media and Cultural Identity in Turkey,” *Journal of Communication* 43 (1993): 37. In 1992, the total advertising revenue was around \$400 million. A. Dondar, “Ülkemizdeki TV Kanallarının Durumu” [The Condition of TV Channels in our Country], *Dunya*, December 1, 1992, 6. The highest earning station at the time, Show TV, was expected to reach \$120 million in annual revenues. I. Berkan, “Bu ülke kaç özel TV kaldırır?” [How many private TV stations can this country sustain?], *Hürriyet*, October 14, 1992, 4.

<sup>35</sup> With the putting into orbit of the Turkish satellite, TURKSAT, in 1993, and the advent of cable in the late 1990s, Turkish people now “have a choice almost as bewildering as that of American consumers, and often of the same products.” Jenny White, “Amplifying Trust: Community and Communication in Turkey,” in *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, ed.s, Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999), 169. Contemporary Turkish audiences can watch and form online fan forums for American programs such as *The Simpsons*, *Scrubs*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Lost*, and *Sex and the City* (all subtitled; undubbed) while those who speak English can also enjoy undubbed/un-subtitled American programs such as the late night shows with David Letterman and Conan O’Brien, or MTV’s *Real World*.

to the deconstructive programming on private channels. Soap opera narratives and the viewers' social networks for discussing the texts have contributed to new discourses about shifting identities (Turkish/non-Turkish; state/local; modern/backward; woman/man; woman/girl) in Turkey.

Until late 1990s, the soap operas *The Young and the Restless*, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* were aired every weekday on Star TV, ATV, Show TV or Kanal D. Typically, each channel would purchase the right to broadcast one soap opera and it was common to have a transfer from a channel to another every year. These soaps would be broadcast within the same daytime slot (anywhere between four and six o'clock) in the 1990s. Unlike other non-US settings where these same soap operas were broadcast at prime-time and thus were associated with a family viewing setting, the daytime schedule on Turkish television contributed to the construction of a predominantly female audience.<sup>36</sup> With the stations' tendency to use the cheaper local programming available in the early 2000s, these soap operas were largely replaced by Turkish serials.<sup>37</sup> This cost-based shift caused a gap until 2004 when Flash TV, a new and less publicly available Turkish channel, began to broadcast recent episodes of *The Bold and the Beautiful* in a day-time slot.<sup>38</sup> The soap opera was moved to the more accessible private channel, Kanal D, in 2007, which removed the program in 2009, without any explanation. Turkish channels no longer prefer American daytime soaps or

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<sup>36</sup> In Egypt, for example, *The Bold and the Beautiful* was broadcast (1992-1993) between 9:30-10:30 pm and had a large, mixed-gender audience. Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian television and the cultural politics of modernity," in *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*, ed. Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1995), 193.

<sup>37</sup> Ironically, it was the same economic rationale when the private TV stations preferred American soaps over local serials in early-1990s as local programming was extremely expensive to produce.

<sup>38</sup> Prior to this, *The Bold and the Beautiful* briefly appeared on another private channel, Show TV, in 2002 but it was broadcast at 6:30 in the morning, a busy time for homemakers attending to the needs of the family members who were likely present at home during that time.

do not air them through an extended period, as they choose the more affordable local serials that have adopted soap opera conventions.<sup>39</sup>

Due to such changes in the televisual landscape that limit viewers' access to dubbed American soaps on network television, even the fans among the respondents had no knowledge of the recent airing of the selected episode for the pre-focus group screening (originally broadcast on Flash TV). Since it had been about three years since most of the study participants had watched any American soap opera on the more accessible channels, the pre-focus group viewing served to refresh their memories of the narrative and genre of a text that most of them had once watched on a routine basis. Despite initial concerns they had expressed regarding the “accuracy” of their recollection or that they did not watch soap operas that much, the respondents immediately recognized the characters as well as the underlying narrative history, commented on their past viewing experiences, and explained the multiple meanings they made out of the soap text.

### **“Women’s Genres” and Soap Opera Studies**

Critical writing about soap opera, women’s genres, and the processes of meaning making has always been part of media research. Early feminist works on soap opera and women’s genres, however, were often denunciatory. Feminist writing in 1970s and early 1980s was limited to content-analysis and individual quantifiable effects approaches and the theorists saw mass media culture as a primary site for the perpetuation of patriarchal

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<sup>39</sup> An exception remains the Turkish version of the American cable television channel TNT that was launched in March 2008. TNT Turkey airs the daytime soap opera, *Days of Our Lives*, in a daytime slot and in dubbed form. Yet this cable channel remains largely inaccessible to the participants in this study, and *Days of Our Lives* has a short (one-year) history on Turkish television.

hegemony and of conventional femininity. Feminist research since the 1980s indicates a particular re-engagement both with the specific textual form of soap operas and with real women's responses to women's genres in their daily lives. Much feminist writing from this period reflects a turn-to-the audience move, with a primary interest in female viewers, their pleasures, desires as well as agency.<sup>40</sup>

According to many media theorists, American day-time soap operas are, indeed, marked by a gendered structure, narrative, and address. Female-identified qualities of soap operas, as will be elaborated later, include their resistance to closure, the emphasis on the private sphere/world and domestic concerns, narrative focus on networks of relationships, the frequent use of close-up camera techniques, emphasis on verbal interaction, and the fragmentation of story telling that corresponds to the routine of daily household chores.<sup>41</sup>

With the international appeal of American soaps such as *Dallas*, there also emerged a body of literature that explored non-U.S. audiences' interpretations of American soaps. Ien Ang's research on the female viewers of *Dallas* in the Netherlands explores women's pleasures, which she argues, "are based on a recognition of and identification with the tragic structure of feeling."<sup>42</sup> A later cross-cultural study by Elihu

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<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Mery Ellen Brown, *Television and Women's Culture: The Politics of the Popular* (London: Sage, 1990); Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1991); Tania Modleski 1982; Janice Radway 1984; Ellen Seiter *et al* 1989; and, Janice Winship, *Inside Women's Magazines* (London: Pandora Press, 1987).

<sup>41</sup> C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, *Soap Fans: Pursuing pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 47; Robert C. Allen, "On Reading Soaps: A Semiotic Primer," in *Regarding television: Critical approaches*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Frederick, MD.: University Publications of America, 1983), 100-103.

<sup>42</sup> Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (Methuen, 1985), 135.

Katz and Tamar Liebes also focused on *Dallas* and its global audiences.<sup>43</sup> The writers demonstrated the interrelated nature of audience reception and cultural specificities.<sup>44</sup>

Recent work on telenovelas and the messages deliberately placed in entertainment-education texts has further highlighted audience specificities and the consciousness-raising role assigned to some telenovelas and soap operas in non-Western settings. As Heidi Nariman illustrates in her study of entertainment education soap operas and their role in national development in developing countries such as Mexico, “every detail of entertainment-education soap opera is based on a theoretical and empirical research-based formula in order to reinforce a coherent series of interrelated values that is tied to a specific pro-social behavior.”<sup>45</sup> Nariman goes on to argue that the use of entertainment-education soap operas, or as she terms the programs, “development communication technology,” is particularly promising in countries in the process of modernization since they promote and perpetuate social change relevant to the agenda of national policymakers.<sup>46</sup> Such programs also correspond to organizations in the public infrastructure.<sup>47</sup> Commenting on American soap operas, Nariman also observes that regular American soaps vaguely refer to “pro-social behavior” but the prevailing tone contradicts these messages.

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<sup>43</sup> Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, “On the Critical Abilities of Television Viewers,” in *Remote Control*, ed.s. Ellen Seiter *et al* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 204-222.

<sup>44</sup> Other studies directly or indirectly focusing on American daytime soap operas and their international audiences include, Everett Rogers, Arvind Singhal and Avinash Thombre, “Indian Audience Interpretations of Health-Related Content in *The Bold and the Beautiful*,” *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies* 66 (2004): 437-458; Sauli Chaudhuri, “Watching *The Bold and the Beautiful*: Reception of an American Soap Opera by Women in India” (Master’s Thesis, The Ohio State University, 1995); Sheena Malhotra and Everett M. Rogers, “Satellite Television and the New Indian Woman,” *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies* 62 (October 2000): 407-429; Michele Tager, “Identification and Interpretation: *The Bold and the Beautiful* and the Urban Black Viewer in KwaZulu-Natal,” *Critical Arts* 11(1997); and Iiris Ruoho, “Double Standards in Evaluating Television,” in *Inescapable Horizon: Culture and Context*, ed.s., Sirpa Leppanen *et al* (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä Press, 2000).

<sup>45</sup> Heidi N. Nariman, *Soap operas for social change: toward a methodology for entertainment-education television* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 3.

<sup>46</sup> Nariman, 68.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

Nariman's work makes an important contribution to television scholarship and audience studies in transitional societies such as Turkey, which used similar methods in the late 1980s for raising awareness about women's health and family planning. But her argument presents several problems when applied to Turkish soap opera viewership. Any cause-and-effect description that views entertainment-education soaps as reinforcement for the national social change agenda does not account for possibly diverse or alternative readings by viewers who can use the same text in unexpected ways. Nariman also does not consider local resistances by women to a text that is explicitly associated with the governmental ideology, however empowering it may sound. Moreover, any approach that views national policy makers as the only definer of pro-social behavior does not take into account the multiple ways in which 'pro-social' can be defined, depending on one's class, gender, ethnicity, age and political affiliation. Finally, the polysemic nature and foreignness of U.S. soaps Nariman questions are precisely why such programs provide a less threatening alternative sphere for their female Turkish viewers.

American soaps can, indeed, blur the distinction between entertainment-education and consumer-oriented entertainment television. A recent ethnographic study on Indian audiences' interpretations of health-related content, specifically HIV/AIDS, in *The Bold and the Beautiful* indicates an explicit move in the soap industry occasionally to include "educational" messages. Although the researchers conclude that there is no immediate impact on Indian viewers' understanding of female sexuality or assertiveness, they claim that "it may be possible for long-running, popular programs like *The Bold and the Beautiful* to gradually influence, and reverse, the negative perception of HIV/AIDS,

removing the stigma at least among urban, elite, and youthful audience members.”<sup>48</sup> Another study of *The Young and the Restless* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* and their American audiences also demonstrates the educational potential of soap operas as in the textual inclusion of topics such as diabetes and breast cancer in *The Young and the Restless* and HIV/AIDS and safer sex in *The Bold and the Beautiful*.<sup>49</sup>

Likewise, in Turkey, the locally-produced and government-sponsored television serials, comedy shows, films, documentaries, and radio spots built on formative research have had a direct impact on Turkish rural audiences’ awareness of family planning and thus on “pro-social” behavior in the late 1980s.<sup>50</sup> Yet only rarely would entertainment-education media specifically emphasize women’s basic human rights or create a public sphere in which to discuss women’s issues. The state-sponsored educational videos shown in family planning centers may have created limited spaces of discussion, but the perceived formality of those contexts and their focus on family planning limited the creation of a non-threatening female space.<sup>51</sup> Further, these entertainment-education programs were part of a massive media campaign, which, unlike the decade-long, daily broadcasting of American soap operas, eventually faded. While they may have naturalized the role of television in consciousness-raising, the limited contexts in which Turkish women experienced these programs did not furnish the repetitive, homo-social,

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<sup>48</sup> Everett M. Rogers *et al*, “Indian Audience Interpretations of Health-Related Content in *The Bold and the Beautiful*,” *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies* 66 (2004): 456.

<sup>49</sup> Vicki Beck, “Working with Day-Time and Prime-Time Television Shows in the United States to Promote Health,” in *Entertainment Education and Social Change: History, Research and Practice*, ed.s, Arvind Singhal *et al* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2004), 207-224.

<sup>50</sup> Yasar Yaser, “The Turkish Family Health and Planning Foundation’s Entertainment-Education Campaign,” in Arvind Singhal *et al* (ed.s) *Entertainment Education and Social Change: History, Research and Practice* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2004), 327.

<sup>51</sup> The enormously successful TV film *Berdel* (Atif Yilmaz, 1990) provided an exception with its emphasis on the equality between daughters and sons and its criticism of polygamy. *Berdel* won six international awards including the Europe Cinema 1991 Fellini Award (Best Film of Europe), the Berlin International Film Festival Award, Golden Palm Award in the 12<sup>th</sup> Mostra de Valencia Cinema Del Mediterrani, and the Population Institute’s Global Media Award for Best TV Film.

informal, and potentially counter-patriarchal conditions offered by the viewership of American soaps.

As for the scholarship on American popular media and female viewers, popular writers and most scholars share the belief that soap opera viewing or any other women's genre requires no sophistication from the viewer. Turkish audiences and their experiences of popular culture have been only recently discovered as a topic of scholarly research. In a study of Turkish private television, Ayse Oncu has argued that there are now competing interpretive repertoires ("packages"), such as Islam or feminism, to choose from in contemporary Turkish broadcasting—both global/official and local/alternative elements that seem to correspond more with popular tastes.<sup>52</sup> Oncu has elsewhere observed that private channels, with their alternative representations, subvert the unified definitions of Turkishness while supplying a multivocal interpretive repertoire to the discursive field.<sup>53</sup> Oncu's research suggests that diversified commercial broadcasting in Turkey opens up possibilities to deconstruct established norms of national and religious identities. Yet Turkish women audiences and the resistive pleasures of rural women, in particular, remain excluded from such studies. The present chapter aims to simultaneously consider rural Turkish women's contextual and cultural specificities *and* the role of patriarchal gender divisions in their diverse social soap viewing experiences and textual decodings. As I will argue, for rural Turkish viewers, American soaps offer an alternative sphere for reception in which both traditional *and* alternative depictions and ideologies of femininity are continually negotiated.

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<sup>52</sup> Ayse Oncu, "Packaging Islam: Cultural Politics on the Landscape of Turkish Commercial Television," *Public Culture* 8 (Fall 1995): 64.

<sup>53</sup> Ayse Oncu, "The Banal and the Subversive: Politics of language on Turkish Television," in *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 3 (2000): 3, 296-318.

### **Turkish Women Talking About American Soap Operas**

Turkish women's pleasures gained from the soap opera genre and text correlate with their viewing contexts and the discourses they use to talk about the soaps and their viewership habits. To explore the transgressive potential of American soap operas for Turkish women, one should simultaneously consider the soap text, the viewing context, and the related discourses within which Turkish women rationalize their potentially counter-patriarchal pleasures, active thinking, and "doing" in their real lives.

The respondents did, in fact, move fluidly and simultaneously between the textual and extratextual meanings offered by their soap viewing experiences. They recognized the fictional aspect of American soap operas and other forms of textual representation and engaged in meta-commentary. While simultaneously moving between textual and extratextual levels of meanings, thirty-nine of the forty respondents frequently commented on the fictional aspects of the American soap operas including their "well-written," or "immoral" storylines, thus revealing a complex view of the soap operas as both "real" and constructed, as artistic and cultural texts. On one hand, their remarks about the elegance of the décor, the different costumes, the artistry of the make-up, the different camera techniques as well as the changes in the Turkish media landscape indicated their understanding of the soap opera as a product. On the other hand, their comments about text-based romantic fantasies blurred the distinction between the

fictional and real so much that the viewers “wouldn’t look at that man on *Generations* because he [the character] was engaged. We were looking at the singles only.”<sup>54</sup>

Most acknowledged the foreign actors and actresses as “doing a great job” in conveying feelings. As Nezihe, a *Generations* fan, repeatedly commented, it was the acting of that particular actor/actress that she enjoyed, but she “would also give anything to be Sam,” her favorite soap opera character.<sup>55</sup> Sam, whose performative act and talent she acknowledged, was also like a family member, an “imaginary real person.”<sup>56</sup> Another respondent further exemplified the underlying conflict between the supposed referential nature of the text and its fictional nature. “After all, this is just a film. When I turn off the TV, everything stays there. I wonder if American women are actually like that [loose, immoral]? [tries to initiate a reply from me] Well, it’s not nice.”<sup>57</sup> Regardless of the fact that none of the respondents knew the real names of the actors or had the financial or informational resources to form a fan club to elaborate on the actors’ off-screen lives as do soap fans in the United States or contemporary urban audiences in Turkey who use the Internet to form their fan clubs and acquire knowledge, most women such as Nezihe and Saime considered the soap operas as simultaneously a valid reference to Americans and as a fictional product, a performed act.

Some respondents also referred to the changes in the Turkish media as a factor that influenced the cancellation of, and loss of interest in, American soap operas in the early 2000s. When asked to specify their source of information about their assumption that Turkish television stations were no longer able to afford them, Naciye, among others,

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<sup>54</sup> Melek (respondent), follow-up interview by the author, July 18, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>55</sup> Nezihe (respondent), focus group discussion, July 21, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Saime (respondent), focus group discussion, July 21, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

stated that they heard this from other women.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, there was no news coverage in the print or visual media regarding the cancellation, and thus the women themselves created this fact via their familiar networks of gossip. Some of the respondents added that the countless Turkish serials that have appeared on Turkish TV were more affordable options for the TV stations. Four respondents, two of whom were self-identified fans, expressed nationalist sentiments as they claimed agency for Turkish television industry and the new Turkish serials, with comments such as: “Turkey should sell to America. Our serials today are much better than Americans’. Our country should win. This will happen, don’t worry [...] They’ve started using our traditional music, for example, like how we took their rock music!”<sup>59</sup>

Besides explicit nationalism as well as an awareness of the product value of soap operas, such comments reveal observations of processes of globalization and localization. Since the late 1990s, Turkish serials have increasingly been built on the “excitement of unpredictability,” a feature that thirty-nine of the forty respondents associated with American soap operas. Indeed, some respondents recalled an “obligation to watch” American soaps in the 1990s because of the unpredictable storylines:<sup>60</sup>

**Sevim:** In this village, these [American soaps] are our only entertainment. That’s why we *feel obliged* to watch. We must never miss an episode.

**Aydan:** But you can always choose something else. We don’t have an obligation!

**Sevim:** But why? We mostly choose these American soaps. Once you see it, you are hooked. You are curious to see what will happen in the next episode, you can’t even wait!<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Naciye (respondent), focus group discussion, July 7, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>59</sup> Pelin (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>60</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>61</sup> Sevim and Aydan (respondents), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

Respondents repeatedly referred to the unpredictability of American soap operas as an appealing feature that distinguished them from telenovelas or most Turkish serials. All of the respondents shared the belief that “You need to just glance at a Turkish serial, and, believe me, you will know how it ends.”<sup>62</sup> Yet their comments about the increasingly more open-ended Turkish serials in the 2000s revealed that they were drawn to them due to what they identified as their shared feature of unpredictability. Indeed, as Hamdiye succinctly puts it, “[New] Turkish serials have destroyed the American soaps.”<sup>63</sup>

Some respondents noted that they quit watching the soap opera because of what they saw as the illegitimate and immoral relationships that were nonetheless presented as normal within the text. These women, such as Sevim and Aydan, simultaneously acknowledged the fictional nature of the soap while they discussed their decision in regards to the “immoral” storyline. In reference to a female character in *The Bold and the Beautiful*, Sevim perfectly illustrated this reaction. “We even called Brooke the ‘whore bride’! How could they [the scriptwriters] allow her to sleep with her daughter’s husband? How could she marry her ex-father-in-law? That’s why we stopped watching it altogether.”<sup>64</sup>

However, when the story occasionally required that their favorite characters commit to actions unacceptable from a Turkish perspective, most of the respondents continued to watch the soap opera. Indeed, when reminded of some “immoral” behavior by their favorite characters, a majority of the respondents stated that they “do not recall those scenes,” or that while a certain character cheated on her partner, her overall qualities still

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<sup>62</sup> Meral (respondent), focus group discussion, July 8, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>63</sup> Hamdiye (respondent), focus group discussion, July 21, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>64</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey

made her worthy of their fandom.<sup>65</sup> As one respondent put it: “Yes, she sometimes cheats. But because her lovers cheat on her all the time. I’d *still* want to be in her place. She can eventually do whatever she wants.”<sup>66</sup>

Respondents also explained their loss of interest in American soaps as a natural outcome of the increase in the number of private channels as well as the introduction of the remote control. Respondents such as Sevim perceived the remote control as a focal symbol for the ongoing conflict in their homes regarding viewing preferences. Viewers also associated the remote control with freedom of choice and their level of fandom, as in the following remark:

We can now get the remote, and zap to whatever we want. In those times, we had to get up, and go near the TV to change the channel. If we had had the remote then, we probably wouldn’t have been such addicts!<sup>67</sup>

Besides such comments on advances in television technology, thirty-six respondents also concluded that the current televisual landscape offers more options than back in early 1990s when there were only a handful of private channels. Awareness of the production context of their favorite soap operas does not indicate, however, that these women have not equally immersed themselves in the narrative histories within the soap text, and viewed most characters as real people that they have, at times, perceived as role models. Nor does it negate the fact that their viewing experiences open up alternative public spheres in which to freely discuss multiple and foreign meanings which help challenge their understanding of traditional Turkish womanhood and female sexuality.

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<sup>65</sup> Nezihe (respondent), focus group discussion, July 21, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>66</sup> Elif (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>67</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

### Generic Codes and Rural Women's Genre-Based Textual Pleasures

The alternative viewership pattern offered by the soap text and associated textual pleasures correlate closely with the gendered codes that validate codes of femininity while, at the same time, allowing multiple and active readings. Soap opera viewers learn the textual and ideological codes within soap operas through repeated viewings, and ignorance of the specific codes at work in the genre “leaves novice viewers and critics uneducated about the meanings viewers derive from soaps.”<sup>68</sup> Meaning is thus partly generated by the viewers’ understanding of the nuances of the genre.

*The Bold and the Beautiful* episode viewed by the respondents prior to the focus groups demonstrates these generic textual conventions that produce and perpetuate codes of femininity, while providing pleasures associated with the perceived Americanness of the text. Interpretive strategies for “reading” the textual features of soap operas, as Christine Gledhill observes, are “culturally defined as feminine, involving the exercise of skills and methods of understanding developed by women in the particular socio-historical circumstances in which they live.”<sup>69</sup> Likewise, the unique, multilayered identities of the focus group participants in this study, as rural, low-income, Turkish, Muslim, Anatolian, Middle Eastern, and Western-identified women, inform their historically specific viewing pleasures from gendered textual codes.

The viewed episode illustrates an important feature of the soap opera genre: its resistance to closure.<sup>70</sup> It starts with a wedding scene of Eric and Stephanie Forrester as Stephanie had agreed to forgive Eric for his affair with Brooke and re-marry him. The

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<sup>68</sup> C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, *Soap Fans: Pursuing pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 15.

<sup>69</sup> Christine Gledhill, “Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 371.

<sup>70</sup> Robert C. Allen, “On Reading Soaps: A Semiotic Primer,” in *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*, ed.s., C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, [1983] 2001), 235.

wedding is interrupted, however, by Massimo, who is then convinced by Ridge to leave. As the wedding proceeds, Thorne, anxious about why his ex-wife and current girlfriend Macy is late to the ceremony, goes to Macy's house, only to find her kissing another man, Lorenzo. Devastated, Thorne goes back to his house and starts drinking, while Darla, a mutual friend to Macy and Thorne, and a secret admirer of Thorne, stops by to surprise the couple with a bottle of champagne. In the meantime, however, Macy refuses Lorenzo's sexual advances telling him that he should leave because she is in love with Thorne, who at this point thinks Macy is cheating on him. As Thorne and Darla both get drunk, Thorne, thinking she is Macy, has sex with Darla, only to find out her true identity in the morning and then clarify that it was a mistake since he is still in love with Macy.

In addition to its open-ended narrative, the slow pace of *The Bold and the Beautiful* functions as a source of immense textual pleasure for Turkish viewers. Melek commented specifically on the appeal of the slow pace:

American soaps are so slow. In the telenovelas, you have almost three years of events in two episodes! I think a slow pace is much better. Say, a man cheats on his fiancée. Because events unfold slowly, you don't judge him right away. You get to think about why he did it. Maybe you'll find something you can identify with.<sup>71</sup>

Thirty-seven of the forty respondents indicated that they were drawn to this genre primarily because its resistance to closure gives the text a level of unpredictability, the most appealing generic feature identified by the respondents.

In the viewed episode, as two of the main characters Eric and Stephanie Forrester decide to re-marry, a novice viewer can presume that they will live happily after. However, in line with the endless nature of the soap structure, the wedding is interrupted by the character Massimo. Although the wedding finally takes place, the interruption

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<sup>71</sup> Melek (respondent), follow-up interview by the author, July 18, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

foreshadows interrelated problems that arise in the couple's future. Indeed, the soap text depends on such foreshadowings of an ominous future, representing the soap text's resistance to closure.

Unlike traditional fictional texts characterized by a linear structure that require an end to the story, the multiple storylines in soaps are never completely resolved. An open text allows for endless interpretations among soap opera viewers.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, each episode has numerous ongoing, inter-related subplots, and a new episode is shown every weekday, fifty-two weeks a year, often for decades. While a series of over-lapping mini-closures do regularly resolve particular narrative questions within the subplots, they are in no way read as moving the overall story toward its potential end.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to viewers' awareness of these textual features and genre conventions, contextual specificities of Turkish women guide their narrative interpretation and open up multiple meanings. When asked to comment on Thorne's reaction to seeing Macy kiss another man, focus group respondents revealed the multiple levels of meaning they could appropriate due to the open-ended nature of the soap opera. Although the majority of the respondents agreed that Macy was cheating since she could have kept herself from kissing another man if she was really in love with Thorne, some noted that this did not count as cheating since she explained to Lorenzo that she loved Thorne and that's why she did not want to have any further relationship with him. Some additionally commented on the peaceful way that Thorne reacted to this incident without using violence as a solution, as well as the gentlemanly response of Macy's partner to respect

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<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Ellen Seiter *et al*, "Don't Treat Us Like We're So Stupid and Naive: Toward an Ethnography of Soap Opera Viewers," in *Remote Control*, ed.s., Ellen Seiter *et al* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 223-224.

<sup>73</sup> Robert C. Allen, "On Reading Soaps: A Semiotic Primer," in *Popular Culture: Production and Consumption*, ed.s., C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, [1983] 2001), 234-242.

her decision to leave. Comparing both Thorne and Lorenzo to the average Turkish man who might go through the same experience (in TV fiction or reality), the respondents observed how understanding and nice these “American” men were. Some even commented that American men are “too nice,” and that they would like their husbands or fiancés occasionally to show jealousy, which they saw as a sign of a passionate relationship.<sup>74</sup> None of these women could imagine themselves as Macy, who openly accepted her sexual attraction to another man while she was in love with Thorne and later had the courage to say “No” to sexual intercourse.

Another rare instance of consensus occurred in the respondents’ comments on Thorne’s “accidental sex” with another woman. Comparing that scene to the previous one in which Macy kissed another man, a majority of the respondents agreed that Thorne should not be seen as guilty of cheating on Macy because he was deeply devastated after having seen her with another man. In the specific scene with Macy, however, they viewed her as “nothing but a whore” because she could not suppress her sexuality, and she kissed a man other than her husband. As the respondents continued to comment, directly drawing from traditional Turkish gender norms, they demonstrated a level of decoding specific to rural Turkish women. This culturally specific gendered division became most obvious in their justifications of Thorne’s affair and other incidents of cheating with remarks such as: “I don’t care that most of these men cheat on their wives. I’d *still* love to be with one of them. It isn’t like he beats up his wife. There’s so much of that here.”<sup>75</sup> A majority of the respondents therefore considered Thorne’s affair potentially bearable by women who have no other options. They added that most rural

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<sup>74</sup> Yeliz (respondent), focus group discussion, July 11, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>75</sup> Elif (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

Turkish women similarly had to ignore their husbands' affairs. Only two respondents explicitly stated that, no matter how scarce their resources, they would leave such a man.

In contrast, thirty-nine respondents expressed anti-patriarchal sentiments in their remarks about the difference between having to ignore an extramarital affair and living with another wife in the house, a tribal tradition seen in remote villages in Eastern Anatolia. Their comments demonstrated the existing cultural hierarchies among rural people from different geographical regions as well as a culturally specific level of self-perception. They emphasized that cases of polygamy never occurred in their own villages, but in those "other eastern villages in which women can be purchased or sold like commodities."<sup>76</sup>

Respondents' criticism of polygamy also indicated their support for women's rights. Seen from this perspective, the rural women of Adapazari perceived themselves as relatively more empowered than the eastern Anatolian women. However, comments by respondents such as Elif and Nur also indicated an ambiguity, and a lack of consensus regarding their relative empowerment:

**Elif:** People here have changed a lot. It's not exactly like in the old times: You can see two teenagers kissing at the tea garden; they can flirt, they don't have to get married. But still, women are like property in our village. Then you look at the women in those soaps: They never do housework; their husbands take them out to dinner all the time. They buy flowers, say nice things."

**Nur:** It's now like those American soaps: people imitating what they see, kissing your boyfriend, skinny dipping!<sup>77</sup>

From the extreme images of women as commodities to depictions of dating and skinny dipping, these conflicting statements point to the diverse range of personal experiences

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<sup>76</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>77</sup> Elif (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey; Nur (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

lived by rural women in contemporary Turkey, which informs their multiple responses to textual representations of complex kin networks and inter-relationships.

The soap opera's narrative focus on complicated networks of relationships and the generic emphasis on the private sphere provide immense pleasure for the respondents. A survey of the intertwined histories of the characters from the viewed episode illustrates the web of relationships that needs to be mastered by the viewers in order to derive the greatest textual pleasure. This complex web of primarily romantic relationships, most of the respondents noted, drew them to American soap operas. In contrast, however, some respondents saw these increasingly unorthodox networks of relationships as a major cause for the decline in viewership in early 2000s.<sup>78</sup>

One critical remark came from seventeen-year-old Munire: "Why do Americans always sell us such serials with weird relationships, people living together, cheating? Why don't they send educational serials?"<sup>79</sup> Another respondent, Adile, a *Young and the Restless* fan for eight years, challenged Munire as she succinctly identified textual focus on romantic relationships, not necessarily education, as the distinguishing feature of soap operas:

They are called serials for a reason; they are not educational movies. What's special about them is the love relationships; you don't have to include educational messages in that. If you want education, go to Channel 4.<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, respondents' comments about 'learned' knowledge on emotionality, inter-relationships, sexuality, and consumerism complicate the above comment about the absence of text-based learning in soap operas. Learning, in this context, does not result

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<sup>78</sup> Cemile (respondent), focus group discussion, July 11, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey; Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>79</sup> Munire (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>80</sup> Adile (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

from a formal, state-promoted educational system supporting the Turkish state's vision of the "pro-social." Rather, it indicates an alternative, informal form of learning that may entail a behavioral or conceptual change in the viewers. For example, for some respondents, soap operas' textual focus on romance met a need for information on sexually inflected behavior such as kissing, as well as a visual guidebook on dating etiquette. One of the respondents, Elif, directly addressed the "educational" value of exposure to such scenes: "Today we are this much well-informed all because of these [soaps]. You learn not only that women can stand on their own feet but also how to kiss! [Giggles] Sometimes we see people kissing on the street, and we say 'She, too, must have watched the soap!'"<sup>81</sup> As Elif's comment vividly illustrates, textual pleasures from on-screen kissing allow for learned knowledge in the lives of Turkish girls. While many Turkish women have no need for such information, Turkish teenage girls have internalized most of those depictions as crucial to their future romantic relationships. Viewers reported that, as they got married and lived romance firsthand, soap operas lost most of their appeal. Fadime and Yeliz explained the reasons behind the rise and fall of the "how-to" appeal:

**Fadime:** We were young girls then, and hadn't experienced anything romantic. We didn't know how to be a girlfriend. That's why all that romance was so attractive.

**Yeliz:** In our village, teenage girls and boys can't date or flirt without feeling the pressure. So the soap operas, before marriage, were so appealing to us. Indeed, we were soap addicts then. But as we got married, we were no longer curious. We now live it firsthand! [giggles]<sup>82</sup>

A more sophisticated observation came from another respondent who commented on the element of fantasy within the soap ideal of romance. For Melek, who was still

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<sup>81</sup> Elif (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>82</sup> Fadime and Yeliz (respondents), focus group discussion, July 11, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey. 11 July 2005.

unmarried, soap operas lost their “how-to” appeal as she increasingly became aware of the impossibility of realizing those intimate relationships:

I didn't know about life or romantic relationships then. Because there was no chance for me to socialize like that, I thought relationships happened that way. But as I got older, I saw that life is very different in our village, that those soap operas were a product of fantasy. I therefore don't watch them any more.<sup>83</sup>

Within this textual world of fantasy and the complex web of soap relationships, the focus remains on verbal reaction rather than action, on feelings rather than logic, and on discussing a future action rather than doing it. Frequent close-up camera techniques highlight the emotions and internal worlds of the characters. In addition, the soap operas emphasize verbal interaction and talk as narrational strategies are among other gendered features of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and other daytime soap operas. As Christine Gledhill aptly puts it, “Try fast-forwarding an episode [...] and it becomes clear that its characteristic camera set-up is a ‘close-up two shot’, producing a drama of talking heads in intimate exchanges or altercation.”<sup>84</sup>

Respondents consciously engaged a cultural text that emphasizes the verbal and visual portrayal of feelings. As Ien Ang argues in relation to the prime-time soap opera, *Dallas*, and its international fan base, soap viewers participate in a “subjective experience of the world, a ‘structure of feeling.’”<sup>85</sup> Soap fandom thus allows viewers to experience the emotions embedded within the cultural text itself.<sup>86</sup> Although my focus is not prime-time soap viewership, and only twenty-one of the forty respondents in this study self-

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<sup>83</sup> Melek (respondent), follow-up interview by the author, July 18, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>84</sup> Christine Gledhill, “Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 371.

<sup>85</sup> Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 45. Ang notes that the concept “structure of feeling” comes from Raymond Williams. *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128-35.

<sup>86</sup> C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, *Soap Fans: Pursuing pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 45.

identified as fans, Ang's position on fans' shared subjective experiences remains useful in exploring Turkish women's textual pleasures. The respondents, regardless of their occasionally critical views of the mixed-up relationships, shared a similar subjective experience of re-living the emotions and the romances depicted within the text.

Most respondents also connected textual pleasures with the emphasis on gossip. When their favorite character did not "know the truth," about a particular person or situation, they could not help but "scream at her" what they had known all along.<sup>87</sup> Gledhill argues that the soap opera's generic emphasis on talk functions as a major factor in its negotiation of gender and creation of a "female cultural verisimilitude, as opposed to the investment of male oriented genres in action."<sup>88</sup> However, "[w]hile antipathetic to the criteria of plot development and narrative progression associated with high cultural aesthetics, talk offers a different mode of *social action*: conversation, gossip, dissection of personal and moral issues."<sup>89</sup> A major appeal of the soap opera genre depends on pleasures of knowledge and circuits of guessing and passing knowledge. In the Turkish context, these pleasures entail more than accessing information that is unavailable to the on-screen characters. Rural women's pleasures are closely related to their newly acquired knowledge about and negotiations of "foreign" forms of femininity and masculinity offered by the American soap operas.

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<sup>87</sup> Elif (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>88</sup> Christine Gledhill, "Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997), 371.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Textual Pleasures from the Foreignness of American Soap Operas**

The various pleasures Turkish women derive from gendered textual codes and from their soap viewership practices correlate closely with the perceived Americanness of the soap genre and text. This foreignness lays the groundwork for a non-threatening viewing context which, in turn, opens up possibilities for alternative viewership positions. These positions allow for the production of counterpatriarchal awareness in Turkish soap viewers' lives. The actual lived experiences or fantasies of Turkish women problematize traditional gender norms in rural Turkey while indicating the agency of Turkish female viewers who actively read depictions of Americanness in culturally specific ways. Indeed, as one respondent puts it, "We probably would have criticized and maybe stopped watching altogether if a Turkish woman did this in a serial."<sup>90</sup> Most of the respondents, however, observed that everything the female soap opera characters do becomes attractive because they, the respondents believe, are essentially different from them. Turkish women viewers also exhibit agency in their selective attitude towards "women's genres." Most respondents' preference for soap operas over telenovelas suggests that they are not passive consumers of *all* feminine genres, but perform an active viewership position.

Respondents identify several "foreign" factors in the soap operas: the initial foreignness of the genre, with which they later became acquainted but still associated with novelty and unpredictability; the textual representation of female agency and a drastically different way of female living as conveyed through the tropes of career and relationships; explicit or implied depictions of female sexuality; the occasional lack of agency among some American women; the presentation of American men as a spectacle;

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<sup>90</sup> Nezihe (respondent), focus group discussion, July 21, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

depictions of alternative masculinities; and the textual emphasis on the glamour of American consumer goods and fashion.

The textual representation of the perceived “Americanness,” the American way of female living, and depictions of American women’s sexuality are among the important textual features associated by respondents with foreignness and the textual pleasures that come with it. Respondents repeatedly referred to the female characters’ careers and relationships as evidence for the existence of female empowerment in the United States. Despite occasional critical remarks about the loose values of these American women, they all commented that they had, on more than once occasion, fantasized about being as independent as, or in the place of, American women. Moreover, some respondents stated that, during viewing, and usually in the presence of other women, they would voice their dreams about being “one of them.”<sup>91</sup>

Although the soap operas present female characters with professional lives in the diegetic public sphere, characters such as Stephanie and Brooke from *The Bold and the Beautiful*, are primarily and, usually simultaneously, portrayed as wives, ex-wives, lovers, mothers, and daughters within the confines of the domestic sphere. As Ien Ang puts it, “Personal life is the core problematic of the narrative.”<sup>92</sup> The lives of these female characters revolve around complicated relationships, unwanted marriages, questionable pregnancies that lead to paternity tests, and an unwanted woman who gets a foothold in the Forrester clan. There is little, if any, textual depiction of the world outside the “private” sphere.

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<sup>91</sup> Meral (respondent), focus group discussion, July 8, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey; Ela (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005; Nezihe (respondent), focus group discussion, July 21, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>92</sup> Ien Ang, “Melodramatic Identifications: Television Fiction and Women’s Fantasy,” in *Television and Women’s Culture*, ed. Mary Ellen Brown (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990), 79.

The soap text includes few public spaces, mainly offices at fashion companies and fashion runways; occasionally, bars, restaurants, foreign or exotic vacation destinations; and hospitals—but all of these serve as backgrounds to worsen, intensify, or temporarily resolve a romantic or family relationship issue. Most of the professional worlds to which the text alludes are also traditionally associated with feminine responsibilities or women's jobs in Turkey. For example, most *Bold and the Beautiful* female characters work at fashion design firms, which can be directly linked to women's chores inside the home, such as sewing, knitting, and mending. Others work at secretarial jobs, also associated with women who similarly organize the daily chores, listen to the complaints of the boss/husband, mother-in-law and/or their co-workers/children, and make sure the “boss” is well-tended. Female nurses and doctors in the hospital scenes also allude to the societal expectations of caring from women. As such, the female characters, at first glance, seem to reinforce women's associations with domestic work.<sup>93</sup>

Moreover, there are images of female characters as CEOs (Brooke) and company (co-) founders (Sally Spectra, Stephanie Forrester) that explicitly question conventional femininity attached to the public/professional sphere in *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Brooke, CEO of Forrester Creations, has earned that position not because of her background, but after a questionable legal battle with the founders of the company. Yet Brooke, the villainess, provides textual pleasures for most respondents who acknowledge her ability to get what she wants. Similarly, Sally Spectra is presented as the type that stirs things up by gossiping, backstabbing, and stealing from Forrester Creations.

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<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, respondents did not see modeling as a job for “good” girls. Similarly, they found the character Macy's singing career as one for loose women or the feminine male types. Although respondents occasionally pointed out some Turkish female singers who appeared virtuous, and they referred to male singers whom they liked especially because of their macho features, these exceptions did not change their conventional belief that singing and modeling in the Turkish public sphere were not acceptable options for their own daughters or sons.

Nevertheless, she is an assertive woman and runs a company of her own.<sup>94</sup> While soaps' representations of women's jobs fit with or reinforce Turkish norms—including disapproving ones—the very existence of professional women in the textual public sphere remains aspirational to most Turkish respondents.<sup>95</sup> The appeal of the characters primarily depends on the fact that the respondents' lives, most of the time, do not allow them to take up even such culturally-acceptable jobs as nurses, doctors, designers or secretaries.

American soap operas thus provide the respondents an opportunity to experience symbolic realizations of their own professional or personal dreams. As such, viewers' textual pleasures create the circumstances under which rural Turkish women become aware of the possibility, if not the realization, of counterpatriarchal action in their own lives. Respondents' comments throughout the focus groups and participant observation reveal such soap-opera-related knowledge that highlights female agency:

**Elif:** These American women's lives are so different from ours. Different in a "good" way. *Although* they are women, they can do whatever they want. When watching these soaps, we'd often say things like, "Wow! Look at what that *woman* can do! ...After you see these women, you start thinking about your own life, and how different it could be. You question things. You think that these women's lives go on fine even after they challenge men. "So *I* can do it," you say.

**Fadime:** These American women are so free. Turkish women aren't that free even on TV! When they show Turkish women with a career in a movie/serial, they [scriptwriters] never show a woman and a man alone at a business meeting. Like, women and men can't work together without falling in love?!

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<sup>94</sup> Other characters (from *The Bold and the Beautiful*) with professional lives include Stephanie who co-founded Forrester Creations with her then husband Eric. Darla works at the rival fashion company, Spectra. Most female characters from previous episodes also had a professional life, usually outside the depicted private sphere. Some examples are Brooke's mother, Beth Logan, who owned a catering company; Ridge's ex-wife, Taylor who was a psychiatrist; and Megan Conway, a secretary at Forrester Creations.

<sup>95</sup> An analysis of the Turkish respondents' responses challenges accounts by some scholars who argue that the American soap text in non-American settings serves as another hegemonic medium that primarily reinforces the existing patriarchies by naturalizing and valorizing the domestic and the personal. For a discussion of the hegemonic functioning of American imports, see, for example, Sauli Chaudhuri, "Watching *The Bold and the Beautiful*: Reception of an American Soap Opera by Women in India" (Master's Thesis, The Ohio State University, 1995), 76.

**Melek:** I'd like to be like those American women, but I can't because my family is too conservative. These women always get what they want...maybe because of their financial independence.<sup>96</sup>

As the above quotes illustrate, although the highest concerns of the female soap opera characters seem to be domestic, what makes the American soap operas increasingly more appealing and pleasurable for the respondents is what the respondents perceive as American women's financial and emotional independence. The Turkish viewers were thus highly attentive to, and enthusiastic about, the tangential professional lives of these and other female characters, most of whom they saw as role models and/or symbolic realizations for a life of financial independence. Ela perfectly illustrated this culturally specific role of soap operas in her life:

However messed-up their relationships, I look up to these American women because they can stand on their own feet, and financially take care of themselves. They don't have to ask for money from their husband or father. Then you look here and still see families not allowing their girls to even go to school.<sup>97</sup>

Most respondents' view of the financial independence of the female characters as a direct, deserved outcome of their education level can easily be disputed because the texts show the women born or marrying into wealthy families. However, my focus is not to evaluate the accuracy of Turkish women's textual decodings, but rather to analyze the diverse range of meanings they draw and its potential for raising counterpatriarchal awareness. Seen from this perspective, Ela's comments shed light onto the anti-traditional mindset that exists in close relation to soap opera viewing and textual pleasures.

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<sup>96</sup> Elif (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey; Fadime (respondent), focus group discussion, July 11, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey; Melek (respondent), follow-up interview by the author, July 18, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>97</sup> Ela (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

Respondents' active viewership also manifests itself in comments on their lack of access to the village public sphere, one they contrast with the female characters' ability to navigate in the textual public sphere. Sevim, a self-assertive woman whose nickname, due to her confident manner, is "Sue Ellen" (after a strong character in the prime-time soap opera *Dallas*), made a striking comment, later challenged by a fellow respondent:<sup>98</sup>

**Sevim:** I feel like green grass turning into hay.<sup>99</sup> We can't even go to the village bazaar unless we have to buy something. We can't visit the neighbors because people can talk about you. Then what do we do? Stay at home, and dream to be like those women we watch. Who wouldn't?

**Aydan:** I'd never want it! I may dream of it but would *never* want it in reality!

**Sevim:** I think you'd still want it. I'll always say "I wish I were in her place."<sup>100</sup>

Another respondent also illustrated an extreme level of symbolic realization on both a professional and personal level. In reference to her favorite female character, Sam, from *Generations*, Nezihe commented, "I wanted her everything. Her life, her education, her intelligence, her confidence, even her soul! I could give up myself to be Sam!"<sup>101</sup> The respondents' view of female soap characters as emotionally secure and independent from patriarchal regulations can be easily negated by a reading of the textual representation of women primarily as lovers, wives and mothers, and in constant need of male presence. Some leftist Turkish intellectuals have, indeed, criticized these "seemingly powerful women who either gain that power through acting like prostitutes or with the money they already have."<sup>102</sup> But Turkish viewers, due to their local specificities, interpret these

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<sup>98</sup> Sevim was also known in the village as a "hanimaga" [lady-master], because she was self-assertive and supposedly able to have everyone, including her husband, do whatever she wanted.

<sup>99</sup> The original comment refers to the Turkish saying, "Ot geldik saman gideriz hesabi," [We came as grass, and are leaving as hay].

<sup>100</sup> Sevim and Aydan (respondents), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>101</sup> Nezihe (respondent), focus group discussion, July 21, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>102</sup> *Bagimsizlik ve Demokrasi Yolunda Kurtulus 22* ["Escape to Independence and Democracy"] <http://www.kurtulus-online.com/eskisayilar/b-yolunda22/tv.htm> (Accessed 2 November 2005).

textual representations in unanticipated ways, which may not always correspond to Western or leftist Turkish standards.

Depictions of a female character, such as “Sam,” who will do anything to get back the man she loves may likely seem quite disempowering from a Western feminist perspective. Turkish rural women, however, view the self-confidence and self-assertiveness of such a character, and her ability to choose or leave her partner, as empowering. Nermin, a devoted fan of all American soap operas, presented a vivid picture regarding the applicability of such relationship behavior in their village: “The moment you say, ‘I want to get divorced’ you’ll get a punch in your face! But when you look at those (American) women, you see that they get whatever they want.”<sup>103</sup> Another respondent reflected a sense of symbolic realization, shared by thirty-eight of the forty respondents, regardless of their level of fandom: “She can do whatever I am not allowed to. My best friend and I would even imagine that we each were one of the women, and call each other by those names. When watching that soap, we’d say ‘Look, here you come’ and things like that.”<sup>104</sup> Textual depictions of female self-assertiveness and self-confidence thus allow rural Turkish women a culturally specific pleasure, mainly due to symbolic realizations of their own fantasies.

Another counterpatriarchal aspect of rural Turkish women’s soap viewership stems from the unanticipated pleasures of some younger respondents as they fantasize about the mother-daughter relationships that the soap operas suggest. In reference to representations of anti-traditional mother-daughter relationships, one respondent, Melek, commented that “Not only lovers, but also mothers and daughters are so understanding

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<sup>103</sup> Nermin (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>104</sup> Elif (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

toward each other. That part I like. Older women here are never like that. Mothers-in-law, mothers...they're all the same."<sup>105</sup> Another respondent's comment also reflected female-perpetuated patriarchy as it referred to the subservient role that mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law expect from brides in the family: "Brides should never get tired! They're here to serve us."<sup>106</sup> Soap opera mother-daughter or female-to-female relationships thus allowed some younger respondents to re-consider their own relationships.

Textual representations of female sexuality further contribute to the respondents' questioning of their given roles, both in the bedroom and in their community. Discussions about female characters' explicit claims to sexuality open a non-threatening, alternative sphere, which, at times, allows women to re-think their traditional roles, consider potential ownership of their bodies, and challenge such ill-founded claims that "It's a sin not to grant your husband his God-given right [ownership of woman's body no matter what]. We've learned from our great grandfathers that it's the biggest deed you can do for Allah."<sup>107</sup> One respondent, for instance, referred to a woman, whom, she heard, used to watch American soaps and later thought it was normal to refuse her husband's sexual advances and even divorce him. That woman is said to later have married her ex-brother-in-law, very much in line with what she supposedly "learned" from the soap characters and "their weird relationships."<sup>108</sup> Such comments point to a conscious link that the respondents have identified between the textual depictions of American women's sexuality and a potential, learned agency they can dream about or actualize in their own lives. While most respondents criticized the textual normalization

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<sup>105</sup> Melek (respondent), follow-up interview by the author, July 18, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>106</sup> Cemile (respondent), focus group discussion, July 11, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>107</sup> Yesim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 8, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey. For an excellent study of the relationship among sexuality, procreation and Islam in rural Turkey, see, Carol Delaney, *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>108</sup> Hamdiye (respondent), focus group discussion, July 21, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

of anti-traditional relationships, they still acknowledged the multiple and rather active ways in which some Turkish women interpreted American soap operas.

All of the respondents agreed that the soap operas' visual depictions of female sexuality pointed to an American and alternative way of being a woman. Among aspects of soaps on which viewers commented were direct or indirect references to women's ownership of their own bodies (marked in the soaps, for example, by female characters' ability to reject or accept intimacy), visual expressions of female physical attraction to men, female characters' ability to choose their own sexual partners, and the lack of importance given to virginity. These scenes, all respondents noted, posed a huge threat to ideas about traditional and virtuous Turkish womanhood. As such, respondents indirectly acknowledged that repeated, intense viewings of these American soap operas potentially challenged their understanding of their given roles as defined by Turkish patriarchy. Therefore, Elif claimed, a soap opera viewer, who is under extremely confined circumstances, can "begin to think about saying 'No' to her husband's sexual advances if she doesn't feel like it," and claim ownership of her body.<sup>109</sup> Although women may begin to say 'No', thirty-six of the forty respondents concluded, the husbands would probably not listen to them. As Elif put it, "Saying 'no' is luxury for women here."<sup>110</sup>

Despite such day-to-day realities with which most rural women coped, their soap-initiated fantasies can still complicate the given roles they have been assigned by patriarchy, by "the great grandfathers." Hence, the aforementioned ultra-conservative comment by another respondent about the "sinfulness" of women's rejection of their

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<sup>109</sup> Elif (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

husbands' sexual advances is challenged by alternative representations that rural Turkish women see in sexually inflected scenes from American soap operas.

### **Pleasures of “Sexual Viewership” and New Masculinities**

Voyeuristic pleasures of rural women from the aforementioned ‘kissing scenes’ represent a crucial aspect of the transgressive potential of their viewership. Since on-screen kissing was unheard of in Turkish television programming until recently, and rural Turkish women did not have any other resources about sexuality, these love-making scenes were a distinct source of, at times guilty, pleasure in their lives. Thirty-six respondents referred to kissing or love scenes with feelings of identification. One respondent, Fadime, an avid fan of all soap operas, exemplified the level of identification specifically related to sexually inflected scenes: “When they were so much in love with each other, and, say, started kissing, we’d sometimes get jealous! We dreamed to be that girl, his girlfriend.”<sup>111</sup> Another respondent recalled her extreme embarrassment as a teenager when she came across such scenes while watching soap operas with her mother: “I would instantly run out of the room with complete embarrassment...like *I* was kissing him.”<sup>112</sup> Most young respondents thus preferred to watch without the presence of older neighbors or their mothers. Their ideal viewing arrangement was watching alone, although this was rarely possible, or, watching with very close female friends—which implies a communally experienced erotic gaze that may in itself be considered empowering—so they would not feel awkward while witnessing the kissing scenes. If a male family member was present, the respondents noted that they changed the channel.

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<sup>111</sup> Fadime (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>112</sup> Hamdiye (respondent), focus group discussion, July 21, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

If they were watching with older women, they would often look somewhere else and change the subject.

Respondents' comments about the "kissing" scenes in *The Bold and the Beautiful*, in particular, reflected a diverse range of viewer responses. "You can't see such bed scenes in *The Young and the Restless*," Nur commented in defense of her favorite soap, as her mother Sevim related the fading popularity of *The Bold and the Beautiful* to "such immoral scenes that don't fit our culture."<sup>113</sup> Although most respondents admitted their voyeuristic pleasures from such scenes, Sevim commented that "I remember a scene, for example, the daughter brings her boyfriend home, and they start making out in her room. The mother comes in, sees them and leaves without saying anything! I just can't believe it!"<sup>114</sup> Her later remark that "the girl needed a good spanking. I know *I* would do it," also revealed the complexity of rural Turkish women's viewing experiences due to the coexistence of male and female-perpetuated patriarchies and female agency.<sup>115</sup>

Repeated viewings of the spectacle of the (white) American men further contributed to the transgressive quality of the viewers' experiences which reflect a voyeurism not only across gender but also across cultures and nations. Respondents mentioned multiple times the physical attractiveness of the characters Ridge and Thorne from *The Bold and the Beautiful* and of Victor, from *The Young and the Restless*. Their comments were frequently accompanied with some giggling and blushing because the respondents knew that, by traditional Turkish patriarchal standards, they were not supposed to talk about a pleasure from male physical appearances. Indeed, the physical appeal of the male characters far outweighed their personal integrity and loyalty issues.

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<sup>113</sup> Nur and Sevim (respondents), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>114</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

Thirty-seven respondents stated that they would not mind marrying them, in fantasy or reality. They agreed that American men, as represented by the male characters, looked different from the men in their village—compared to the Turkish men they had known, these American men were very well-groomed (meaning, most male characters except Victor did not have a moustache) while all men in the village equated a mustache with manhood. Respondents perceived American men as taller than the Turkish men they knew, and physically more fit, “probably because they exercise and never smoke,” as one respondent noted.<sup>116</sup> American men knew how to dress well (differently from men in their village). And, most, like Thorne, were blonde, while most men in the village had dark hair. Based primarily on their different looks, the respondents found the male characters extremely attractive. One respondent, Melek, problematized this statement when she commented that “There were some black male characters on *Generations*, but my friends and I were never attracted to them that way. I think it’s because we’re white and feel closer to white Americans.”<sup>117</sup> While Melek saw herself as “white,” all the positive physical attributes she and other respondents emphasized were those that they thought Turkish men lacked.

Respondents also referred to their viewing pleasures of simply looking at these American men and frequently voicing their attraction to the characters while watching their favorite soap operas. Although for most respondents the voicing of their attraction took place before they got married, there were several married women who did not mind speaking out. Indeed, part of the pleasure was based on speaking about this attraction which represented an explicit violation of gender norms (about who can look and desire

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<sup>116</sup> Nur (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>117</sup> Melek (respondent), follow-up interview by the author, July 18, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

and who the gazed-at object is) in both the visual and social realms. While watching *The Young and the Restless*, Naciye, among others, made comments about the physical appeal of her favorite male character, Victor: “I’d always say ‘Look at how handsome he is.’ And my daughters and neighbors’ daughters would all agree that they wanted to marry someone like him, as good-looking.”<sup>118</sup> When asked to comment about how she felt when her daughters expressed their attraction to Victor, Naciye, a very strict mother indeed, became defensive: “Why should I get angry with them? Their *mother* likes the guy, too. Why can’t they!”<sup>119</sup>

However harmless these active viewing experiences were to women like Naciye, some Turkish men interpreted their wives’ voyeuristic pleasures as a threat or rivalry that had to be overcome. As acknowledged by Naciye, some husbands did not allow their wives to watch *The Young and the Restless* “just because they were jealous of Victor!”<sup>120</sup> Hence, women’s intense engagement with the erotic spectacle of American men, regardless of whether or not they verbally expressed their voyeuristic pleasures in the presence of men, created the circumstances under which women could gain an active voyeuristic stance, unknown to them prior to their soap viewership experiences. As seen here, the traditional patriarchal response to women’s gained agency was completely to block access to soap operas. However, those women with limited access to the text could still take part in discussions with their friends or simply gossip about the male characters that their friends were able to enjoy.

One needs to situate respondents’ visual pleasures within the context of rural Turkey and its patriarchal traditions. Respondents’ verbal comments during past

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<sup>118</sup> Naciye (respondent), focus group discussion, July 7, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

viewings or at the focus groups never went beyond “He’s so handsome. I’d love to marry him,” or “Just so my mother has a handsome son-in-law!”<sup>121</sup> Since marriage in rural and most of urban Turkey is the only means by which men and women can justify sexual intercourse, their explicit wish to marry a certain male character based on his “good looks” suggests sexual attraction. Recognition of their physical attraction and the willingness for marriage thus indicate these women’s acknowledgement of their sexuality and ownership of their bodies.

Approaching rural women’s viewing of sexually inflected scenes as instances of active female pleasure allows for an approach that grants these viewers the active stance of the voyeur, not that of a passive, disempowered object. Indeed, the diverse experiences of rural Turkish women who not only direct an erotic gaze at the male spectacle but also actively interpret the text in multiple, unanticipated ways exhibit an active viewership position. A comment by Nur shows that rural women, even within the presence of male viewers, experience active voyeuristic pleasures. Upon referring to her high school years when “boys and girls would comfortably talk to each other about how handsome or beautiful a character was,” Nur recalled:

Once during a Ramadan dinner at a restaurant, we [girls] were sitting at the same table with the boys from our class, and watching *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The boys were all so crazy about the American women that they’d comment about their looks all the time. We, too, were talking to them about which guys we liked, which one looked handsome, attractive and so forth.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ela (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey; Yeliz (respondent), focus group discussion, July 11, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey; Nur (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>122</sup> Nur (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

Nur's comment, on one hand, suggests that soap operas may function in the Hollywood tradition so that the male gaze objectifies the female characters. This is true in this particular case and within this viewing arrangement. Yet girls' comments about the American men point to an apparent erotic gaze of their own, and a publicly acknowledged female desire. Moreover, the mere fact that Nur and her girlfriends were able to look at on-screen men within the presence of boys and voice their attraction demonstrates an active viewership position. In this case, the female viewers were not only actively enjoying the American men in the soap opera, but also consciously claiming agency while drawing the attention of male viewers to their female pleasures.

Turkish men failed to neutralize respondents' newly gained visual pleasures, in part because women's pleasures were not based merely on their erotic gaze but also on their fantasies related to male characters' positive attributes. All of the respondents associated the different personality traits and relationship behaviors of the male soap opera characters with what they perceived as American masculinities, which they considered more appealing than traditional Turkish manhood. Only one respondent, Nur, problematized other respondents' (including her mother's) comparisons between Turkish and American men, particularly the preconception that Turkish men, unlike Americans, are incapable of verbally expressing their love. When her mother stated that she'd want her husband to show his love more, Nur claimed that "My father is such a loving and kind man. He values us greatly, but can't express it well. It's because of the way he was raised. He's not a bad father."<sup>123</sup> As Nur attempted to justify traditional Turkish male behavior, her comment also pointed to the visible existence of patriarchy.

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

Representations of American masculinities in soap operas became a significant resource for Turkish women who began to discuss amongst themselves positive male attributes. They believed that, unlike Turkish men they had known, all American men were romantic, loving, kind, understanding, forgiving, charismatic, considerate, patient, peaceful, helpful to women in housework and raising their children, affectionate, and passionate.<sup>124</sup> American men were perceived as not afraid of expressing their love verbally and were also good listeners. Unlike some men in their village, it was assumed that these American men would never resort to violence toward women as a solution to their daily frustrations or jealousy. Respondents also noted that American men did not seem to be jealous of their partners. According to most respondents, these American men thus respected women. They usually were heartbreakers, too, as they would cheat constantly, but “Which man doesn’t?” most women thought.<sup>125</sup>

The empowering nature of Turkish women’s fantasies about the male characters can be challenged by white Euro-American feminists and media scholars who have tended to conceptualize racialized, non-Western, and Muslim women through an essentializing lens that either excludes them or does not grant them any agency in real life. Such a view would emphasize that ambiguous representations within the text itself challenge the positive attributes Turkish viewers have given to American men. From a western feminist perspective, rural Turkish women’s indifference to, or justifications of, personality traits, such as unfaithfulness, could be seen as a direct outcome of the internalization of patriarchal hegemony, and its perpetuation by women themselves. From these views, normalization of men’s extramarital affairs through their soap opera

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<sup>124</sup> These positive attributes have not been presented in any particular order of importance for the respondents, although their comments tend to emphasize American men as “romantic,” “kind,” and “understanding.”

<sup>125</sup> Elif (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

viewing experiences should disempower, rather than empower, the female viewers. However, none of these approaches accounts for rural Turkish women's multiple pleasures gained from the depictions of American male soap opera characters.<sup>126</sup>

Regardless of the seemingly disempowering aspect of the textual normalization and reinforcement of patriarchal hegemony, rural Turkish women's soap opera viewing and their pleasures from textual depictions of alternative masculinities provide these women with a new repertoire which they can use to re-consider their relationships in fantasy or reality. American soap operas, while perpetuating and celebrating patriarchal norms of domesticity, heterosexuality, and marital unions, provide for Turkish women a co-existing set of empowering female pleasures from American female and male characters. In this case, textual depictions of alternative images through the male characters allow rural Turkish women a different means by which they can critically look at the men in their real lives and re-evaluate the validity of traditional norms of Turkish manhood.

Indeed, thirty-eight of the respondents noted that they experienced immense pleasures specifically from the images of this new kind of man. Although most respondents commented that they did not always voice their requests for a better (future) husband or father, corresponding to the depicted American manhood, they had, at one

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<sup>126</sup> Feminists-of-color in the west as well as non-Western women have, indeed, offered many critical studies of white western feminism. These recent analyses challenged feminists such as Susan M. Okin, whose essay, "Is multiculturalism bad for women?" represented white Euro-centric feminism's problematic universal sisterhood model that excludes race, class and imperialism as important dynamics of patriarchy. Susan M. Okin, "Is Multiculturalism bad for women?" in *Is Multiculturalism bad for women?* Ed.s. Joshua Cohen et al (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), 7-26. For critical studies by women-of-color feminists, see, for example, Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, "Challenging Imperial Feminism," *Feminist Review* 17 (1984): 3-19; Hazel Carby, "White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood," in *Theories of race and racism: a reader*, ed.s. Les Back et al (London; NY: Routledge, [1982] 2000), 389-403; Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (NY: Vintage Books, 1981); bell hooks, *Feminist theory from margin to center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984); Audre Lorde, "The Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," in *Feminism and "race,"* ed. Kum-Kum Bhavnani (Oxford; NY: Oxford UP, 2001), 89-92; and Chandra T. Mohanty "Under Western eyes," *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 65-88. These studies, however, do not provide relevant tools to explore Turkish women's specific experiences of American popular culture.

point or another, fantasized that their husbands would treat them like those American men treat women. As one respondent observed, “Here they treat you as a servant, and, say, when they come home drunk and the woman didn’t finish all the housework, the husband can beat her up. When you’re watching these serials, you then start questioning why your own husband isn’t like the men you see on TV.”<sup>127</sup> Another respondent added, “Those American men are so helpful. Wouldn’t it be nice if my husband was like that? Say, if he gave water to the cows when I asked for it.”<sup>128</sup>

Some respondents, indeed, had their doubts about the appeal of American manhood. In the “cheating” scene from the viewed *The Bold and the Beautiful* episode, when the character, Thorne, sees his girlfriend, Macy, kiss another man in her bed and leaves without saying or doing anything, two respondents commented that American men are too understanding. As further proof that all American men, indeed, were like the men in soap operas, one respondent referred to a news story she saw on TV about a man who watched secretly taped footage of his girlfriend and her lover having sex and still forgave the woman.<sup>129</sup>

All of the respondents agreed, however, that a Turkish man would never act as passively as Thorne. “Turkish men here would definitely shoot both to death,” Cemile commented.<sup>130</sup> Respondents believed that the biggest difference between the American men and rural Turkish men is the level of understanding and patience toward women as in such cheating scenes. Yeliz, for instance, complained about her husband’s overreactions to her interactions with her male friends in the village, but overall, she saw

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<sup>127</sup> Ela (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>128</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>129</sup> Hamdiye (respondent), focus group discussion, July 21, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>130</sup> Cemile (respondent), focus group discussion, July 11, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

jealousy as a sign of love.<sup>131</sup> Melek, on the other hand, directly questioned the credibility of any representation that shows men as so understanding. “I just can’t believe it,” she said.<sup>132</sup> “Both men and women in these soaps are too understanding. I don’t think that happens in real life, in America.”<sup>133</sup> Another respondent added that there were times when she and her friends felt they were lucky that their husbands were not like the cheaters in the soap.<sup>134</sup>

A few respondents additionally commented on Turkish men being influenced by the American men they see in soap operas. They noted that some younger Turkish men are starting to act more “civilized” arguably because “they are imitating American men.”<sup>135</sup> That textual representations of American masculinities in soap operas appealed to or promoted behavioral change in some young Turkish men brings with it the idea that women expressed their interest in this new image or that younger generation males watched soap operas and used them a behavioral reference. Such claims remain difficult to document. What we do know, based on the respondents’ comments, however, is that rural women equate the occasional alternative images of Turkish womanhood and manhood with Americanness. One of the respondents, Sevim, a devoted fan of Victor from *The Young and the Restless*, would therefore comment that “There are both backward and modern men in Turkey, modern like Americans. Not in rural areas, though.”<sup>136</sup>

Sevim, initially claimed that she would “never want an American husband like him [Thorne]” while she later confessed her deep admiration for Victor as the ideal

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<sup>131</sup> Yeliz (respondent), focus group discussion, July 11, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>132</sup> Melek (respondent), focus group discussion, July 8, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Pelin (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>135</sup> Saime (respondent), focus group discussion, July 11, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>136</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

man.<sup>137</sup> Naciye, also a fan, commented that “although he made some mistakes like cheating on his wife, I still remember Victor as a great man, and wonderful husband.”<sup>138</sup>

While the uncritical valorization of American manhood voiced by most respondents may be seen as a revaluation of one kind of dominant masculinity to another, especially in the light of global power relations that privilege capitalist heteropatriarchies of the Euro-American world, respondents’ experiences should be situated within the strictly patriarchal structure of their lives. As contradictory as they may seem, remarks by Sevim and Naciye point to a negotiated way of decoding soap operas that is specific to their cultural backgrounds: No matter how unfaithful these American male characters, they provide fantasies of an ideal husband as long as they are what women believe Turkish men are not, representing these women’s negotiations of local patriarchies by means of re-defining the patriarchal elements of a globalized norm of masculinity.

### **Pleasures from the Glamour of American Living**

Respondents’ remarks suggest an awareness of the ways in which diverse textual pleasures from soap operas are intertwined with the changing reality of women’s lives in the village and in the imagined city, one inherently tied to the glamour of American capitalist consumerism promoted in the soap operas. Nur, for example, noted that, “My sister has a wonderful husband who makes her live like Americans. My brother-in-law takes her out to parties all the time, and allows her to wear whatever she wants. He buys

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Naciye (respondent), follow-up interview by the author, July 10, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

her new clothes all the time.”<sup>139</sup> She also commented that “There are now women in Istanbul who are no different from Americans, going out to nightclubs, drinking.”<sup>140</sup>

Respondents also expressed an increased sense of discontent as they compared their own lives to the luxurious lives of the female soap opera characters. Necla illustrated this sentiment during an evening focus group discussion in her front yard: “American women live in such luxury. Look at us [showing her arms]. We’re all bitten by mosquitoes out here!”<sup>141</sup> Respondents also commented on the appeal of the elegance of female characters’ clothes, shoes, jewelry, and make-up; the fashion world; the grand American houses, furniture, and cars; vacations to foreign destinations; luxurious hotels; the constant tradition of men’s buying gifts for women; and scenes of restaurant meals.

Thirty-nine of the forty respondents shared a critical look toward their own living conditions after seeing the glamorous life depicted in American soap operas, and thirty-eight noted that they would like to live like American women. Only one respondent, Aydan, emphasized that she might have fantasized about it, but she would never want to live like the characters in reality. The following exchange took place between Aydan and a fellow respondent, Sevim, who challenged her:

**Sevim:** As long as you are a woman who feels young at heart, you’d always want to live like them, be taken out to restaurants. What will you do if you’re always stuck at home? If he never takes you out?

**Aydan:** I’ll stay at home. What else can I do? But he can’t go anywhere, either!<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Nur (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Necla (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>142</sup> Aydan and Sevim (respondents), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

Aydan, obviously, was one of the more self-assertive women who would exhibit agency and operate in resistant ways even when confined to the domestic sphere. Sevim went on to voice the discontent of most rural women:

We are not really that poor, thank Allah; but we'd, of course, dream about living in luxury like those Americans. Why don't we have the right to wear beautiful outfits, and expensive perfumes? Why should we instead have to work in the fields or milk the cows, and smell like crap!<sup>143</sup>

Another respondent, Naciye, commented that, when she was watching *The Young and the Restless*, she occasionally felt she was not “as free as those American women because they were living in such luxury and could go wherever they wanted, by themselves.”<sup>144</sup> Complete freedom, to her, was thus not merely based on financial independence, but on the ways in which money eased a woman's entrance into the public sphere. Naciye's association of female characters' glamorous lifestyles with their unlimited access to the public sphere suggests discontent not only about her financial condition, but also due to a newly gained counterhegemonic awareness of her given role that limits her permanent access to the male public sphere unless accompanied by a male family member.

Such counterhegemonic awareness is enhanced by the textual appeal of an Americanness that women perceive as a counter-identity to traditional Turkishness. The perceived difference of American consumer culture becomes an important part of the textual pleasures available from soap operas. Daniel Miller, in a 1992 ethnography of Trinidadian viewers of *The Young and the Restless*, observes that the soap's immense popularity in Trinidad is based on the perceived similarities between American consumerism and Trinidadian folk culture that has historically emphasized cultivation of

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<sup>143</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>144</sup> Naciye (respondent), focus group discussion, July 7, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

style and external display.<sup>145</sup> According to Miller, when Trinidadians living in squatter areas watched the soap from their battery operated televisions, they were not drawn to American characters or images themselves, but to the clothing, consumer goods, and fashions. Identification with textual commodification rather than the personality of a character, Miller concludes, thus indicates “not the superficial level at which the program is absorbed, but quite the opposite”; that Trinidadians perceived the “display” of clothing and style within the soap opera as close to their culture which sees such display as an expression of public selves.<sup>146</sup> In contrast, Turkish culture avoids excessive display. Moreover, the respondents’ small, conservative communities, even after the consumerism boom of the 1980s, do not allow women freely to experience the new kinds of clothing and fashion styles they see in the soap operas, “because people would say something,” as Sevim puts it.<sup>147</sup> Seen from this perspective, what increasingly draws more rural Turkish women to American soap operas is their “foreignness,” namely the difference between their local culture and the American culture depicted in the text.

As Miller’s work suggests, some respondents did, in fact, relate textual representations of American consumerism to superficiality, one of the few negative attributes they assign to the textual foreignness. Nur, for example, openly challenged tradition by offering a negotiated version of her dreams of a glamorous lifestyle. She also kept her critical distance, particularly in terms of the extravagant lifestyles presented in the soap operas: “I used to always dream about those lives. Who wouldn’t want servants,

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<sup>145</sup> Daniel Miller, “The Consumption of Soap Opera: *The Young and the Restless* and Mass Consumption in Trinidad,” in *To be Continued...Soap Operas Around the World*, ed. Robert C. Allen (New York: Routledge, 1995), 213-233.

<sup>146</sup> Miller, 225.

<sup>147</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

lots of money? But I find it very superficial. After all, they are ‘gavur’ foreigners.”<sup>148</sup> Sevim also questioned the realism of glamorous lifestyles in the soap operas despite her intense engagement with the text: “They can’t all be this wealthy. I am sure they have poor people, too, and those women must feel even worse than we do.”<sup>149</sup> A few respondents, such as Naciye, also criticized the overvaluing of wealth over personal happiness. “These characters are all wealthy but never really happy. They keep backstabbing each other,” she observed.<sup>150</sup> Another respondent problematized the validity of any argument that equates Americanness with luxurious living: “What I don’t get is that these women are always wealthy, even though they never work!”<sup>151</sup>

Respondents’ identification of the textual absence of low-income women and men indicates a certain level of critical decoding on their behalf. Rural Turkish women’s interrogation of the content in terms of such absences, as well as their critical stance toward some scenes that they perceive as problematic, disempowering and/or complex suggest the existence of an oppositional gaze structure as formulated by bell hooks.<sup>152</sup> Once rural Turkish women begin to see that not all women have to share the same fate, and continually compare their lives to those of their on-screen American friends, the ground for counterpatriarchal knowledge is prepared for the blossoming of visible female agency: *real* action both inside *and* “outside the living room.”

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<sup>148</sup> Nur (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey. “Gavur” is a colloquial Turkish word used to refer to non-Muslim foreigners. It has derogatory connotations.

<sup>149</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>150</sup> Naciye (respondent), focus group discussion, July 7, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>151</sup> Melek (respondent), follow-up interview, July 18, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>152</sup> bell hooks, *Reel to Real* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 197-213.

### **Social Pleasures: “Inside *and* Outside the Living Room”**

Respondents’ awareness of the social implications of soap viewership becomes most vivid in the ways in which they sometimes proudly, and at times critically, re-tell the stories of certain housewives. Under the influence of American soap operas, these women challenged their assigned roles and refused to do the expected household chores. The factual reliability of such mediated narratives remains difficult to document. But the respondents recognize the extratextual ways soaps can function in the lives of women, from a similar background, who are avid viewers of the same soap operas.

Arzu, a young bride who is not allowed to sit in the presence of an older male family member, provides a perfect example of such symbolic realization. Although her re-telling of stories about unruly women who refuse to listen to their husbands points to an apparent disapproval of their behavior, one does not need to dig too far below the surface to identify her pleasure from such role reversals. It is therefore crucial to be cognizant of the alternate, nonverbal ways in which respondents such as Arzu could express how they “really” felt without fear of punishment.<sup>153</sup> During the focus group discussion, her emotionality and increased amount of participation (when her mother-in-law temporarily left the group) as well as her enthusiasm to have her voice heard reflected a sense of identification with those “other women” she seemingly criticized. Although this is one possible reading and any argument based on the researcher’s subjective interpretation may not appeal to those social scientists who believe in only some forms of quantifiable evidence as “valid” data, a mere glance into Arzu’s self-assertive body language and her tone of voice, coupled with her earlier complaints about

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<sup>153</sup> Arzu (respondent), focus group discussion, July 11, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

her lack of agency, illuminated her unvoiced fantasies of how such role reversals related to her own soap viewing.

The social, potentially counterhegemonic aspects of the soap viewing process thus need to be explored in relation to the culturally specific viewing contexts. As the respondents come together in a mostly all-female space to watch their favorite soaps, at times to criticize the characters and sometimes to cry out for them, as they gossip in their gardens, the stable, fields and their living rooms about the American characters' lives and the unruly women whose soap viewership is said to have provided them alternative perspectives, there emerges a counterpatriarchal female public sphere, within the broader hegemonic space of traditional Turkish patriarchy.

The presence of a homosocial viewing context plays an important role in the maintenance of this counterpatriarchal female sphere. Central to this female community and "to the validation of feminine culture is gossip, which both reflects a denial of male-defined pleasure and serves as a source of independence for women."<sup>154</sup> Gossip and other social aspects of the oral culture related to soap operas provide female viewers an important means through which they engage and control their own fantasies.<sup>155</sup> A respondent perfectly illustrated this fluidity among text-related gossip, Turkish women's real-life experiences, and their fantasies: "I'd sometimes see a whole soap episode in my dream, and tell my friends about it first thing in the morning."<sup>156</sup> This comment about story speculations also points to the interrelated nature of viewing pleasures, fantasies, and viewers' controlled distance. Similar to the "controlled self-delusion" of *Dallas* fans

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<sup>154</sup> C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby. *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995: 127.

<sup>155</sup> Mary Ellen Brown. 1989. "Soap Opera and Women's Culture: Politics and the Popular." In *Doing Research on Women's Communication: Perspectives on Theory and Method*, edited by Kathryn Carter and Carole Spitzack, 161-190. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

<sup>156</sup> Inci (respondent), focus group discussion, July 20, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

studied by Ien Ang, most Turkish women's viewing pleasures and associated forms of gossip indicate an active viewing position that often takes the form of story speculations.<sup>157</sup> Such active viewing correlates with viewers' constant move between reality and fiction.

As feminist scholar Mary Ellen Brown argues, women's pleasures from gossiping about soaps can be counterhegemonic as "the audience has taken into its own hands the power to use soaps as a resistive form [...] a type of affective resistance to dominant ideology."<sup>158</sup> Respondents also resisted their husbands' repressive ban of soap watching by going to a neighbor's house to watch with other women. Such acts provided women both a way to challenge patriarchy and to feel empowered as a result of the interpersonal bonds found in a homosocial viewing context.

In the case of rural Turkish women, one sees their agency not only through gossip, interpersonal bonds with other women, and active resistance to husbands' bans, but also through their construction of a safe, empowering discourse to talk about issues not previously discussed in female gatherings. Female viewers, who speculate about the storyline and create their own view of the text via their fantasies, "construct a safe discourse with which to explore the dangerous subjects of their own lives."<sup>159</sup> Respondents repeatedly commented that they experienced pleasures from discussing issues related to characters' love relationships ("Which man should the female character choose?" "When will the lovers get together?"), female sexuality (kissing, bed scenes, flirting), and male characters ("He's very handsome," "He is so understanding"). As

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<sup>157</sup> Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1985).

<sup>158</sup> Mary Ellen Brown, "The Politics of Soaps: Pleasure and Feminine Empowerment," *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* 4 (1987): 10; 1-3.

<sup>159</sup> Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 203.

previously mentioned, the soap text also initiated gossip about unruly Turkish women who refused to abide by their husband's rules, supposedly because of their intense soap viewership. The mere fact that women, through their comments, expressed their opinions about previously taboo subjects such as female agency and sexual attraction indicates the subversive potential of their homosocial viewing context. As Brown observes, "[s]oaps which are designed to reinforce existing social practices which isolate women and encourage them to buy as a source of pleasure, instead promote a women's community which gets pleasure from itself [, from] their own discourse and their own pleasure."<sup>160</sup>

Some respondents observed, however, that sometime male family members were present for soap opera viewing. Eight respondents noted that they usually watched soaps with their husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons. The male viewers would not necessarily be as engaged, but there still were some, such as Melek's father, who became fans. When, for example, a major newspaper gave away free posters of the character Sam, from *Generations*, Melek's father put the poster above the village fountain, at the center of the village. Although this may be seen as an incident in which the hegemonic male gaze once again objectifies women and/or as a glorification of "American" looks, and overthrows the reign of the empowered female gaze, it can also be read as the male acceptance of women's viewing pleasures and a valuing of the "women's genre" of soap opera.

Another way in which soap opera viewership elicits real-life female agency for rural women relates to what most respondents perceived as role models. Respondents felt motivated by most female characters that they viewed as personal role models to deal

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<sup>160</sup> Mary Ellen Brown, "The Politics of Soaps: Pleasure and Feminine Empowerment," *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies* 4 (1987): 10.

with similar issues in their own lives. As previously noted, they were particularly attentive to and enthusiastic about the tangential professional lives of well-educated female characters. Some respondents, such as Ela and Kadriye, did take a step further as they actualized their soap-initiated fantasies by following their role models, the female soap characters. When asked about any real-life decision triggered by their soap viewing, both proudly referred to their stubborn desire for higher education. Ela's father initially decided not to send her to high school, but she put her foot down and, with the support of her sister and brother, convinced her father. Currently a distance learning college student, she wants financially to stand on her own feet, just like her favorite character, Kristin, the attorney from *The Young and the Restless*, so that she will not "have to ask for money from [her] husband or father in the future."<sup>161</sup> Preschool teacher Kadriye is another self-identified follower of Kristin. She, too, made a life-altering decision as she decided to go to college. Not only did Kadriye want to earn her own money, but she wanted to be in a loving relationship like Kristin's.<sup>162</sup> Coming from a less conservative family, Kadriye did not face any resistance to her decision. She, however, had to work extremely hard to pass the nationwide university exam.

Another respondent's comment about her best friend's fantasy-to-real life experience with American soap operas also shed light onto the counterpatriarchal potential of rural Turkish women's soap viewing and their soap-associated real-life experiences. An avid admirer of the self-confidence, assertiveness, and independence of the female characters in *The Young and the Restless* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*, Elif's friend had once claimed that "You'll see. One day, I'll become like them!" Elif

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<sup>161</sup> Ela (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>162</sup> Kadriye (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

noted that her friend did achieve her goal: “She is now married, but regardless of her husband, she can do whatever she wants. She is moving ahead like the women in the soaps, self-assertive, confident, and very ambitious.”<sup>163</sup>

Five respondents also exhibited agency as they, in the presence of their husbands, questioned traditional Turkish manhood by comparing their husbands to male soap opera characters. Sevim observed, for example, that when she had guests over, and had to watch the soap with the guests and her husband, she and the female guest would frequently make comments such as “See, gentlemen? You never treat us like that... You should watch and learn!”<sup>164</sup> Sevim noted that the men would simply smile back and say, “Forget it.”<sup>165</sup> Inci and Aygul provided other examples of such direct referral to a textual role model. “Why aren’t we like them? Why don’t you act like those men?” each would challenge her husband, who remained silent.<sup>166</sup> One respondent’s friend reportedly “requested too much from her husband,” and this particular husband reacted in extreme anger.<sup>167</sup> The woman, a devoted soap viewer, voluntarily wore the Islamic headscarf. She, however, later wanted to dress “openly” like the female characters. She confronted her husband when she said: “Those women’s husbands allow them to dress like that. Why shouldn’t you?” Her husband did not choose to remain indifferent as others, but reacted in extreme frustration, “Do you think I am Victor?”<sup>168</sup> Although their husbands responded to women’s active requests with either indifference or negative reactions, all five women voiced their discontent and used male soap characters to express their dissatisfaction with certain aspects of their marriage and their husbands.

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<sup>163</sup> Elif (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>164</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> Inci and Aygul (respondents), focus group discussion, July 20, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>167</sup> Aynur (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

Respondents associated active female requests—those resulting in marital tension, arguments or divorces—with “negative” role models. While the respondents’ conflicting statements about the same characters/behaviors blur the distinction between “positive” and “negative” role models, their comments reflect Turkish men’s simplistic assessment of soap operas. Respondents noted that men thought women’s changing expectations stemmed from what men viewed as the bad examples within soap operas. Naciye noted, for example, that some of her friends argued with their husbands, who said, “You’re too influenced by what you watch, and do all these new things,” or “You don’t always do what I say any more.”<sup>169</sup> Two other respondents reportedly witnessed several marriages end because of women’s requests for a different, more “American” lifestyle. “If my husband can go out at this time, why can’t I?” those women reportedly questioned, and ultimately they had to get divorced because they could not come to any resolution.<sup>170</sup>

Ien Ang argues that women’s viewing pleasures are based on a “large *emotional involvement* which is invested in identification with characters of popular fiction.”<sup>171</sup> Soap-initiated real-life experiences of Turkish respondents, who actively followed their textual role models, complicate Ang’s observation that “[The characters] do not function as role models but are symbolic realizations...with which viewers can identify in *fantasy*.”<sup>172</sup> As respondents’ comments demonstrate, in addition to providing fantasy, the soap text also may provide personal role models that rural Turkish women can and actively do use as tools against patriarchal restrictions in their daily lives.

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<sup>169</sup> Naciye (respondent), follow-up interview, July 10, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>170</sup> This association of “rebellious” women with soap opera viewing and with divorce appears as a recurring issue in most focus groups. Such directly soap opera-related divorces remain difficult to document. Nor does an act of divorce necessarily reveal agency as the implication is that the husbands initiated the divorces. What this study rather focuses on is the respondents’ view of soap operas as a potentially destabilizing text, and its transgressive role as a recurring topic in gossip networks [Yesim (respondent), Focus group discussion, July 8, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey].

<sup>171</sup> Ien Ang, “Melodramatic Identifications: Television Fiction and Women’s Fantasy,” in *Television and Women’s Culture*, ed. Mary Ellen Brown (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990), 83.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

Women's daily negotiations of patriarchy through soap viewership also occur when women reject their assigned work and claim time for themselves and for their undistracted, concentrated viewing of soap operas. All but three of the forty respondents deliberately stopped work to watch soaps, and only attended to urgent chores during the commercials. Routine rejection of housework, and, in rural women's cases, refusal to maintain the stable as well as work in the fields, provides pleasures that can be associated with counterpatriarchal acts.

The fragmented, familiar structure and content of soap operas parallels the rhythm of the domestic sphere.<sup>173</sup> As Tania Modleski illustrates, the structure of the soap opera genre on both radio and television corresponds closely to the rhythms of women's everyday lives.<sup>174</sup> The soap text is interrupted with several commercial breaks, leading to a textual rhythm that parallels the daily lives of women viewers whose tasks are similarly endless, ongoing, and in need of routine switches from one chore and mood to another. Moreover, textual focus on verbal interaction is a gendered feature that appeals to housewives. One respondent notes, for example, that she would merely turn up the volume and continue to do her work, coming to look at the screen only when there is a scene she did not want to miss: "Whenever I heard something important, I'd immediately stop doing the dishes, and run into the living room. I just couldn't miss that scene!"<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Charlotte Brunsdon, "Text and Audience," in *Remote Control*, ed.s. Ellen Seiter *et al* (London: Routledge, 1989), 116-129; James Lull, "The Family and Television in World Cultures," in *World Families Watch Television*, ed. James Lull (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1988), 9-21.

<sup>174</sup> Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Methuen, 1982) and "The Rhythms of Reception: Daytime Television and Women's Work," in *Regarding Television*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Los Angeles: American Film Institute Monograph Series/University Publications of America, 1983), 67-75.

<sup>175</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

The intersection of soap operas with the everyday lives of female viewers has been one of the main themes taken up by feminist ethnographers. As early studies by Janice Radway and Andrea Press demonstrate, women's reading pleasures from seemingly disempowering texts such as television or romance fiction can suggest a counterpatriarchal female resistance.<sup>176</sup> In her study of romance readers, Radway argues that women's choice of romance reading over their domestic chores functions as a form of resistive female action against patriarchal constraints of everyday life. She maintains, however, that "romance reading provides women with imaginary solutions to real structural problems and is a poor substitute for real life."<sup>177</sup> As such, Radway concludes, romance reading is merely a counterpatriarchal *fantasy*, "an illusion of pleasure."<sup>178</sup>

Drawing from Janice Radway, Ellen Seiter and her co-authors argue that the act of soap opera viewing raises the problem of female pleasure and its potentially oppositional role in women's lives. In line with Modleski's earlier conceptualization that the fragmented structure of soap operas, indeed, serves to perpetuate the domestic functioning of women," they claim that the interrupted flow of daytime television as well as the fragmented feature of the soap narrative do not serve as interruptions from housework.<sup>179</sup> Hence, watching television for women, they conclude, must be viewed as complementary to work.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Andrea Press, *Women Watching Television: Gender, Class, and Generation in the American Television Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

<sup>177</sup> C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, *Soap Fans: Pursuing pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 128.

<sup>178</sup> Ien Ang, "Feminist Desire and Female Pleasure: On Janice Radway's 'Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature'," *Camera Obscura* 16 (1988): 186.

<sup>179</sup> Tania Modleski, "The Rhythms of Reception: Daytime Television and Women's Work," in *Regarding Television*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Los Angeles: American Film Institute Monograph Series/University Publications of America, 1983), 67-75.

<sup>180</sup> Ellen Seiter *et al*, "Don't Treat Us Like We're So Stupid and Naive: Toward an Ethnography of Soap Opera Viewers," in *Remote Control*, ed.s. Ellen Seiter *et al* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 223-247.

Rural Turkish women's soap viewing experiences, however, point to a slightly different story. Some respondents, for example, did refer to the fragmented soap structure as allowing them to fix the dinner, do the dishes, or change the baby's diapers during the commercials, and one respondent, a fan, felt that there were not enough commercials during the soap so that she could simultaneously do her work. The majority, however, wished there were no commercial breaks at all. As one fan put it in the form of self-parody, "We hated the commercials and would turn up the volume if we had to go to the bathroom, and, believe me, there were times when I actually had to run from the bathroom!"<sup>181</sup> It is therefore true that the soap structure is interrupted and does function along with the daily routine as identified by some respondents. Yet most Turkish viewers clearly wished to escape that routine and resisted doing any chores during the commercial breaks.

From the three respondents who claimed that they preferred their work to soap operas, two were not regular soap viewers while one was a fan, who had previously commented that she "felt obliged to watch because I was so hooked."<sup>182</sup> This respondent's comment about the public aspect of her work in the stable/fields is particularly important:

If I had to milk the cow or work in the field and my film [soap opera] started, I had to leave for the outside work, but I'd think about the soap the whole time [...] But if I only had housework, it could always wait, it isn't that important.<sup>183</sup>

This respondent viewed the public sphere ("outside") as beyond her control while the domestic sphere and related work were clearly within her realm. Indeed, she later added

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<sup>181</sup> Sevim (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

that men should value domestic labor because “they just don’t see how much weight we carry on our shoulders.”<sup>184</sup> Although her responsibilities both “outside *and* inside” were monitored by “the husband,” she was still able to claim independence within the domestic sphere: Housework could wait.

Respondents, whose primary work was in the home, the stable, and, during harvest time, in the fields, deliberately avoided their responsibilities so they could experience pleasures from their undistracted, concentrated viewing, a mode associated with (male) power.<sup>185</sup> Indeed, several respondents noted that when they were watching soap operas, they had, more than once, forgotten about the boiling pot on the stove or the iron yet to be unplugged. Only when the soap was over would they realize the outcomes of their unattended chores. Women viewers’ rejection of chores was also covered in the print media. Mahmut Gencoglu, chief of the fire department in the city of Kayseri, reportedly stated, for example, that there was an increase in domestic incidents of fire “because women are captivated by these pink serials.”<sup>186</sup> He claimed that forty percent of the fires in the city took place during the time when the soap operas were broadcast.<sup>187</sup> As the study respondents recalled those incidents of temporary rejection of house chores, they were not apologetic at all about having to discard a few pots or hide their husbands’ burnt shirts: It was their time for their undistracted viewing, for *their* pleasures only.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> Charlotte Brunson, “Crossroads: notes on soap opera,” *Screen 22* (1982), 32-7.

<sup>186</sup> Ersan Temizel, “Pembe Diziler Yuzunden Ev Yanginlari Artti” [Fires Because of Pink Serials], *Zaman*, 4 August 2003, <http://arsiv.zaman.com.tr/2003/08/04/televizyon/h1.htm>.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> In urban working women viewers’ cases in recent years, the rejected or delayed chores occasionally extended to the public sphere. The governor of the Anatolian city of Usak, for example, had to block female government workers’ soap opera viewing during work hours by removing the television tuners from the office computers. *Haber Ekspres*, “Isler Aksamayacak” [Tasks won’t be delayed], January 22, 2004, [http://www.haberekspres.com.tr/haber/11553\\_Isler-aksamayacak.html](http://www.haberekspres.com.tr/haber/11553_Isler-aksamayacak.html).

Several respondents additionally recalled those times when, during harvest time, they had to work with their family in the hazelnut fields, and they still managed to avoid work. One respondent, for example, even though she had to go to the fields with the rest of the family, would say, “I won’t move until my soap finishes!”<sup>189</sup> Another respondent did not feel the need to explain her decision to her husband. “I’d just leave him in the field and run home to watch the soap,” she said.<sup>190</sup> Two sisters, Elif and Ela, would beg their father so that he would eventually let them go home to watch their soap opera. Ela added that, in order to go home, she sometimes had to lie to her father that she needed to bring some water.<sup>191</sup>

The rejected work was not limited to daily house chores and work in the fields. Inci, for example, noted that when she had guests over during the time of her soap, “I didn’t at all prepare for the guests. I’d send the girls to the grocery store to buy some biscuits, and that was all I’d serve the guests.”<sup>192</sup> Inci’s “serving biscuits” during soap viewing has an important cultural connotation. In any Turkish home, rural or urban, if the hostess, who is a housewife, does not serve food that she herself has made, but biscuits or store-bought pastries, it means that she does not value her guests. Seen from this perspective, Inci not only rejected cooking for her guests, but her decision to serve biscuits was also an explicit rejection of the guests themselves who intruded into her private soap viewing environment.

Rural Turkish women’s control, during the day, over the television set and over viewing choices reflected another counterpatriarchal aspect of social pleasures associated

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<sup>189</sup> Necla (respondent), focus group discussion, July 15, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>190</sup> Inci (respondent), focus group discussion, July 20, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>191</sup> Elif and Ela (respondents), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>192</sup> Inci (respondent), focus group discussion, July 20, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

with soap viewership. Twenty-four of the forty respondents stated that they did not experience any pressures from male members of the family about their viewing preferences, and thus, these respondents controlled their soap viewing. Of the twenty-four, six respondents added that their husbands, (grand) fathers, brothers, or sons occasionally watched with them.

Despite criticisms faced by sixteen of the respondents, they exhibited temporary or permanent agency in their control over the television set, with or without the presence of men. Of the sixteen, six respondents stated that they completely and permanently controlled viewing preferences and watched their soaps even when their skeptical husbands or male relatives/guests were present. As for temporary control over viewing preferences, seven respondents noted that they watched soaps despite male presence in the home. They added, however, that their viewing choices did not matter if there was a soccer match or the news which then had to be watched instead. Only two respondents failed to exhibit agency when their husbands were present. They, however, did experience viewing pleasures when their husbands were not around.

Soap viewers' level of agency is also related to their control over the technology of television, which, in the respondents' case, meant control over the remote control and/or over electricity. The remote control became a focal symbol for the ongoing conflict regarding viewing preferences. Respondents recalled, for example, their strategies to get away with their soap viewing when fathers wanted to watch the news: "We'd do all kinds of things to make him forget about the news. We'd hide the remote

control, and then, when the soap is on, we'd say 'Oh, look, how exciting! I wonder what'll happen next!' We'd win most of the time!"<sup>193</sup>

Inci provides perhaps the most striking example of female control over the technology of television. Once when the electricity in the village was cut off, which happens frequently in rural areas, Inci panicked because her favorite soap opera, *The Young and the Restless*, was about to start. She pulled herself together, however, and phoned the local branch of TEK, the National Electric Company. As Inci explains: "I know some of the people [men] working there; they are from our neighborhood. I told them 'I have a women's prayer group this afternoon, and we can't read the Koran in the dark. We need electricity in twenty minutes!' We had it in fifteen! [smiles in pride]"<sup>194</sup> Inci's experience points to an explicit level of control not only over her viewing choices, but also over technology. She intrudes into the masculine realm of the electric company through interpersonal bonds and references to Islam. Inci cleverly used in her complaint the idea of an Islamic gathering, a valid excuse in her community. The way in which she navigated within traditional discourses to achieve her non-traditional soap viewing also suggests that rural women may, at times, "cling to tradition" strategically. Turkish women's strategies to control the television set as a technological object exhibit a considerable level of agency and creativity as they are accepting the patriarchal limits. But indeed, their strategies point to the constant struggle with the patriarchal hegemonic system within which rural women choose to operate.

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<sup>193</sup> Elif and Ela (respondents), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

<sup>194</sup> Inci (respondent), focus group discussion, July 20, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey.

## Conclusion

The subcultural legacy of daytime American soaps in Turkey continues to this day. All forty of the participants in this study, from fans to those who claimed no interest in soaps, including the eighty-five year old Naciye, recognized the soap characters, remembered the narrative histories, and explained the multiple ways in which they (or others) enjoyed these “pink serials.”

This chapter has demonstrated that rural Turkish women’s soap viewership habits, when added to the surrounding discourses used to talk about the soaps, as well as the textual pleasures from their fantasies inspired by the anti-traditional, American diegetic world, contribute to the creation of an empowering female sphere, a relatively safe female forum for free speech. Turkish women’s active viewership positions are simultaneously marked by a capitalist heteropatriarchal stance (through idealized notions of heterosexual romance that entails consumerism as well as new–“American”–masculinities and femininities) and by a recognition of counterpatriarchal awareness in their lives, as in the stories they tell about those women who act like their favorite female soap characters.

Related to the soap opera depictions and viewers’ multiple decodings of American ways of living is the emergence of a new, alternative mindset with which rural Turkish women familiarize themselves. Soap-opera-related knowledge of potential agency both “inside *and* outside the living room” creates the fertile ground for future fantasies or actualizations of agency in rural women’s own lives. As one respondent, Elif, has aptly put it: “Once you watch these soaps, your whole way of thinking changes, *everything*

changes!”<sup>195</sup> This new knowledge does not completely overthrow the patriarchal gender norms with which Turkish women grow up. Rather, newly acquired knowledge about female agency co-exists with deeply rooted patriarchies that only gradually begin to be challenged. Part of these new challenges emerges from other more localized American imports such as the Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazine, which functions as a transgressive repertoire for a different group of Turkish women – urban, middle-class, career professionals – the focus of the following chapter.

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<sup>195</sup> Elif (respondent), focus group discussion, July 12, 2005, Adapazari, Turkey. 12 July 2005.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Turkish *Cosmopolitan* as Neo-Feminist Manifesta: Texts, Readers and Cultural**

#### **Producers Create a Resistive Counterspace<sup>1</sup>**

Before *Cosmo*, there wasn't even a sexual jargon in Turkish. We created the jargon and opened up the space for Turkish women to discuss taboo subjects.  
Former Editor-in-Chief of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*<sup>2</sup>

A Turkish newsstand presents a telling microcosm of the contradictions within Turkish society and media culture. Images of sexually and financially liberated Turkish *Cosmo* girls on *Cosmopolitan* covers co-exist alongside newspaper cover stories about young women killed by their family members or forced into suicide because they were raped or merely seen with a man. Headlines about arrested intellectuals (both female and male secularists) and high-level military officials deemed dangerous by the neo-Islamist government also constitute a routine part of the media coverage since the 2000s. These contradictions inform both the counterpatriarchal social implications of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*, the highest-selling women's magazine franchise in Turkey, and its resistive potentiality as a localized U.S. import that has largely escaped the government's silencing policy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow the term, *manifesta*, from the title of Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards's 2000 book, in which they use the word to refer to their third-wave feminist framework that accounts for the feminist implications of girls' culture today. Baumgardner and Richards have been affiliated editors of the *Ms Magazine*. *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey. [Translated by the author. All quotations from Turkish sources in the present chapter are translated by the author.]

<sup>3</sup> Launched in April 1992 by Bir Numara Yayıncılık (currently *Turkuaz Dergi A.S.*), Turkish *Cosmopolitan* has an average monthly circulation of 35000. Although the circulation figures seem low when compared to other countries, one should situate this data within the Turkish context which predominantly has an aural and visual culture.

Turkish *Cosmopolitan* represents an ongoing discursive fight over the shifting definitions of modern Turkish womanhood.<sup>4</sup> Since the magazine's launch in 1992, the locally-produced textual and visual content, including articles, interviews, quizzes, comic strips, advertisements and readers' letters, has offered Turkish women—both magazine editors and readers—an alternative textual repertoire about how to be a liberated woman in a particular historical period. *Cosmopolitan* has served as a paradoxical counterspace in which Turkish women continually negotiate and re-envision their gendered subjectivities.

Regardless of the popular and occasional editorial criticisms directed against the magazine, particularly in its supposed superficial commitment to women's liberation and its commercial-feminist image, Turkish *Cosmopolitan* functions as a feminist “manifesta” and a female counterspace in which women can bond with other like-minded women and discuss as well as deconstruct such concepts as female sexuality, marriage, motherhood, patriarchy, and heterosexuality. Due to the national, cultural and contextual specificities of the production and reception processes of the magazine—and to mark its contradictory impulses and effects—I will argue that *Cosmopolitan* exhibits and reinforces an ideology that I call “neo-feminism.” The neo-feminist potential of *Cosmopolitan* relates to two factors: local editors' construction of an antidualistic, multivocal text that incorporates a consciousness-raising subtext with features on female sexuality, career success and activism that co-exist alongside other local and translated content as well as visual material perpetuating capitalist, heteropatriarchal femininities;

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<sup>4</sup> My use of the term, discourse, is informed by Michel Foucault's view that defines discourses as “meaning-producing systems which are both instruments and effects of power.” From this perspective, Turkish *Cosmopolitan* produces and represents historically shifting discourses of womanhood that are constantly re-defined. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. I: An Introduction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 101.

and, readers' implied acceptance of both traditional and anti-traditional types of magazine content.<sup>5</sup> Features that make the magazine anti-traditional in the Turkish context include a textual focus on female agency and on formerly taboo topics of sexuality, as well as the editors' enlightening mode that challenges industry regulations of what a commercial non-feminist magazine traditionally signifies in Turkey.

The magazine's neo-feminist potential thus emerges from the incorporation of feminist-identified, feminine and capitalist representations in the same article or magazine issue, thus presenting a less intimidating counterspace to its readers. The neo-feminist stance toward heterosexual romance and self-assertion within the public and the private spheres appears as the underlying subjectivity offered to all constructed *Cosmo* women. Neo-feminism, in the case of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*, thus refers to a discursive normalization of female empowerment, through the tropes of female sexuality and financial independence, from a seemingly anti-political, thus non-intimidating stance. Turkish *Cosmopolitan*'s neo-feminism gains its ideological power from its ambivalence drawing on an antidualistic, seemingly non-feminist-identified textuality. The translated content, accompanying images, the visual content of the cover page and the advertisements incorporate patriarchal images which may nevertheless have a resistive function in Turkey with their emphasis on female sexuality. The locally-produced magazine content, at times, internalizes a more political voice, while it also acknowledges, reinforces and simultaneously challenges heteropatriarchal constructs common to all women as well as those specific to Turkey. Former Editor-in-Chief Leyla Melek Ciftci identifies *Cosmopolitan* "as a neo-feminist magazine, a non-man hating

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<sup>5</sup> My use of the term heteropatriarchy refers to an ideological system of women's domination that normalizes and perpetuates heterosexuality and notions of ideal romance, family and female self-sacrifice.

text” more in line with third-wave feminism and its engagement with femininity and consumer culture.<sup>6</sup> She notes that “We are not opposed to radical feminism. But we aren’t on their side, either.”<sup>7</sup> This nonhierarchical space, while perpetuating capitalist patriarchy in its translated content and most visual material, does not privilege the radical feminist voice over others; it does not reject traditional femininities and it thus has not intimidated the post-radical feminism generation of Turkish readers since the 1990s.

This neo-feminist orientation promoted by Turkish editors and reinforced by readers’ implied acceptance of it combines aspects of radical as well as commercial feminisms. While the Turkish editors’ reservations about self-identifying as feminists “because we are not man-haters” indicates the ongoing stigma even among educated women about feminism as a (supposedly) binary framework, the magazine content as exhibited through editorials and readers’ letters shows the appropriation of ideas introduced by radical feminism.<sup>8</sup> The magazine’s coverage of feminist activism, women’s human rights, and financial independence, as well as its inclusion of interviews with or free-lance contributions by feminists, exhibit radical feminist undertones. The editors’ focus on female sexuality and self-assertion is clearly informed by ‘The personal is political’ motto of the early 1970s U.S. feminism.<sup>9</sup> The transnational *Cosmo* Girl image and the earlier “all smart girls carry Cosmo” motto also point to the collective sisterhood notion of radical first-wave feminism as well as transnational feminist models

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<sup>6</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey. Although the consumerist aspect of neo-feminism has been criticized by two of the three interviewed senior editors (Sibel Kilimci and Ceyda Asar), the editors’ overall conceptualization of the magazine’s relationship to feminism paralleled that of Ciftci’s.

<sup>7</sup> Ciftci, interview.

<sup>8</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>9</sup> The idea that the structure of the personal and private spheres contributed to female oppression informed much theory and activism in the U.S. feminist movement in the 1970s. Some examples include, Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970); and Charlotte Bunch, “A Broom of One’s Own,” in *The New Woman: A Motive Anthology on Women’s Liberation*, ed. Joanne Cooke and Charlotte Bunch-Weeks (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), 164-8.

since the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> The magazine's overall celebration, despite dissenting voices, of conventional femininities and consumer culture indicates the incorporation of a neo-feminist consciousness.

In this context, I do not assume that all Turkish readers necessarily interpret the same text in the same way as the meaning of any given text "will be constructed differently according to the discourses (knowledges, prejudices, resistances etc.) brought to bear on the text by the reader."<sup>11</sup> I will demonstrate, however, that while the audience members do not share an identical cultural background, their remarks indicate a shared acceptance of the local content's take on female agency and pleasures. The common preferred reading position seems most obvious in the readers' letters as well as the editorial statements in the anniversary issues and personal interviews which highlight the editors' guiding mission.

Viewing *Cosmopolitan* as a multi-vocal, at times, self-contradictory, text helps illuminate the complex processes of transnational capitalist patriarchy. Transnational capitalist patriarchy refers to non-western nations' cultural and economic domination by transnational (mostly American) media flows and consumer trend hegemonies that assign a passive, constrained, and feminine position to local cultural producers and audiences – both female and male. While products of transnational patriarchy tend to prioritize the Western, consumerist style of living as a prototype for happiness, and may serve a regressive function in non-western cultures, the present case study of Turkish

*Cosmopolitan* demonstrates that local cultures can resist, adapt and/or re-contextualize

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<sup>10</sup> While criticized later by feminists of color and non-western feminists due to a perceived imposition of 'sameness,' several earlier accounts of sisterhood emphasized a shared oppression, not necessarily a homogeneous condition. See, for example, Redstockings, "Redstockings Manifesto," in *Sisterhood is Powerful*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage, 1973), 533-536. For early discussions of sisterhood from a transnational perspective, see, Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Global* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992), 57.

imported texts/goods. Transnational texts, especially as they get localized with input from cultural producers and audiences and situated in relation to local norms, can embody a resistive potentiality. Indeed, even the one-dimensional representations of conventional, seemingly oppressive femininities in most translated magazine content and advertisements, have counterpatriarchal social connotations in Turkey.<sup>12</sup> Although the visual material and the polysemic nature of editorial content do elsewhere allow for a seemingly problematic celebration of female “to-be-looked-at-ness” and as such perpetuates the patriarchal gaze structure, the magazine depicts the female reader as a self-conscious subject who actively takes pleasure in being looked at or as one who challenges that very hierarchy of gender by enjoying the sight of male bodies offered within the magazine.<sup>13</sup>

Without directly challenging or discussing Turkish societal emphasis on female virginity as a prerequisite for marriage, the magazine’s focus on sexuality, self-assertiveness and female pleasures serves to naturalize women’s agency. While two senior editors have, indeed, observed that the manual-like format of the translated sex and relationship articles appear constraining from a western feminist perspective and reduce readers to “mindless followers,” they have also noted that these sections normalize

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<sup>12</sup> From this perspective, Janice Radway’s analysis, in regard to readers’ experiences of romance fiction, is particularly relevant. Radway notes that while the romance heroine may look pathetic to a feminist, “she appears courageous, and even valiant, to another still unsure that [male-female] equality is a fact or that she herself might assent to it.” Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (London: Verso, 1987), 78.

<sup>13</sup> The earliest attempt to engage seriously with one’s embracing their “to-be-looked-at-ness” is in the first issue. *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 12-14. By “to-be-looked-at-ness,” I refer to Laura Mulvey’s much-debated discussion of Hollywood female characters of the 1950s and 60s that she argued were coded with a passive object position for the male viewer. Turkish women’s pleasures from their self-objectification and from the eroticized male images challenge views of the active male/male-identified gaze that Laura Mulvey discussed in relation to her theory of film spectatorship and debated in later audience studies. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16 (1975): 11.

discussions of premarital sex and female desire.<sup>14</sup> As a senior editor has put it, “we need to situate the role of the magazine in different Turkish women’s lives not only in *Cosmo* girls.”<sup>15</sup> Contextual specificities thus prove particularly important in exploring the social connotations of the ways in which Turkish producers and readers adapt and re-contextualize imported texts and goods, turning transnational, patriarchal texts into transgressive, semi-local versions with their historically specific ideologies.

Reader agency within the Turkish context can take the form of allegiance to the dominant values and the inscribed reading positions embedded in the magazine. From this perspective, the ‘voluntarily’ preferred reading position of Turkish audiences helps naturalize alternative gazing structures, counterpatriarchal worldviews and action. While I question the existence of a linear causal relation between the messages in the magazine and the behavior of the readers and editors, I will demonstrate through textual analysis, reception study and production ethnography that the text’s emphasis on female agency and women’s rights has naturalized the public discussions of formerly taboo topics, such as alternative views of motherhood, marriage and of female sexuality outside those constructs, and has had resonances in some readers’ lives.

Editors and readers have both contributed to the magazine’s counterpatriarchal approach. Partially informed by feminism but not self-identified as such, editors have offered a polysemic text which, at times, has challenged Turkish patriarchy. The polysemic nature of editorial content relates to the historical moment in which the magazine appears as well as the diversity of perspectives among the editors themselves.

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<sup>14</sup> Ceyda Asar (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey; Sibel Kilimci (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>15</sup> Ceyda Asar (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, August 3, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

While the editorial strategies differ depending on the political and cultural conditions, the local editors have always incorporated competing images of feminisms, femininities, sexualities and female desires in the local magazine content as well as through the letters they choose to publish. Turkish editors have thus offered a non-intimidating counterspace to their readers.

Turkish editors, while maintaining an ambivalent relationship to capitalist and patriarchal views of femininity and, at times, to readers' agency, incorporate their own feminist views within the content. The self-contradictory content presents co-existing images of women's rights activism and commercial feminism as well as seemingly oppressive visual and written content that reinforce patriarchy. This textual multiplicity of views and images allows for a neo-feminist consciousness informed by women's rights movements and the cultural specificities of Turkish women as well as by consumer culture and heteropatriarchy.

The editors perceive themselves as more sophisticated than their readers and attempt to transcend the limited framework of the American "Cosmo formula" by incorporating their own views of female empowerment in their writing and business decisions. Former Editorial Director, Aysun Orhan, explained the "Cosmo formula" as one that requires that at least seventy percent of the total content include translated material, consisting of two sex articles, two relationship pieces, and occasional interviews with American celebrities.<sup>16</sup> Despite the limitations of this formula, which often contradicts the ideals of radical feminism, editorial decisions to incorporate such topics as Turkish women's rights, and sexual liberation reveal the editors' self-proclaimed mission of feminist

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<sup>16</sup> Aysun Orhan (Former Editorial Director, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

enlightenment. The editorial mode of address, in the personal interviews in particular, that assigns the superior, already-enlightened position to the editors and to the contributors appears problematic as their approach exhibits similarities to that of Euro-American or western-inspired state feminists.<sup>17</sup> From those perspectives, the non-Western female body becomes central to the contested definitions of modernity and ‘backwardness.’ In both models, one finds a subaltern in need of guidance and enlightenment from outside sources. While the Turkish *Cosmopolitan* editors textually reveal such a recruitist approach, they self-identify as “not teachers, but friends” to their readers.<sup>18</sup> The editors have thus actively resisted dualisms (educational versus fun, feminist versus *Cosmo* Girl; femininity versus feminism, editors versus readers) as they have localized, adapted and re-contextualized the magazine according the broader power relations of a given period.

Women readers, through an alignment with textual ideologies in conflict with Turkish patriarchy, and as evidenced by their remarks in their letters about their pleasures from reading and participating in an imagined community of *Cosmo* girls, demonstrate the anti-patriarchal potential of this alternative space. The mode of address in the readers’ letters presents *Cosmopolitan* as “Cosmo, a knowledgeable friend” and indicates that readers approach the magazine content as a legitimate resource on sexuality, relationships, career and consumer trends. Readers maintain this counterspace by writing letters to the editors or to the *Cosmo* Forum section to share their views, reading

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<sup>17</sup> As discussed at length in the Introduction, white, middle class Euro-American women’s recruitist view, in first-wave feminism, of the ‘ordinary women,’ and the colonialist as well as developmentalist approaches toward nonwestern nations and women often intersect. The monolithic nature of first-wave and western feminisms has been challenged by feminists of color and those from nonwestern settings. See, for example, Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 61-88; and Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

pleasures or problems and by applying in daily life what they reportedly learn from other readers' letters as well as from editorial content. Turkish *Cosmopolitan*, as both a transnational and local cultural text, thus represents a collective consciousness for its readers. Although the reading practice primarily remains solitary, the editorial content and readers' letters reveal a sense of an imagined community of *Cosmo* girls.

Despite the editorial mode of address that seems to target urban, middle-class women, the present study shows that the audience for *Cosmopolitan* includes different demographics. Readers' letters, editors' personal remarks, shifting editorial content and discussions of sexuality, in particular, point to four separate groups of readers: urban women from western Turkish cities who only follow the sex and relationship pieces and beauty/fashion sections; urban women who additionally follow the articles on women's rights and culture; the occasional male readers introduced to the magazine through their partners; and, housewives and "girls" from rural areas or non-western cities for whom a great gap exists between lived experience and magazine content. Indeed, as former Senior Editor Ceyda Asar points out, she envisions the readers of the sex articles as women who need sexual education and enlightenment. In contrast, she views readers of her own column as her equals, already liberated and more sophisticated than the sex article readers.<sup>19</sup>

The magazine, throughout its publishing history, has thus provided both upper-middle-class urban, professional women from big western cities and aspiring young women from underprivileged environments a safe space for public discussions of modern Turkish womanhood. Readers from different demographic backgrounds also identify an

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<sup>19</sup> Ceyda Asar (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

alternative repertoire within *Cosmopolitan*. They view the magazine content as a valid resource that they consult from college years to motherhood. The readers' letters also construct an imagined communal space in which readers assert their pride in their financial independence and claim rights to ownership of their bodies. Readers' discussions primarily revolve around the contested definitions of female empowerment, feminisms, femininities, financial independence, female sexuality, female desire and consumer culture as depicted through the shifting trope of Turkish *Cosmo* Girl.

Multiple images of female empowerment in the magazine relate to the historically specific image of Turkish *Cosmo* Girl. The Turkish *Cosmo* Girl shares certain traits with her American counterpart: she appears as a financially, sexually and emotionally independent, heterosexual woman not afraid to embrace her femininity through an engagement in beauty culture and consumerist discourses. Yet there is also a specificity to the imagined Turkish *Cosmo* Girl. The negotiated image of a Turkish *Cosmo* Girl has always been in conversation with the secular state-promoted "New Turkish Woman" image of the early 1920s (well-educated, professional, pro-Western women in western attire, viewed legally and socially equal to men with whom they share a western-inspired family structure), its independent feminist appropriations in the 1980s ("New Woman" as a feminist-identified activist that refuses to remain a passive recipient of state-implemented women's rights and claims agency in all walks of life including private matters), neo-Islamist re-definitions of "New Turkish womanhood" since the 1980s (highly-educated and Muslim-identified feminists or female intellectuals as well as female college students in Islamic attire drawing attention to the limitations of the earlier definitions of modern womanhood), and the societal responses to it with the rise of

private mass media in the 1990s (“New Woman” as an ambivalent construct constantly de-constructed and re-imagined by Turkish women as well as by the shifting ideologies of the Turkish government).

With the rise of Islamism in the 1990s and its political dominance through the policies of the Islamist Justice and Development Party since 2002, the *Cosmo* Girl has come to symbolize more than the self-assertive, liberated career women, as it also embodies the American editors’ concern with a ‘too local’ franchise that, in their opinion, does not fit the *Cosmo* format.<sup>20</sup> In a way, the Turkish *Cosmo* Girl, and the local editors’ self-censorship of any markers of religiosity, has embodied secular anxieties about an Islamic regime and the editors’ resistance to incorporating the Muslim identity of some of their readers. Indeed, the editorial mode of address and the incorporated images have included all women except those with Islamic attire, a substantial portion of the contemporary urban, college-educated female population as well as of the rural audiences in Turkey. While dissenting editorial voices, such as those by former Senior Editors Sibel Kilimci and Ceyda Asar—the self-identified Oppositional Party within the Editorial Board—attempted to incorporate images of successful career women with Islamic attire, the Editor-in-Chief and the American editors disapproved.<sup>21</sup> A particular *Cosmo* Girl image, detached from any religious markers, thus became central to the local editors’ struggle with shifting definitions of modernity and to the editors’ seemingly apolitical,

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<sup>20</sup> Former Senior Editor Sibel Kilimci criticized the American editors and then Editor-in-Chief, Leyla Melek Ciftci, due to their exclusion of photographs of Muslim identified women that she claimed did not fit their understanding of a *Cosmo* Girl. Sibel Kilimci (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>21</sup> Ceyda Asar (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey; Sibel Kilimci (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

yet implicitly oppositional, response to the government's suppression of alternative views.

Such culturally and historically specific negotiations mark the transgressive potentiality of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*'s semi-local nature. Unlike other adopted or appropriated forms of transnational American popular culture that conservatives view as corrupting local cultures in Turkey, Turkish *Cosmopolitan* has mostly escaped critical views. This primarily relates to the editors' adaptation of the content according to Turkish gender and industrial norms, its self-identification as a women's magazine (thus mostly avoiding the political radar), and its emphasis on an urban upper-middle-class female target audience, not historically associated with political activism in Turkey.<sup>22</sup> Unlike other American imports such as soap operas, which do not undergo a drastic content modification when brought to Turkey, Turkish *Cosmopolitan* content—both the translated and the locally produced sections—exhibits a direct engagement with Turkish gender norms, particularly in its coverage of sexuality and female agency.

Processes of localization appear most visible through Turkish editors' negotiations of the transnational Cosmo formula and local gender norms. Compared to American *Cosmopolitan*, the Turkish magazine has, at times, exhibited a more political perspective and a historically and culturally specific approach. Considering the Turkish *Cosmopolitan*'s business relationship with the American headquarters, its administrative, structural and editorial differences from the American version, and the contradiction

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<sup>22</sup> This misconception has, indeed, aided the rise of the women's movement in the 1980s. Middle-class women mobilized at that time to promote consciousness-raising among women in both urban and rural areas. As discussed at length in the Introduction, that historical period was one of political suppression for all anti-government thought, particularly leftist activism. Non-leftist women and their movement, however, were generally deemed trivial and apolitical. This period also gave rise to a neo-Islamist revival in western Turkish cities. Women's magazines, among other women's genres, therefore carried great significance in presenting anti-dominant views to an audience that has traditionally been considered 'harmless' if not depoliticized.

between local editorial and translated foreign content, I demonstrate in this chapter the processes of and editorial strategies for localization. I should note that I do not approach the American and Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazines as opposites, nor do I focus on how much of its Americanness or the transnational sisterhood model the Turkish magazine has retained. I rather focus on its engagement specifically with Turkish women's issues, the different discourses the magazine makes available to its editors and readers, and the extratextual implications of Turkish women's readership and localized production of an American women's magazine.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The broader framework in which I situate this case study is based on an assemblage of approaches: theories of hegemony as conceptualized by Antonio Gramsci and later taken up by Linda Steiner in her discussion of oppositional media texts; debates about globalization and heterogeneous local responses as emphasized by Arjun Appadurai; preferred reading positions as theorized by Stuart Hall; and polysemic discourse as conceptualized by Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>23</sup> This multifaceted analytical approach allows me to explore texts, contexts, readers, and producers as interdependent and historical, rather than as isolated, ahistorical dynamics.

As Steiner comments in relation to the reception of American women's magazines such as *Ms Magazine*, women's readership patterns offer a potential for the

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<sup>23</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in *Global Culture: nationalism, globalization, and modernity*. ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990), 295-310; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, [1963] 1984); Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, trans. and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971); Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, [1973] 1993), 90-103; Linda Steiner, "Oppositional Decoding as an act of Resistance," in *Critical Perspectives on Media and Society*, eds R K. Avery and D. Eason (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 329-345. See "Introduction" for a detailed discussion of each theorist.

development of a textually hegemonic, yet socially oppositional account of gender roles.<sup>24</sup> She argues that alternative women's magazines that lead to unified and preferred decodings (through the readers' non-critical acceptance of the feminist messages in its content) can provide small, yet important, spaces for resistance. Specialized alternative publications can thus have genuine political impact in their attempts to denaturalize feminine styles in other media texts.

Steiner's framework may serve as a relevant conceptual tool in analyzing earlier radical feminist Turkish women's magazines that presented a univocal view of patriarchal femininity as a counter-discourse to feminism.<sup>25</sup> Unlike such oppositional media with an explicit political agenda, which Steiner identifies as progressive, *Cosmopolitan* appears, at first glance, as *the* counter-progressive text, one that naturalizes capitalist patriarchy.<sup>26</sup> I would argue, in light of textual analysis and an examination of the readers' letters that while the multivocal written and visual content of the magazine reinforces conventional femininities and objectifies the female body, it also naturalizes female agency through the tropes of financial independence and sexual liberation.

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<sup>24</sup> Steiner, 343.

<sup>25</sup> The feminist-identified Turkish magazine, *Kadınca* (1979- ), under the direction of late feminist writer, Duygu Asena, remains a pioneer cultural text that has popularized feminism in the 1980s and legitimized women's magazine reading as a politicized act. Unlike Turkish *Cosmopolitan* which would later embrace patriarchal as well as commercial feminist identities based on female sexuality and beauty culture, the prevalent discourse, in *Kadınca*, with the exception of the advertisements, excluded conventional femininities. I should note, however, that *Kadınca*'s editorial content emphasized female sexuality but women's sexual experiences, unlike that of *Cosmo* girls', required a 'husband' ("3 K," *Kadınca*, January 1987). For a brief discussion of *Kadınca*'s feminist tone, see Ayşe Saktanber, "Women in the Media in Turkey: the Free, Available Woman or the Good Wife and Selfless Mother," in *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader*, ed. Sirin Tekeli (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1995), 159-160.

<sup>26</sup> Feminist media scholar Suheyra Kirca Schroeder's comparative study of Turkish and British magazines, argues, for instance, that Turkish magazines, such as *Kadınca*, embody a politicized, collective feminist voice while British *Cosmopolitan* magazine highlights the personal at the expense of the collective, thus naturalizing commercial feminism as well as a capitalist patriarchy. The present analysis will show, however, that Turkish *Cosmopolitan* merges the collective feminist tone of *Kadınca* and the individualist emphasis of *Cosmopolitan* and, with careful attention to local gender and industry norms, turns the magazine into a counterspace for Turkish women. Suheyra Kirca, "Popularizing Feminism: A Comparative Case Study of Turkish and British Women's Magazines" (Ph.D diss., The Centre for British and Comparative Cultural Studies, University of Warwick, U.K, 2000), 266-270.

The co-existence of multiple subjectivities and competing ideologies contribute to the magazine's 'non-intimidating' appeal to women from different demographics. Similar to prose discourse theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin, the magazine offers a polyphonic dialogue of competing voices. Bakhtin argues that a text is essentially composed of multiple voices and perspectives.<sup>27</sup> The polyphonic dialogue in *Cosmopolitan* is not limited to written text, since the accompanying visual content (the cover page, photographs, and advertisements) also reinforces and destabilizes capitalist patriarchal as well as feminist ideologies. The visual images often objectify the female body and perpetuate the hetero-masculine viewing position and patriarchy. But they may also reinforce readers' pleasures from eroticized male bodies and a female "to-be-looked-at-ness" that remain sensitive topics in Turkish culture. In either case, the images are often complicated by the captions, the articles that they accompany, or other editorial content, which often reflects a competing meaning.<sup>28</sup>

The counterpatriarchal features of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*, in the Turkish setting, manifest primarily in the magazine's focus on romantic heterosexual relationships and its non-critical stance toward conventional femininities—precisely what it has been criticized most for in the West.<sup>29</sup> Yet this emphasis on heterosexual privilege, commodity culture, and a limiting notion of female subjectivity takes on a different meaning in the Turkish context. Such seemingly patriarchal content combined with an editorial focus on financial independence and Turkish women's issues, such as the stigma

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<sup>27</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, [1963] 1984), 204.

<sup>28</sup> For example, a full-page advertisement for a local bank includes an image of a female cab driver and encourages women to apply for a special loan to take up that profession (which remains a male-only profession in Turkey). Yet the rest of the images in the same advertisement show other women engaged in activities like crafts making, cooking and cleaning, thus associating women with the domestic chores. *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 227.

<sup>29</sup> "Conventional femininities," in the context of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*, refers to shifting notions of domesticity, ideal romance, and beauty primarily based on heterosexuality, marriage, motherhood, fashion practices, and a limited understanding of women's agency.

around virginity, as well as the readers' preferred, non-oppositional readership of both types of written and visual content allow for deconstructions of local gender norms. Stuart Hall describes preferred reading as a decoding in line with the dominant hegemonic codes in cultural texts.<sup>30</sup> From this perspective, both feminist discourses and images that perpetuate patriarchy and non-critical readership may take on a counterhegemonic function in regard to proper female behavior in Turkey. Turkish women's preferred decodings of a textually privileged heterosexuality should thus be situated within Turkish patriarchal culture which continues to have an uneasy relationship with discussions of female sexuality. The magazine thus plays a crucial role in constructing and maintaining a counterspace, one that naturalizes discussions of female desires, needs and aspirations. As the following analysis will demonstrate, *Cosmopolitan's* neofeminism gains its discursive power from its ambivalence that has allowed the textual normalization of women's agency and female sexuality, representing a radical move in Turkish women's history and popular discourse.

## Methodology

This case study includes eighteen issues of Turkish *Cosmopolitan* published between 1992 and 2005.<sup>31</sup> For detailed textual analysis, I surveyed each magazine to identify content categories pertaining to gender roles in Turkish society. I then examined these categories in all magazine content including published readers' letters and advertisements

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<sup>30</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, [1973] 1993), 98.

<sup>31</sup> The issues included in detailed textual analysis include the following: April 1992 (First issue), June 1992, January 1993, April 1993, April 1994, April 1995, April 1996, January 1997, April 1998, June 1999, April 2000, April 2001, October 2001, April 2002, January 2003, April 2004, February 2004, March 2005. All samples except the April anniversary issues were randomly selected. April 1997, April 1999, April 2003 and April 2005 issues were not available at the time of conducting the research. For that reason, January 1997, June 1999, January 2003 and March 2005 issues have been randomly selected for inclusion in the research sample.

(with the exclusion of horoscopes, unless they, in some way, addressed the themes explored). The often interrelated themes that I explored include textual representations of feminisms and feminist politics, femininities, the image of the New Turkish Woman/*Cosmo* Girl as depicted through the subthemes of female sexuality, eroticized male spectacles, career, family/marriage, relationships, beauty culture, and consumerism. This textual analysis accounts for how and why the textual *Cosmo* Girl image has changed throughout the years and its implications for the readers.

Drawing from Janice Radway's study of romance readers, in which her analysis of readers' letters comprises the primary data, reception analysis in the present study is based on 231 readers' letters to the to the *Cosmopolitan* editor(s), as well as a personal individual interview with the sender of the only critical letter in the sample.<sup>32</sup> Of the letters, twenty-four are unpublished letters while 207 are published e-mails or letters included in the "Dear Cosmo" section of the magazine.<sup>33</sup>

I should note here that all of the letters in the research sample indicate explicit remarks about readers' readership for as long as fourteen years. These devoted readers view *Cosmopolitan* as a best friend or family member, and they often include statements such as "I love you, Cosmo!"<sup>34</sup> Several readers also proudly refer to their personal Cosmo archives, which they consult year after year. Readers thus give *Cosmopolitan* a

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<sup>32</sup> See Appendix B-III for reader interview questions in English. The only critical letter in the research sample that indicates an oppositional readership pattern is an unpublished letter about an article with implied lesbian love. M.D., letter to the editor, March 2005 (*Cosmopolitan* editorial files, Istanbul, Turkey). From here on, to protect letter writers' confidentiality, initials will be used whenever a reader's letter is quoted. In the case that, the sender uses a nickname or only a first name, one initial will be used.

<sup>33</sup> Fifty-two of these published letters appear in the eighteen issues selected for text analysis while 155 come from twenty-eight additional issues between December 1996-January 2006 surveyed for expanding the reception data. Among the twenty-eight surveyed issues, the earliest inclusion of readers' letters to the "Dear Cosmo" section is in the December 1996 issue, while the earliest occurrence of readers' letters in the eighteen analyzed issues is in the January 1997 issue.

<sup>34</sup> N.B., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, April 2004.

canonical status, as they perceive the magazine not as a pastime or meaningless entertainment, but as a legitimate instructional resource and a well-educated friend.

Despite the fact that some letters include confessions or references to the personal problems of the letter writer, a majority of the letters include senders' full real names. The editors encourage readers' use of their real names by offering a chance to win cosmetic products, and most senders thus include their full contact information. The ages of the letter writers range from 15 to 42. The pluralistic nature of recent letters reveals a shift from the monolithic nature of published letters in earlier issues from career women to those from housewives and stay-at-home mothers in recent years.

The editorial in the first issue also sets out the socio-economic prerequisites for becoming a *Cosmo* Girl, the imagined reader of the magazine. Former Editor-in-Chief Funda Belendir refers to her female friends who follow the American edition of *Cosmopolitan*, and she ends the editorial with the motto, "Smart girls carry Cosmo," in English. The targeted *Cosmopolitan* reader thus emerges as one who can afford and access the American edition and is fluent in English. Although the editors later replaced the English motto, "Smart Girls Carry Cosmo," printed on the side of each cover, with "Common Language of All Women in the World," in Turkish, frequent use of English words throughout the magazine shows that the target reader remains one competent in English.<sup>35</sup> The magazine thus appears to serve "readers who represent markets desirable

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<sup>35</sup> Marketing and advertising research conducted by the magazine support the claim that the target audience is urban, middle- to upper-middle-class professional women and aspiring college students. Marketing data has been provided by email, upon request, by the Marketing Department of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*. Ceyda Asar, e-mail message to the author, September 4, 2005.

to advertisers,” a typical occurrence, Linda Steiner has observed, in the women’s magazine industry.<sup>36</sup>

Analysis of the readers’ letters, however, points to a diverse range of readers, with seventy-three of the 231 letters sent from smaller towns or cities in or near rural areas and by readers from a lower socioeconomic status. Two of these letters in my sample are sent by male readers, while six letters by female readers mention a shared readership with their fathers or spouses. Despite this data and the editors’ acknowledgement of the occasional letters from male and transsexual readers, editorial depictions of the *Cosmo* girl image continue to position readers as heterosexual, female, middle class and urban professional.<sup>37</sup>

To collect data regarding the localized production processes, the power relations in the Turkish *Cosmopolitan* office, and editorial decision making, I engaged in a production ethnography. For a total of three weeks, two weeks in March 2005 and one in August 2005, I was a participant observer at the Turkish office while also conducting in-depth one-on-one interviews in the office as well as outside settings.<sup>38</sup> I also conducted detailed follow-up interviews, either in person or over the phone and through email. I should note in this context that I approach editorial statements in the interviews not at

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<sup>36</sup> Linda Steiner, “Would the Real Women’s Magazines Please Stand-up...For Women?” in *Women and Media: Content/Careers/Criticism*, ed. Cynthia M. Lont (Wadsworth Publication, California, 1995), 100.

<sup>37</sup> Sibel Kilimci, (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey. Analysis of readers’ letters and editorial content of Turkish *Cosmopolitan* demonstrates a more diverse reader profile, particularly since 1999. Letter writers include middle-class professionals, devoted fans of *Cosmopolitan* who self-identify as stay-at-home mothers or housewives, girls who have been introduced to the magazine by their mothers as well as rural women and occasionally men.

<sup>38</sup> During participant observation, I went to the office using the same means of transport (office shuttle for all employees working in the same building) with two of the senior editors; observed their work habits and relationships – taking notes and doing work myself, as they went about their daily routine; had lunch with them in the office cafeteria, and observed their office interactions. See Appendix B-II for interview questions in English.

face value but as texts that also need to be analyzed, mainly due to their self-contradictory and historically specific nature.<sup>39</sup>

People with direct authority over the editing and writing process in *Cosmopolitan* have always included women, with the exception of a male photographer and the occasional free-lance male contributors.<sup>40</sup> However, the publishers and the members of the magazine's advertising department, located in a separate building, have been predominantly male, as have the owners of the media corporations that own the magazines.<sup>41</sup> The editors note that they perceive themselves as independent from this male-dominant structure, which in itself indicates their claimed distance from industry standards. The editors' position embodies a type of negotiation which allows them to see through the shortcomings of the administrative hierarchy and to acknowledge the commercial value of the magazine, as well as assert their own ideas about feminism, femininities and consumer culture.

To go beyond the debate as to whether *Cosmopolitan* oppresses or liberates women (whether the editors, contributors, or the readers), one must explore the competing representations of female empowerment in the magazine, the interviews, and the readers' letters as well as consider the processes of the magazine's localization.

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<sup>39</sup> The four members of the Editorial Board whom I have interviewed include, former Editor-in-Chief, Leyla Melek Ciftci, the only editor that self-identifies as a Turkish Cosmo woman; former Editorial Director (Second-in command), Aysun Orhan; and former Senior Editors Ceyda Asar (arts and media culture, travel) and Sibel Kilimci (Literature, Women's Rights). While all of these respondents, at the time of this research, served on the Editorial Board with the above titles, they do not currently work at Turkish *Cosmopolitan*. None of these editors, except the Editor-in-Chief, used to read *Cosmopolitan* before working there. Indeed, as Ceyda Asar and Sibel Kilimci point out, they did not read any sections other than their own in the magazine. Kilimci, interview; Ceyda Asar, (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>40</sup> Between 1992-2009, four female Editors-in-Chief served on the magazine's Editorial Board. The Editorial Director and Editor positions have also belonged to female employees.

<sup>41</sup> Currently, *Cosmopolitan* is owned by Turkuaz Dergi A.S. that also publishes the mainstream newspaper, *Sabah*, and Turkish franchises of *Cosmo Girl* (with an independent administrative and editorial structure from *Cosmopolitan*), *Harper's Bazaar*, *FHM*, and *Esquire* magazines.

### **The Resistive Potentiality of a Semi-Local American Import**

The transgressive potentiality of Turkish *Cosmopolitan* primarily relates to its semi-local nature, or the editors' adaptations of the American 'Cosmo formula' to give it culturally specific, yet multi-vocal, qualities. The magazine's cultural specificities manifest themselves in its editorial, textual, administrative and ideological deviations from the American version. "Semi-local" also indicates the incorporation of specifically Turkish women's problems, such as forced virginity tests, as well as the local editors' conflicts with the American editors or among themselves. The editors' focus on their responsibilities as enlightened guides, their acknowledgement of and struggle with local gender norms, and their awareness of the cultural specificities of their readers inform the resistive potentiality of the magazine within patriarchal Turkish culture.

The content of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*—both the translated and the locally produced sections— exhibits an editorial engagement with Turkish gender codes. Former Editor-in-Chief Ciftci notes, for instance, that she adapted American content about sexuality and relationships to prevent any direct disruption of local gender norms and to avoid lawsuits by the Turkish government. Examples of such locally-conscious adaptations include avoidance of references to genitalia, and employing a vague language in the articles by the editors so that the content does not explicitly present a favorable image of premarital or extramarital sex. Editors incorporate such locally sensitive issues in the readers' letters and the "Cosmo Forum" sections or in articles by free-lance contributors.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The only exception appears in an editorial by then-Editor-in-Chief Leyla Melek Ciftci, *Cosmopolitan*, March 2005, 32.

The magazine exhibits its localized nature through its editorial, administrative and ideological differences from the American version. While this chapter does not present a comparative analysis of American and Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazines, but rather investigates the localized production, representation and reception of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*, a study of the Turkish magazine requires competence in the editorial and textual structure, thematic focus, and target audience of its American counterpart. I therefore conducted a limited comparative analysis, which has shown that American and Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazines share only a few features.<sup>43</sup> Thematically, they both highlight heterosexuality, female sexuality, beauty culture, and consumerism. Visually, both magazines offer images of the eroticized male body for female pleasures.

But significant differences exist within content, editorial perspective (on feminism, female empowerment, women's collective activism), and target audience. The cover pages and the articles differ, with a more diverse range of "cultured" articles and interviews on social issues and book/film reviews in Turkish *Cosmopolitan*.<sup>44</sup> The editorials and the dominant textual voice in American *Cosmopolitan* overemphasize femininity at the expense of any clear feminist images. In contrast, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*, contains multiple textual voices that allow for the co-existence of feminine with empowering, and at times explicitly feminist, images in both the editorials and other magazine content. Moreover, The Turkish magazine focuses on inspirational career stories and highlights career success as an indispensable part of the *Cosmo* Girl identity, while the American *Cosmopolitan* does not contain a similar emphasis.

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<sup>43</sup> The research sample includes the January 1993, October 2001, and February 2004 issues of American and Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazines, randomly selected for this study.

<sup>44</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci, (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

Most importantly, American *Cosmopolitan* appears as an ahistorical text, devoid of real-life social and political connotations while Turkish *Cosmopolitan* portrays a more socially aware, politically informed, and historically specific image. This distinction becomes most vivid in the October 2001 issue, immediately after 9/11. The American editorial entitled, “Why Women Need Men?” and the rest of the magazine content do not include any reference to the bombings, while the Turkish *Cosmopolitan* assigns an entire editorial statement to the Editor-in-Chief’s expressions of sympathy for Americans, along with a special section on New York, a day before the bombings. Turkish *Cosmopolitan*, unlike its American counterpart, thus functions as a historically aware text, not only engaged with the Turkish context but also with the events in the rest of the world.

Another important signifier of the Turkish magazine’s differences from American *Cosmopolitan* relates to the production setting and to the editorial hierarchy within the Turkish magazine. The Turkish office is located in the publisher’s headquarters in Ikitelli, Istanbul, and shares the same floor with the administrative offices of magazines such as *Harper’s Bazaar*, and *Esquire*. The Editor-in-Chief, the Beauty Editor, and the photographer share an office, with a private desk for each. Next-door is a bigger office shared by the editorial director, two senior and two junior editors and occasional interns. The editors and interns work at semi-private cubicles while the Editorial Director has a personal desk. The office has see-through glass walls, decorated with a number of cover pages which do not provide enough privacy. The only sign for the office is a magazine cover page taped on the door. Former Editorial Director Orhan notes that, “we aren’t like the American *Cosmo*. We don’t even have a translator or a secretary. So we end up

having to do all these odd things instead of concentrating on our writing.”<sup>45</sup> The Turkish editors thus perceive their lack of sufficient financial resources and the absence of a clear administrative hierarchy as obstacles to their writing and as one of the major structural differences between the Turkish and American magazines.<sup>46</sup> Such editorial statements reflect an awareness of their locality—both as employees in a magazine franchise and as cultural producers struggling with the limitations of the Turkish media industry.

The Turkish editors must negotiate such uneven power relations between Turkish and American *Cosmopolitan* offices. Although former Editor-in-Chief Ciftci and the Editorial Director Orhan deny any direct influence of the American office over the Turkish magazine content, the perceived power of the headquarters by two of the Senior Editors indicates the conflicting power relations between the American and Turkish offices. Senior Editors referred, for example, to the possibility of a post-publication criticism from the American office if the magazine were to include “too local” images, such as those of Turkish women wearing the Islamic headscarf.<sup>47</sup> Text analysis has revealed only one such image, confirming the erasure of Islamic connotations from the image of the Turkish *Cosmo* Girl. As former Senior Editor Sibel Kilimci points out, “Our Editor-in-Chief seems to be in line with the American office. I guess it wouldn’t fit what they have in mind for Turkish *Cosmo* readers.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Aysun Orhan (Former Editorial Director, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>46</sup> Sibel Kilimci (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>47</sup> Former Senior Editors Sibel Kilimci and Ceyda Asar both noted this perceived impact in a personal interview. Kilimci, interview; Ceyda Asar (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey. Regarding the coverage of local topics other than Muslim women, and the nature of administrative, and editorial decisions, the editors did not perceive any influence on their decision making. As long as they maintained the American *Cosmo* formula, they felt independent in producing their local content.

<sup>48</sup> Kilimci, interview. It is worth noting in this context the ambivalence around the national identity of the former Editor-in-Chief Leyla Melek Ciftci. Ciftci has a familial/biological tie to “America” as her late mother, a fan of U.S. *Cosmopolitan*, was an American teaching in Turkey. Ciftci does not emphasize her American identity as much since her editorial persona seems more in line with the “Leyla Abla” (Big Sister Leyla) image that she embraces. She has

Editors' remarks also reveal the contradictory editorial visions of the imagined and targeted *Cosmo* girls within the textual and production spaces of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*. Former Editor-in-Chief Leyla Melek Ciftci, in response to a question about the capitalist patriarchal codes in some magazine content, defended the images that they portray:

Ads that address domestic women, such as those for headwear do not generally choose us for advertising because we have articles on sex, women's rights and so on. It's just that we don't fit them and they don't fit us. I wouldn't refuse an ad if it somehow isn't in line with our *Cosmo* Girl image. It has to be really extreme and then we can discuss.<sup>49</sup>

Ciftci's conflation of the notion of domesticity with religiosity, which is then reduced to the Islamic headscarf, relates to Turkish *Cosmopolitan*'s problematic relationship to Muslim-identified women. The magazine editors appropriate ideals from the women's movement and react, through their use of the *Cosmo* Girl image, to the visibility of successful religious women and college students in the public sphere. Ciftci's statement, like the magazine content throughout its history, incorporates secular anxieties about the headscarf as a symbol for backwardness, and as an obstacle to modernity. This remark also reveals editorial differences on notions of *Cosmo* womanhood.

These differences become visible in an earlier article on members of the parliament which included a sympathetic interview with a female MP who, indeed, once wore the Islamic headscarf but, due to the secular law, had to remove it when she entered the parliament or any government office. This interview attempted to detach the headscarf from notions of disempowerment attached to it by former Editor-in-Chief

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presented a clear narrative of her dual identity only in the October 2001 issue, which also referred to her sympathy for her family and friends in the United States.

<sup>49</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, August 3, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

Ciftci and by the state feminism of the early republic. Here was a powerful woman, able to navigate in the public sphere. Ciftci explained in a follow-up interview that she would give an editorial position to a female applicant with Islamic attire if she had the necessary skills in that particular area.<sup>50</sup> She avoided, however, any comments about the perceived influence of the American office on the Turkish content regarding the Islamic headscarf.

The tension between foreign content and local features proves particularly important in discussing the historically specific complexity of female sexuality and violence against women in the Turkish context. Textual analysis demonstrates that Turkish magazine content, since the late 1990s in particular, has presented diverse voices that attend to the cultural specificities of the Turkish setting. Freelance articles, the occasional editorial statements and readers' Cosmo Forums that include conflicting views all highlight the tension within the magazine as well as that between the magazine and societal values. While the imagined Turkish *Cosmo* girls continue to enjoy the translated how-to-guides on sizzling sex and thus share some reading pleasures with their American "sisters," the magazine also offers them a multiplicity of local voices on problems specific to Turkish women from urban as well as rural and working-class backgrounds.

Issues between 1992-1993 indicate a more self-conscious editorial engagement with local views of female sexuality and its limitations while later issues demonstrate an indirect approach. This shift, beginning in 1994, is primarily due to a replacement of the entire Editorial Board. Former Editor-in-Chief Elif Dagistanli, who replaced Funda Belendir in 1994, and Leyla Melek (Ciftci) who replaced Dagistanli in 1995, each brought in their own staff. While the new Editors-in-Chief and their editorial team did not necessarily share the same views on female empowerment, their articles reflected a

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<sup>50</sup> Ciftci, interview.

consensus on a less feminist-identified editorial voice. In line with the overall shift in editorial policy toward all topics that may be considered “sensitive,” editorial content, since 1994, has included locally specific explorations of sexuality and gender violence not by the editors themselves, but in interviews, forums, or articles by freelance contributors.<sup>51</sup> Radical voices thus appear either in articles contributed by free-lance writers, or within the context of interviews so that the interviewed person, not the interviewing editor, directly challenges patriarchal constructs. An interview in the April 1996 issue, for example, exhibits the magazine’s ongoing engagement with violence against women. The interviewed project designer of the first Women’s Shelter in Turkey states that “women from different demographics in Turkey are viewed as second-class. They are abused, beaten, and thrown onto the streets. At our shelter, we are teaching them how to stand on their own feet. All this is for our women to live the humane life that they deserve.”<sup>52</sup> Inclusion of this statement reflects the magazine’s commitment to the issue of domestic violence while avoiding a direct editorial voice in the text.

Although the editors avoid first-hand critiques of locally sensitive issues, their personal remarks highlight their opposition to patriarchal views of female sexuality.

Former Editor-in-Chief Ciftci notes,

We never support the Turkish traditional obsession with female virginity; we never say you have to save yourself for your husband. But these are extremely sensitive topics, and I don’t like the idea of telling readers what to do. I only want them to be aware of other options out there, and that it’s fine for them to find out about their sexuality.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Despite changes in the Editorial Board, most freelance contributors from the earlier years continue to contribute to the local content.

<sup>52</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1996, 132.

<sup>53</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

Editorial Director, Aysun Orhan, adds that the editors avoid explicit remarks about premarital sex, cohabitation, and alternative sexualities, but that the magazine's content naturalizes those issues for their readers. She notes that "some readers may not immediately use the tips in our sex-related articles, but would definitely take them up for future reference."<sup>54</sup> Orhan also points to the active role the editors envision for women's sexual lives: "We want Turkish women to express their sexual desire, and reject any sexual advance they don't enjoy. Men react to this active female role. They may even say, 'Where did you learn this?'"<sup>55</sup> In regard to limitations assigned to female sexual pleasure by Turkish patriarchy, an article in the first issue, entitled "What are scholars of sexuality after now?" challenges the Turkish view of sex as a spousal duty for women.<sup>56</sup> Rather than merely normalizing a fixed understanding of sexual liberation, the magazine naturalizes the possibility of opening up the issue for debate within the discursive space of *Cosmopolitan*. Whether the editorial voice remains first-person or not, the editorial content thus remains oppositional in its engagement with Turkish norms.

Continuing the emphasis on the locally specific and diverse experiences of Turkish women, the "Cosmo Forum" section in the April 1998 issue, entitled "How was your first sexual experience?" contains messages from female readers from different backgrounds. This section includes a message from one reader who, in line with the projected *Cosmo* girl image, states that she experienced premarital sex despite the cultural obsession with female virginity. However, this image of liberation co-exists with another message from a reader who, on her wedding night, was sent back to her father's

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<sup>54</sup> Aysun Orhan (Former Editorial Director, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>55</sup> Orhan, interview.

<sup>56</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 67.

home because “no blood came...my hymen was too elastic...and he wouldn’t believe me.”<sup>57</sup> This letter also reveals that, despite all marketing research data about the magazine’s target audience as urban, sexually emancipated women, a drastically different readership still struggles with patriarchal norms.

In response to the demands of a diverse audience, editorial content incorporates contested images of Turkish womanhood. An editorial by Editor-in-Chief Ciftci exemplifies such textual and discursive complexity. Ciftci writes about two important women in her life and the different decisions they made in regard to their pregnancies:

One is married, the other single...they both experienced the excitement of pregnancy. One chose to become a mother and had her baby last month. The other, however, decided to terminate her pregnancy. The most interesting part, to me, is that the one that decided to keep her baby was the single one. This means that, in Turkey, even women who are not famous can make such brave decisions.<sup>58</sup>

Ciftci’s comment, on the one hand, draws attention to *Cosmo* girls’ ownership of their bodies no matter what their marital status. On the other hand, however, she finds it daring that her single friend decided to have the baby, and she implies that most Turkish women have to live with societal pressures that necessitate marriage before having a child. Furthermore, her remark about the bravery of her single friend represents that decision as an isolated act in the Turkish context. The editorial thus includes competing images of womanhood from discourses drawing on patriarchy (that single women should not have children) and feminism (assigning connotations of ‘bravery’ and radicalism to single motherhood in Turkey as well as presenting abortion as a means of women’s control of their bodies and lives). What gives the editorial its neo-feminist quality is the co-existence of such competing ideologies in the text which presents marriage, single

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<sup>57</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1998, 56.

<sup>58</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, March 2005, 32. This statement remains the only first-person critique of Turkish norms in an editorial since 1993.

motherhood, abortion and premarital sexuality as viable options for contemporary Turkish women.

A more radical perspective appears in a later article entitled “Are you ready for pregnancy?” by freelance contributor and feminist activist Mujde Bilgutay. The dominant flow of the narrative, published in 2000, suggests that the writer, a Turkish woman, can live alone, have premarital intercourse and desire to have a baby without getting married. “Yes to a baby, no to the father!” Bilgutay exclaims as she argues for the possibility of motherhood outside the confines of marriage.<sup>59</sup> Bilgutay’s approach represents the historical shift in the *Cosmo* Girl image, one from an anti-marriage/anti-motherhood career woman in the earlier issues to a type more ambivalent about such constructs. Such ambivalence relates to the textual co-existence of explicitly feminist perspectives including Bilgutay’s as well as neo-feminist discourses which incorporate both feminist and capitalist heteropatriarchal images within the same text or issue.

What then makes Turkish *Cosmopolitan* a transnational *and* local text is the taken-for-granted quality of the co-existence of the translated content (the hottest sex positions and accompanying images, for example), which addresses *Cosmo* girls all over the world, alongside an interview or article in the same issue that critically engages with Turkish gender norms and so addresses Turkish women in particular. References to the problems of forced suicide, random virginity tests in schools, selective abortions and honor killings of raped girls, specific to some rural and migrant communities in Turkey, as well as direct deconstructions of Turkish patriarchy construct a semi-local magazine.

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<sup>59</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 2000, 152-4.

### **‘I’m not a feminist, but...’: Re-constructing Femininities, Feminisms, and Neo-Feminism**

The self-contradictory nature of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*’s editorial content makes possible a non-intimidating progressive space in which to introduce, redefine, and discuss feminisms and shifting notions of gendered subjectivities. As editors and readers’ letters indicate, the counterpatriarchal resonances of this women-dominated counterspace may extend to the extratextual sphere. Turkish *Cosmopolitan* embodies features of a polysemic women’s genre that illustrates Angela McRobbie’s point that “the old binary opposition which put femininity at one end of the political spectrum and feminism at the other is no longer an accurate way of conceptualizing young female experience (maybe it never was).”<sup>60</sup> While the translated content appears one-dimensional with its monolithic reinforcement of capitalist and patriarchal notions of idealized womanhood and consumer culture, the polysemic local content presents a different picture.

The textual co-existence, in the local content, of multiple Turkish male and female subjectivities and representations, from radical feminists to anti-feminists, from women’s rights activists to self-named neo-feminists, allows for continual negotiations of traditional gender norms, and this elicits female agency. The Turkish *Cosmo* Girl image serves as a central trope in the magazine editors’, contributors’ and readers’ textual appropriations, and competing redefinitions of feminism and modern Turkish womanhood. While the editors have resisted associating themselves or the magazine with feminism which former Editor-in-Chief Ciftci perceived as man-hating activism, the prevalent discourse in the local content has historically embodied multiple types of

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<sup>60</sup> Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996), 158.

feminisms.<sup>61</sup> The local content, particularly about femininities and feminisms, reveals the Turkish struggle over shifting definitions of womanhood since the 1990s.

Turkish *Cosmopolitan* content and editors thus do not exhibit a unified notion of feminism. Many of the local editorials, articles and interviews in *Cosmopolitan* focus on women's rights and representations of feminism and exist alongside traditional, translated magazine content. Text analysis also reveals the radical versus neo-feminist tension between and within historical periods, as also touched upon by editors. In the first issue of *Cosmopolitan* in April 1992, *Cosmopolitan*'s Editor-in-Chief, Funda Belendir, sets out the mission of the magazine and its initial take on feminism as follows:

The most important thing is to not be oppressed by men or limited by rules. We should construct the ideal relationship with all men by being able to tell what we want and don't want. Don't ever forget that on one end of the continuum is sexist feminism and on the other is domesticity.<sup>62</sup>

Turkish *Cosmopolitan* thus positions itself somewhere between domesticity that the editorial associates with female submissiveness and a feminism that argues for the superiority of women. This first issue also covers the topic in an interview with late male author, Atilla İlhan, who argues that "We should fight for women's full equality with men: in the streets, in the kitchen and in bed."<sup>63</sup>

The June 1992 issue reflects the first-person editorial focus on women's need to fight. An article entitled "Is there a battle against women?" tackles the obstacles faced by Turkish women. As writer Ayşe Cinaroglu puts it, "We have to quickly spread feminist thought before having to fight men's counterattack in Turkey. Considering the fact that we still have random virginity tests and have a considerably high rate of illiteracy among

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<sup>61</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>62</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 4.

<sup>63</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 92-93. The first issue also contains fifteen uses of the words "feminist/feminism."

women, this [getting rid of patriarchy] is not going to happen in the very near future.’<sup>64</sup>

In addition to a call for feminist consciousness-raising, Cinaroglu criticizes the role of media using feminist terminology to perpetuate anti-feminism:

The truth is that media use cheap strategies to mislead women and maintain the patriarchal status quo. Repeated uses of words such as equality and women’s rights, images of the career women and modern husbands holding their babies are there as if to say ‘Here, you have achieved everything. What else is there to fight for?’<sup>65</sup>

Despite a focus on women’s rights and sexual liberation as tropes for individual freedom as opposed to a politicized act of sisterhood, the text includes images of multiple feminisms. The diverse range of feminisms relates to the individual editors’ and freelance contributors’ differing perspectives. Former Editor-in-Chief Leyla Melek Ciftci’s response to a question about the mission of the magazine reveals the conflicting interpretations of the term feminism. Ciftci initially associated feminism with hatred of men, but later related hatred-inflicting ideologies to radical feminism, and claimed that *Cosmopolitan* can be considered a neo-feminist magazine:

We aren’t siding with [radical] feminists, or with lesbians. But we have no hostility toward anyone. We, as women, of course, support women’s rights and full equality with men. But we’d rather address the personal lives of our readers. It’s not the mission of our magazine to inject in our readers feelings of hatred against men. *Cosmopolitan* is not a feminist magazine as such. Our mission [as editors] is to be a step ahead of our target audience and guide them with our content. We, then, are a neo-feminist magazine.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, June 1992, 12-13.

<sup>65</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, June 1992, 13-14.

<sup>66</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

Ciftci's equation of feminism and hatred of men reveals remnants of negative media representations of 1970s' United States radical feminism that surfaced in the 1980s in Turkey.

Former Senior Editor, Sibel Kilimci, who writes predominantly on women's rights issues, exhibits an ambivalence about the feminist implications of *Cosmopolitan*. While she criticizes the magazine's role in objectifying women and argues that Turkish *Cosmopolitan* is not a feminist publication, Kilimci claims that, "*Cosmo*'s very existence functions as a manifesto against Turkish patriarchy especially due to its focus on female sexuality which does not even exist as a topic for public discussion in Turkish tradition."<sup>67</sup> The magazine, indeed, opens up issues of sexuality for discussion not only by highlighting sexuality as a topic in the prose, but as a very visible image on the magazine illustrations and on its cover.

In regard to the conflicting codings in *Cosmopolitan* of women as both objects and as active subjects, former Senior Editor Ceyda Asar notes:

Radical feminists are opposed to *Cosmo* because of the legacy of this *Cosmo* Girl label. If only they wouldn't judge the magazine based only on the cover. They completely ignore the women's rights-related pieces that Sibel (Kilimci) and I try to incorporate in about 5-10% of the total content. If they glanced through the magazine today, they would be shocked at our *other* content about domestic violence, women's rights and so on.<sup>68</sup>

While female empowerment through ownership of one's sexuality remains crucial to *Cosmopolitan*'s imagined neo-feminism in the 2000s, the text itself allows for counter-

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<sup>67</sup> Kilimci also acknowledged the magazine as an oppositional text within transnational patriarchy. "*Cosmo* is a timely response because there is a recent tendency in the world, especially in the USA, to avoid any discussions of women as sexual beings and of abortion in particular. We then need to at least make women consider ownership of their bodies." Sibel Kilimci (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>68</sup> Ceyda Asar (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

perspectives as well. In an April 2000 article, novelist Tomris Uyar presents a critical view of the connection between sexual liberation and feminism as she argues “feminism cannot be reduced to women’s sexual freedom.”<sup>69</sup> Uyar also introduces class and regional background as important carriers of patriarchy, and as crucial dynamics that activists should consider when tackling the issue of women’s rights.<sup>70</sup> Uyar’s framing of equality feminism and capitalist patriarchy within the context of women’s rights and apart from radical feminist politics parallels editorial views since the late 1990s.

The March 2002 issue demonstrates the competing editorial voices in recent issues. The cover story, titled “What will be the new face of feminism?” appears on the cover page after titles such as “Become the woman men can never forget,” and alongside a seductive pose of Britney Spears as the cover girl. In regards to the competing messages in the magazine, former Editor-in-chief Leyla Melek Ciftci notes that “internal conflicts within the content can, indeed, yield a more fruitful text.”<sup>71</sup> Here Ciftci refers to the openness of the text due to the multiplicity of perspectives among editors that manifests in the seeming contradictions within the same issue or even within a single article.

Emphasis on equality and commercial feminisms constitute a significant portion of the magazine text. Although editors state that *Cosmopolitan*, throughout the years, has evolved into an explicitly more pro-women’s rights magazine, text analysis reveals the opposite, particularly for the period 1992-1999.<sup>72</sup> These earlier issues reveal a univocal

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<sup>69</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 2000, 203.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>72</sup> Ceyda Asar (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey; Sibel Kilimci (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

rejection of the notion of marriage and a family.<sup>73</sup> In the first issue, for example, a special section portrays “happily single” Turkish career women.<sup>74</sup> Another article in the same issue entitled “Hurray for Monday” claims that,

Success for women ends with marriage. Therefore, the only way for women to achieve success is to get of that door. At work, there’s nothing other than one’s wedding ring that will remind her that she is a wife and mother.<sup>75</sup>

Another writer challenges women’s domestic roles with the claim that “This patriarchal conditioning that we feel so much more in Turkey locks women inside and presents her own children as her handcuffs.”<sup>76</sup> The earlier magazine content thus presents the happy family image as a patriarchal myth.

Since 1999, the editors’ voices in *Cosmopolitan* have become multi-vocal in discussions of women’s issues and patriarchal constructs.<sup>77</sup> The shift in the magazine content allows for the co-existence of diverse views of femininities and feminisms through the tropes of marriage, motherhood, sexuality, career success and consumerism.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Except in its first year of publication when the magazine had an explicit editorial voice about women’s rights and feminism, no issue between January 1993 and June 1999 contains any direct reference to either term. With few exceptions in written and visual content that define the *Cosmo* Girl as happily married (i.e., *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 134), issues, between 1992-1999, share an implied feminist view of marriage and motherhood as potential obstacles to female empowerment in the public sphere. During that period, the translated features on male-female relationships univocally presented a pro-marriage approach.

<sup>74</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 71-73.

<sup>75</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992: 12-4.

<sup>76</sup> Cosmo Zoom, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1992, 14.

<sup>77</sup> Overall, nine of the eighteen issues in the research sample directly refer to feminism or women’s activism. Of the nine analyzed issues between 1999-2005, seven include direct or indirect references to feminism and women’s rights. There are nine articles with a total of fourteen uses of the word feminist or feminism. Six of the references appear in five articles critical of sexist feminism. There are eleven uses of “women’s rights” in four articles, and two neutral uses of anti-feminism in an interview with a male television presenter. Two issues (October 2001; April 2002) have no mention of feminism or women’s rights, while two others (January 2003; April 2004) demonstrate a critical look at feminism with remarks such as “It is out of fashion to hold on to feminist attitudes such as insisting on paying for your dinner.” *Cosmopolitan*, April 2004, 138.

<sup>78</sup> In regards to marriage and motherhood, for instance, six of the seven issues between January 1999-March 2005, contain seventeen texts with direct references to each topic. Of the seventeen, four, of which three are interviews, demonstrate polysemic representations. Of the remaining thirteen, only two are pro-marriage texts, while eleven are explicitly anti-marriage or anti-motherhood. Four are interviews with well-known women (with the exception of one interview with a male women’s rights writer, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1999, 217), and seven are articles, of which only two are authored by an editor. The only explicit critique of marriage/motherhood authored by an editor appears in two articles by Senior Editor Ceyda Asar. *Cosmopolitan*, April 2001, 114; and *Cosmopolitan*, March 2005, 54.

Articles by freelance contributors and feature interviews with activists and intellectuals have replaced the editorial statements on feminism highlighted in the earlier issues. As the feminist-identified editorial voice faded, external contributors and interviewed individuals have become the new sources within the text to offer readers multiple perspectives on Turkish women's issues.

An interview with pop singer Ajlan Buyukburc, for example, reflects a critical engagement with marriage.<sup>79</sup> In response to the question, "Why do you feel distant from the idea of getting married?" Buyukburc comments: "I am 29, have never been married, and don't ever want to. I can't even deal with sharing my home with someone else. Men in Turkey do not fancy the idea that a woman can stand on her own feet and be free. Turkish men! Do you hear me?"<sup>80</sup> Buyukburc's address to Turkish men and her focus on their problematic relationship to women's careers reveals the textual emphasis in *Cosmopolitan* on the tension between the career woman *Cosmo* Girl image and patriarchal expectations of marriage.

An interview with women's rights writer Atilla Ilhan in the same issue continues this critique. Ilhan questions the applicability of conventional roles within contemporary marriage and asserts that "Both women and men should be raised so that both men and women learn how to live by themselves. Men should learn how to take care of children and women should know how to earn their living."<sup>81</sup> While he attempts to subvert traditional gender roles, Ilhan operates within the confines of patriarchy as he does not question marriage itself or its relationship to the patriarchal control of women. The co-existence of competing discourses within the interview with Ilhan as well as between this

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<sup>79</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, June 1999, 136-138.

<sup>80</sup> 138.

<sup>81</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, June 1999, 217.

and the interview with Buyukburc in the same issue demonstrates the pluralistic aspect of the post-1999 magazine content.

Former Senior Editors Ceyda Asar and Sibel Kilimci provide an exception through their consistent engagement with feminism. Kilimci, indeed, conducted one of the most radical interviews in the magazine with feminist novelist, Hatice Meryem.<sup>82</sup> Meryem argued that women suffer from a “marriage programming error” perpetuated by patriarchal society. She claimed that this ideological programming results in women’s suppression of the alternative views expressed by some teenage girls:

Sometimes we hear from teenage girls that they don’t want to get married, or have children. We just smile back and explain that it’s a fantasy. ‘Sorry but don’t even expect respect for your dream. Unfortunately, just like us, you’ll get married, bear children and abide by the conventional forms of living,’ we say. But why! Can’t at least one or two realize their dream? Do we have the right to violate young girls’ rights to dream about a different life?<sup>83</sup>

In her critique of “marriage programming,” Meryem’s use of “we” reflects her awareness of the role of women themselves as well as popular media texts in reinforcing patriarchal forms of living. Yet, her agreeing to an interview in *Cosmopolitan* also suggests the resistive potential she recognized in the magazine and in its readers.

In a satirical piece entitled, “The Sad Return of Cinderella,” Senior Editor Ceyda Asar, further problematizes societal expectations of an ideal romance as she challenges the fairy tale image around weddings.<sup>84</sup> Referring to her experience at the traditional Austrian Ball in Istanbul, and her disappointment with her male escort, a writer at the Turkish *Esquire* Magazine, Asar writes, “Lessons to take from this ball: Do not ever go

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<sup>82</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, January 2003, 124-5.

<sup>83</sup> 125.

<sup>84</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 2001, 114.

out with an *Esquire* man. Never believe in fairy tales.”<sup>85</sup> Asar not only offers a humorous look at remnants of the Cinderella myth within her own identity, but she also challenges the image of the “*Esquire* man,” who she portrays as an unromantic and irresponsible type who left her alone in the ball.<sup>86</sup> Asar’s direct critique of all *Esquire* men also points to the existence of an oppositional editorial voice that embodies a self-reflexive critique about magazine imagery and constructed subject positions within earlier content that presented the “*Esquire* man” as a compatible partner to “*Cosmo* Girl.” Asar’s anti-mythic stance is particularly telling since *Cosmopolitan*, two months later, included two cover stories, entitled “Are you Snow White or Cinderella? Reveal the fairy tale woman inside you,” and “For those *Cosmo* Girls who want to get married: Special Convincing Techniques,” as if to textually compensate for any damage done by an oppositional anti-fairy tale editorial perspective voiced by Asar, and similar messages in published readers’ letters.<sup>87</sup>

Conflicting notions of femininity also manifest themselves in discussions of career success. The magazine content warns *Cosmo* Girls to avoid suppressing their female nature and advises them to highlight their feminine side in the workplace. A reader’s letter, in reference to women from the Amazon, embodies the editorial anxieties about ‘manly’ career women: “Women do the hunting while the men take care of housework. These women have one of their breasts removed so that they can aim better.

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<sup>85</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 2001, 114.

<sup>86</sup> Asar criticizes the magazine’s overall positive view of *Esquire* men in general since *Cosmopolitan* had, for a short period in the past, even cooperated with *Esquire* to include a matchmaking page with ads of *Esquire* readers to which *Cosmopolitan* readers could respond by calling a designated phone number. This pay-per-call service, called “Give me Your Hand,” began in April 2000 and was stopped shortly after. During the promotion of this service, *Esquire* was presented as *Cosmopolitan*’s “sibling magazine” (*Cosmopolitan*, April 2000, 158). Similarly, *Esquire* included a page where *Cosmopolitan* readers could post ads to which *Esquire* readers could respond. Turkish *Esquire* is published by the same publisher, Turkuaz Dergi A.S., Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>87</sup> Cover Page, *Cosmopolitan*, June 2001. In line with the self-contradictory textuality, another *Cosmopolitan* issue (December 2002) has a cover story entitled, “The Bride Who Fled Her Own Wedding.”

What a sacrifice!”<sup>88</sup> Whether for providing for family, or for one’s self, women’s struggle in the public sphere brings with it the threat of manliness and bodily disfigurement, even women’s replacement of their femininity with male-associated attributes such as aggression.

The problematic relationship of an empowered womanhood to aggression associated either with radical feminism or career success appears as a visible strain in the first issue. Male women’s rights activist Atilla Ilhan criticizes the fluidity of gender roles he observes in the “manly attitude of some career women and lesbian feminists” while a female advertising executive claims that, “Advertising is one of the few industries that doesn’t require a manly attitude for success.”<sup>89</sup> An article by feminist activist Gulay Gokturk also describes the workplace as a unique context in which women can freely experience their femininity:

The alarm clock every Monday invites the woman to a place where she can fully experience her womanhood. She is a ‘real’ woman at work, not a mother nor a wife. She can be looked at, flirted with, fantasized about, even fallen in love with. She doesn’t have to reciprocate any feeling.<sup>90</sup>

Gokturk’s association of the workplace with uninhibited womanhood exists in opposition to concerns regarding loss of femininity while climbing the career ladder.

The editorial voice, since 1999, has univocally opposed so-called masculine attitudes of overly competitive career women. Critical representations of masculine women surface in a feature article entitled “Sisters at the Parliament” on female members of the Turkish Parliament. The article presents a survey of female politicians in Turkey

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<sup>88</sup> S.T., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, March 2002.

<sup>89</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 12; 150.

<sup>90</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 92.

and criticizes women such as the former Prime Minister Tansu Ciller who exhibit aggression to survive in the man's world.<sup>91</sup>

These so-called sisters are no different from the male politicians; they tend to forget their womanhood the moment they earn that parliamentary seat. Remember the mayor who was expelled from [Ciller's] party because he had two wives? It was Ciller again who took him back five days before the general elections so she could raise her votes.<sup>92</sup>

Similar sentiments against gender fluidity arise in another interview that exemplifies the polysemic qualities of the post-1999 editorial content toward feminisms and femininities. The interviewed writer argues that, "Today's unisex society is directly a result of industrialization. Women who do the same jobs as men, those who can take care of themselves are looking for equal rights. The fact that feminism is winning means that feminists will end up living alone."<sup>93</sup> The link between modernity and the solitary nature of this unisex experience appears as a central theme in yet another interview with Tomris Uyar. Despite her critical view of aggressive women, Uyar presents herself as a writer who questions conventional femininities and claims to lack femininity herself. Yet throughout the interview, she exhibits an ambivalent take on femininity and feminism in the public sphere: she simultaneously figures femininity as a crucial element that most career women lack or suppress in favor of manliness *and* as a patriarchal construct and obstacle to female empowerment.<sup>94</sup>

Uyar's interview represents a micro-scale version of the overall co-existence of femininities and feminisms in the magazine content, in readers' letters, and in editors' personal remarks—a combination that makes possible a resistive space that does not

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<sup>91</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, June 1999, 58-60.

<sup>92</sup> 60.

<sup>93</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, June 1999, 217.

<sup>94</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 2000, 203-204.

identify as feminist yet functions as such. Textual inclusion of such seemingly contradictory discourses relates to the continually shifting *Cosmo* Girl image, in constant struggle with changing definitions of “new womanhood” in Turkey.

### ***Cosmo* Girl as the New “New Turkish Woman”: Sexually Liberated Career Women Go Shopping**

Textual depictions of female empowerment in Turkish *Cosmopolitan* gain their ideological power through the *Cosmo* Girl image, which readers could read as a symbol of modern Turkish womanhood. While this historically specific trope has changed throughout the years, it has always referred to a financially and sexually independent woman not afraid to embrace her femininity through consumer culture. *Cosmopolitan*’s first Editor-in-Chief, Funda Belendir, defined *Cosmo* Woman as one who “lives only by her own rules, stands on her own feet and loves life, herself and men.”<sup>95</sup> While the editorial in the following anniversary edition and future issues used ‘*Cosmo* Girl’ over ‘*Cosmo* Woman,’ a clear indication of their negotiated perspective of the societal stigma over the use of ‘girl’ for unmarried, not-sexually active females, the overall editorial voice continued to associate *Cosmo* girlhood with modern women who “love other people (especially men).”<sup>96</sup> From this perspective, their use of “girl” seemed to align them with Turkish patriarchy, while their focus on the sexual freedom of *Cosmo* girls re-defined girlhood as an identity that can share experiences of womanhood, associated in Turkey with sexuality.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 4.

<sup>96</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1993, 5.

<sup>97</sup> In Turkish society and media, the word ‘woman’ is used only to refer to married, divorced or widowed women. It is not used and rather avoided when referring to unmarried women since it connotes sexual activity.

Textual representations of the Turkish *Cosmo* Girl image in readers' letters, editorials and other magazine content, in the anniversary editions in particular, point to a shift from a sexually active, heterosexual, ecologically and socially conscious (mostly feminist-identified), anti-marriage and anti-domesticity career woman to a diverse portrayal that highlights individual choice over collective ideologies. In recent years, depictions of the Turkish *Cosmo* Girl incorporate a curiosity toward alternative sexualities as well as single-living, career success and women's rights activism as acceptable aspirations even as, in a more traditional vein, parts of the magazine emphasize marriage, commitment, motherhood, and femininities.

The historically specific trope of Turkish *Cosmo* Girl relates to the ongoing struggle over shifting definitions of "New Turkish Woman," conceptualized by the state in the early 1920s and challenged and redefined by radical feminists since the 1980s. The image of the New Turkish Woman, like that of the *Cosmo* Girl, has not remained static. The secular state ideology of the early Turkish Republic emphasized Western-oriented education and career success as an indispensable aspect of women's lives. Women's emancipation and their Western look symbolized the modernization project of the new nation and its break from its Ottoman Islamic past. Turkish feminist scholar Deniz Kandiyoti identifies the early Turkish Republic's "New Woman" image as a "prominent figure in the iconography of the regime," referring to women in Western attire attending mixed gender schools who were active in public and professional settings.<sup>98</sup> These new women were seen "parading in shorts, and bearing the flag, in school or military uniform,

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<sup>98</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, "Patterns of Patriarchy: Notes for an Analysis of Male Dominance in Turkish Society," in *Women in Modern Turkish Society: A Reader*, ed. Sirin Tekeli (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1995), 311.

or in Western evening dress in ballroom dancing scenes.”<sup>99</sup> With the independent feminist movement of the 1980s and the spread of media which has adapted commercial feminist ideals in the early 1990s, this new woman image of the early republic began to be redefined.

Atilla İlhan identifies two types of “new womanhood” that co-exist in contemporary Turkish society. One type of “new woman” parallels the image constructed and celebrated by state feminist discourses in the early years of the Republic, “one that is actively engaged in production and refuses to be locked into the domestic sphere, yet may acquire masculine features to succeed in her career.”<sup>100</sup> These “new women” could only legitimize their entry into the public sphere by reflecting an asexual identity, thus not violating existing cultural codes of male honor and female respectability.<sup>101</sup> With the spread of private media which has adapted feminist ideals, the new open market policy and the rise of consumerism, another type of “New Turkish woman” emerged in the early 1990s. Atilla İlhan claims that this new woman “is consumed as a sexual object in media, but is primarily a consumer herself. She uses her sexuality to empower herself and financially abuse men.”<sup>102</sup>

Both conceptualizations of the “New Turkish Woman” manifest themselves in the Turkish *Cosmo* Girl image. Editorials as well as feature interviews and articles present a polysemic, yet consistently evolving, representation of a *Cosmo* Girl intermingled with a new kind of “New Turkish Woman”: one that combines the financially independent career-woman aspect of the early state definition with a sexually active, feminine, yet

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 13.

<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of the symbolic values of women’s attire and women’s entry into the public sphere, see Deniz Kandiyoti, “Slave Girls, Temptresses, and Comrades,” *Feminist Issues* 8 (1988), p 45-46.

<sup>102</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 14.

empowered, image of a *Cosmo* Girl. The April 1994 issue presents a humorous editorial interpretation of the *Cosmo* Girl's sexual freedom as a favorable kind of masculinity, one observed in self-confident and sexually active Turkish women. Describing a survey about readers' perception of the *Cosmo* girl image, the editorial comment reads: "A male respondent describes the *Cosmo* Girl as a female version of him. We liked this definition a lot!"<sup>103</sup> The magazine thus does not problematize *Cosmo* Girl images that display self-assertive and sexually liberated attitudes, also associated with male privilege and masculinity in Turkish patriarchy. As such, this new "New Woman" portrays a unique subjectivity, an appropriated version of the earlier New Woman of the republic, and a more positive portrayal of the consumer New Woman criticized by Ilhan.

Depictions of this new "New Woman" emphasize career success and education as necessary for *Cosmo* womanhood. Textually, the magazine does not present socio-economic class as a status inherited or married into but rather as gained through financial independence resulting from education and a career. For example, both former Editor-in-Chief Funda Belendir's explanation, in the magazine's first issue, of financial independence as a prerequisite for a *Cosmo* Girl and male women's rights activist Atilla Ilhan's highlighting of the agency granted to modern Turkish women through their careers shows the connection between the *Cosmo* Girl image and the New Turkish Woman.<sup>104</sup>

Career and employment have thus constituted a crucial aspect of *Cosmopolitan's* new womanhood. The translated "Cosmo Career" section in the earlier issues (1992-

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<sup>103</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 64.

<sup>104</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 4; 12-14. A feature interview in the following anniversary issue with then-President Suleyman Demirel is also worth mentioning due to its emphasis on the "necessity for all Turkish women to be included in the workforce." The interview relates Turkish women's job insecurity to the patriarchal social structure which "assigns women the primary role of housewife and mother and deprives them of proper education required to compete in the public sphere." *Cosmopolitan*, April 1993, 157.

1995) included practical tips for interview strategies and for resume writing, and it was followed by portrayals of Turkish career women that were accompanied by photographs of those women in work attire, and usually at a work setting. This section was replaced in 1995 with the “Cosmo Success” section which includes a “Career Woman of the Month” sidebar as well as features on sexual abuse at the work place and interviews with upper-middle-class professional women.<sup>105</sup>

The “Cosmo Girl” section (also labeled, “Our Cosmo Girls”) included full-page photos of successful Turkish women whose Cosmo womanhood, in the 1990s, entailed a balance of a happy marriage, motherhood and career success (which, in the 2000s, emphasize individual choice and a non-critical view of choosing only one of those aspirations). This section exemplifies the extent to which the magazine’s specificity emerges from the different modes and meanings that co-exist and, at times, work against each other to form a non-intimidating visual space. The women featured in the “Cosmo Girl” section were photographed in both professional and casual attire, endorsing specific designers and referring to the complementary nature of success in the domestic and public spheres toward the attainment of an enriched life as a *Cosmo* Girl. The section provided a polysemic visual space in which the women that were dressed in professional attire—usually a pantsuit—or photographed in a non-domestic setting were ‘allowed to look’ at the reader/camera, thus representing a level of agency. Yet the same women, when photographed within a domestic environment, had a passive, detached look toward an angle away from the audience. Despite the accompanying written text that attempted to present a satisfying aspect of domesticity, the image of the unhappy female conveyed a

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<sup>105</sup> Depictions of career women range from news anchors, CEOs, doctors, writers, singers, academicians, upper-level administrators, advertising executives, activists and volunteers at NGOs including women’s shelters.

different meaning. As in the following images of the same woman, the *Cosmo* Girl of April 1994, the woman presented in the domestic setting exhibits an inactive and disengaged pose and is dressed in an outfit that exposes her body. When juxtaposed with the first image of her “happy and active at work,” her implied dissatisfaction in the domestic sphere becomes obvious.<sup>106</sup>



The first image shows the same woman in the public sphere as active, confident and content, with a smile and a slightly-open mouth that—unlike its passive, sexualized implications in most advertisements and other visual material—indicates her agency (that she can speak) as well as her willingness to be photographed. While it could also be read as incorporating a phallic image (the parking meter), anxieties elsewhere apparent in the magazine about successful women’s becoming “manly” are not as explicit in the

<sup>106</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 134, 138. These full-page images also serve as endorsements of the designer outfits modeled by a real-life *Cosmo* Girl. The captions in this particular section also serve as a covert advertisement for the company where the featured woman works as Director of Public Relations. The text that accompanies the second image emphasizes this *Cosmo* Girl’s enthusiasm for reading and writing (poetry) and exemplifies the polysemic nature of the local magazine content. The remark connotes some agency but limits it to activities that can be undertaken within the domestic sphere.

image as in the accompanying text. The caption introduces her as “Very beautiful, very smart, very cute, very funny, very emotional, very cultured, a good spouse, an excellent mother, a successful career woman...that is, a typical Cosmo Girl, or woman.”<sup>107</sup> From this editorial perspective, despite the illusion of agency visually assigned to this career woman, her beauty comes first, followed by marriage and motherhood, and career comes last. In this case, this woman appears happy to partake in the professional world and engage with phallic power. In a way, the image entitles her to initiate the gaze herself or reciprocate the reader’s gaze while the accompanying caption embodies editorial anxieties about how to balance femininity and career success. Still, the engaged look of the woman in the first image represents the specificity of the *Cosmo* Girl section in its deviation from other visual content elsewhere in the magazine that positions the photographed female primarily as an object for the male gaze and as a model for female readers to emulate in their lives to attract men.

This specificity becomes most vivid when the images of real Turkish women are compared to the images in the local and foreign-brand advertisements and those photographs accompanying the translated content. While the image of a (non-Turkish) working woman in professional attire may also exhibit agency through an active gaze directed at the reader or through her empowered position in relation to the male in the same image, this remains extremely rare with a majority of the non-Turkish female images that emphasize women as sexual objects. Photographs of non-Turkish women in most advertisements, even though they occasionally are presented as career women, also share a disengaged attitude toward the camera, usually looking toward another direction or the imagined male partner. In contrast, local advertisements with photographs of

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<sup>107</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 134.

Turkish women reflect an explicit engagement with the Turkish *Cosmo* Girl image, one that combines an active gaze directed at the reader/camera as well as an emphasis on both financial independence and the happy family ideal.

A full-page advertisement for a special bank loan, for example, contains four images of Turkish women, including one each of a housewife (engaged in crafts making), a cab driver, a caterer and a Laundromat owner. All except the housewife directly look at the camera and the captions present each woman as “contributing to their family income and to modern Turkey.”<sup>108</sup> While the caption for the female cab driver encourages women to apply for a loan to set up their own taxi business (which remains a male-only profession in Turkey), the rest of the images align women with feminine chores and the domestic ideal, thus not negating or erasing its necessity. The co-existence of such contradictory codings within the multiple modes of representation, from the words in the articles to the images in the photo-spreads, captions, and the ads, has contributed to the non-intimidating quality of the magazine’s neo-feminism.

Analysis of readers’ letters reflects a similar approach toward career success and conventional femininities as readers view each as part of an imagined *Cosmo* womanhood. Letters which primarily comment on an unrelated issue or ask a question about a beauty tip or cosmetic product often begin with an introductory statement that identifies the reader’s profession or educational status. The “Our Cosmo Girls” section in the April 1994 anniversary issue illustrates this discursive focus on professional identity. This section includes a featured *Cosmo* Girl as well as photos and short biographies of readers that self-identify as *Cosmo* Girls and either as career women or aspiring college students. It includes a third-person narrative about each *Cosmo* Girl compiled from the

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<sup>108</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 227.

readers' letters as well as a brief editorial comment that confirms the explicit connection between their career success or aspirations and *Cosmo* womanhood:

The only thing in life that Eker can't stand is quitting her job and staying at home. Not only for financial reasons, but socially she believes that women must have a career for the development of their own personality. Don't you agree?<sup>109</sup>

Earlier issues have thus emphasized career as an indispensable part of *Cosmo* womanhood while integrating multivocal statements about the value of heterosexual romance and beauty culture. If Turkish *Cosmo* girls did stay at home, there were three main causes: they were students; they may have chosen to temporarily pursue stay-at-home motherhood; or they could not escape the economic crisis in Turkey. From this perspective, the *Cosmo* Girl image did not consider motherhood/marriage and career success as polar opposites but as complementing each other to form a complete *Cosmo* Girl image in the 1990s.<sup>110</sup>

Letters and the editorial content since 2000 question those earlier images of modern Turkish women as both career professionals and family caretakers.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, the *Cosmo* Girl of the 2000s need not struggle to achieve it all to consider herself modern; a happy marriage, career success, sexual liberation, and her freedom to terminate or continue her pregnancy each constitutes her modern identity (instead of contributing to it in earlier issues). In other words, recent codings in both visual and written content

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<sup>109</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 198. The "Our Cosmo Girls" section was replaced in 1996 by the "Our Contributors" section that includes short bios of the contributors, who are either depicted as *Cosmo* girls or *Cosmo* men.

<sup>110</sup> I should note, in this context, that unlike later issues which have a more multivocal take on fashion and beauty culture, earlier issues presented an explicit link between loyal consumption of designer outfits and *Cosmo* womanhood. The *Cosmo* Girl section, indeed, allotted extended space for full-page photographs of that month's *Cosmo* Girl that served as a model for designer outfits—both professional and casual.

<sup>111</sup> A letter writer notes, for instance, "On World Women's Day, I'd like to share with you this example: Male lions never help with hunting. It's the duty of the female to struggle outside to provide for the family. But when it comes to eating, male lions sit at the table before the female does. Interesting, isn't it?" S.T., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, March 2002.

present marriage, motherhood, sexual and financial independence as acceptable aspirations on their own. First-person accounts of former-Senior Editor Ceyda Asar, for instance, problematize idealized portrayals of *Cosmo* Girl as both a professional and a happily-married or committed woman considering having children.<sup>112</sup> The shift in the Turkish *Cosmo* Girl image relates to changing, re-appropriated notions of new womanhood, particularly in regard to commercial feminism in the late 1990s.

### ***Cosmo* Girl, Depictions of Beauty Culture and Consumerism**

Consumerist discourses constitute a crucial aspect of the textual and extratextual representations of *Cosmo* womanhood. Readers' loyal consumption of *Cosmopolitan* as a commodity and their negotiations of the patriarchal depictions of consumer culture signify their entry into *Cosmo* girlhood. The magazine has, indeed, occasionally included self-reflexive editorial remarks about its commodity value as it relates to readers' view of the magazine as their best friend or family. Former Editor-in-Chief Elif Dagistanli claims, for instance, that "Those who hang onto the *Cosmo*-imitator magazines will miss the opportunity of becoming a *Cosmo* Girl. Please show the right way to those who can't find it."<sup>113</sup>

Readers' letters and the "Dear Cosmo" section in which they appear further reveal the relationship of the magazine, textual *Cosmo* girls and readers to consumerism. The "Dear Cosmo" section, since 2000, has been sponsored by the cosmetic brand, Clinique, and always includes a letter about a beauty tip, to which the editorial answer always contains a Clinique product as the solution to the reader's problem. Analysis of the

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<sup>112</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, March 2005, 54.

<sup>113</sup> Editorial, *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 5.

readers' letters shows that a mere thirty-nine of the 231 letters inquire about a cosmetic product or beauty tip.

Editorial promotions of the first-ever female consumer show (Cosmo Show) in Turkey, which first took place in April 1999 in Istanbul, and the semi-annual *Cosmo Shopping* magazine further point to the explicit link between consumerism and an imagined womanhood.<sup>114</sup> The magazine promotes the Cosmo Show as the biggest consumer fair for women, where “companies introduce their new products to consumers as shopping and fun awaits all those who attend the show.”<sup>115</sup> The glorified way in which the magazine content represents the “*Cosmo* Girl of the Year Contest” (part of the Cosmo Show) also demonstrates a commercial engagement with the conventionally feminine.

*Cosmopolitan*, since its early years, has presented multiple contradictions in its textual and visual representations of beauty culture and its relation to consumerist discourses. Articles, advertisements and accompanying images that perpetuate conventional femininities, idealized beauty and invasive aesthetic surgeries appear alongside articles that emphasize inner beauty, natural looks and self-confidence. Anti-consumerist texts and editorial voices may thus co-exist with or within advertisements, all of which are still underwritten by male-controlled corporations and designed to teach women how to present themselves to men, with an implicit hetero-masculine viewing position. The visual content shares a commoditized presentation of *Cosmo* womanhood, either through buying the magazine or by consuming the products that are endorsed by

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<sup>114</sup> Some examples that highlight the consumer identity of the imagined Turkish *Cosmo* Girl are, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1999, 194; and *Cosmopolitan*, April 2000, 52.

<sup>115</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 2000, 52. The Cosmo Show also included spa treats, exercise classes, celebrity appearances and a chance to meet the editors.

the editors, promoted in the advertisements and presented by Turkish *Cosmo* Girls. Former Senior Editor Ceyda Asar, while highlighting in a personal interview, the editorial limitations of a dependence on advertising revenue, criticizes consumerism and idealized beauty standards in her column.<sup>116</sup> She notes, however, that, “It’s strange but I don’t necessarily see it as a conflict or a problem when my column appears next to an ad for a cellulite product. We would have to live in a completely different economic system to be able to get rid of ads altogether.”<sup>117</sup> Asar’s oppositional columns thus acknowledge the economic system within which *Cosmopolitan* functions and reflect a metatextual awareness of the role of advertising in the magazine—a view visible in the local content as early as 1994.<sup>118</sup>

Asar’s oppositional ideas also represent her version of a *Cosmo* Girl that questions beauty culture. This *Cosmo* Girl co-exists alongside other versions offered in the visual and written content of the magazine. The images of women for foreign products univocally present a *Cosmo* Girl whose happiness is based on her immersion in beauty culture and fashion practices. These images usually present women as objects, often looking away from the camera or posing for the readers or their male partner in the advertisement. These images seem to ‘teach’ the readers how to pose for an imagined male partner and how they could attract happiness by consuming the advertised products. In a similar fashion, Turkish women in the local advertisements for cosmetic products, beauty centers or designer outfits exhibit a passive position, thus reflecting a non-

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<sup>116</sup> Ceyda Asar (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey; *Cosmopolitan*, March 2005, 54.

<sup>117</sup> Ceyda Asar (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, August 3, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>118</sup> In the 1990s, the magazine did not reflect critical views as Asar’s. Yet it embodied metatextual connotations by drawing attention to its value as a commodity and as a genre whose success is based on its appeal to advertisers. An editorial remark in 1994, for example, highlighted the magazine genre’s relationship with advertising and presented *Cosmopolitan* as a successful magazine due to its “many pages of ads.” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 27.

oppositional view of consumer culture and beautification. However, those Turkish ads that address working women include images of women as active subjects. This active position is due to visual references to the female in the workplace, use of professional attire that does not expose the female body, and the engaged gaze of the female model, all of which contribute to the competing images in the magazine.

The April 1994 issue vividly demonstrates the self-contradictory nature of the local editorial content in relation to the conflicting identities revealed in the magazine content. A comic strip by female illustrator Piyale Madra presents a humorous depiction of the female need to consume as part of creating and maintaining a self-confident, feminine identity. This section, entitled “*Women and Women*,” presents a woman who decides to have a make-over after a break-up. As she returns from her shopping trip and beauty make-over, she receives a phone call from her ex-boyfriend who wants to get back together. Since she feels more self-confident than ever, and feels like a completely different woman with her new look, she responds, “It’s too late.”<sup>119</sup>



<sup>119</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 194.

Madra portrays a humorous yet satirical image of the imagined connection between capitalist means of beautification and female assertiveness, particularly as seen in the “A New Me” section of the magazine, which grants select readers a beauty make-over with complete spa services, hair design, and make-up. Like the lucky readers that the magazine presents as completely new, self-confident individuals due to their make-over experience, the female character depicted by Madra feels empowered after her beauty make-over. Her shorter haircut and new outfits represent a break from patriarchal limitations.<sup>120</sup>

More explicit critiques of idealized beauty as well as promotions of a beauty culture continue to appear in later editorial content. Critical sentiments about consumerism usually appear in interviews or articles by freelance contributors. A feature interview for instance with four overweight models, in the January 1997 issue, challenges traditional expectations of an ideal body type while the editorial invites readers to apply to the “Cosmo Girl Beauty Pageant.”<sup>121</sup> Another interview with singer Candan Erceetin in the April 2000 issue presents Erceetin as a popular singer who asserts that, “Beauty isn’t based on physical appearance. My beautiful/ugly distinction is based on inner beauty as it reflects through one’s eyes.”<sup>122</sup> From this perspective, extravagant consumption of designer outfits and consumer brands have no impact on beauty.

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<sup>120</sup> Another humorous depiction of female empowerment through a visit to the hairdresser’s, appears in the April 2004 issue. The no-author commentary reads: “What can be more tragic than not finding the right man? The answer is not finding the right hairdresser’s. There, with quick decisions, you take the steps toward becoming a completely different person.” *Cosmopolitan*, April 2004, 61. It is worth noting here that almost all hairdressers in Turkey are male, and the implied image of the male hairdresser cutting the woman’s hair complicates the kind of female empowerment associated with beauty culture.

<sup>121</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, January 1997, 92-96; “Editorial,” *Cosmopolitan*, January 1997.

<sup>122</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 2000, 222.

The fine line between artificial beauty and natural *Cosmo* girlhood appears as a central theme in another article:

Some of your physical features that you think need to be fixed or hidden with make-up are, indeed, what contribute to your unique self. Instead of turning into a doll to be looked at, you should highlight these features and feel sexier as a result of it.<sup>123</sup>

Recurring juxtapositions of the confident and sexy *Cosmo* Girl with a “doll/passive sex object” image relate to editorial attempts to respond to their own concerns about the magazine’s overall celebration of consumerism and idealized femininities. Such depictions also embody editorial justifications of the kind of subjectivity and female sexuality they present as legitimate.

### **Turkish *Cosmo* Girls Reclaiming Female Sexuality in an era of “Forced Suicide”**

Female sexual desire has always constituted a crucial feature of the imagined identity of a Turkish *Cosmo* girl. Formerly taboo topics of sex and female sexuality comprise a significant portion of both local and translated content which challenges Turkish gender norms, particularly about proper female behavior and virginity. Self-conscious editorial re-evaluations of the “sex articles” and self-reflexive comments on their social implications, as well as textual incorporations of locally specific female problems indicate a more sophisticated engagement with sexuality in the Turkish context rather than a simple reproduction of a limited U.S. *Cosmo* formula. Although the written content on sexuality does not deviate from the translated step-by-step manuals that revolve around the achievement of an idealized heterosexual romance and the accompanying images perpetuate heteropatriarchy and the objectification of women’s

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<sup>123</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 2002, 102.

bodies, these explicit representations can serve a counterpatriarchal function for Turkish readers.<sup>124</sup>

Indeed, the Turkish government has also recognized a subversive potential within the magazine's content about female sexuality. In 1995, the government sued the editorial board and management "due to a textual reference to a girl who made love to her boyfriend. The rationale behind the case was that *Cosmopolitan* encouraged Turkish girls to engage in pre-marital sex and disrupted the traditional structure of the Turkish family."<sup>125</sup> Another legal case against *Cosmopolitan* centered on the use of the word "penis" on the cover page.<sup>126</sup> In regard to the fluidity of Turkish media law, former Senior Editor Sibel Kilimci points out that "there were other times when we used the word 'penis' with no problem at all. It all depends on the political situation and who is in power."<sup>127</sup> Since 1995, *Cosmopolitan* has continued to speculate about boyfriends and lovers with no further legal problems. Yet, all of the interviewed editors revealed their concern about more recent legal changes that would force them to practice self-censorship. As of 1 June 2005, the Islamist government passed a new legal code which bans, among others, use of the words, "rape," and "penis" from inclusion in any media text.<sup>128</sup> Since sexual and romantic relationships remain crucial to the Cosmo formula, as recommended by American *Cosmopolitan* editors, former Editor-in-Chief Leyla Melek

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<sup>124</sup> As will be discussed in the following section, the magazine's incorporation of eroticized male images of both Turkish and non-Turkish men, presents an alternative gazing structure to women readers who are not only allowed to desire the advertised products or the constructed *Cosmo* Girl image but also the male images in the magazine. This role reversal complicates the magazine's seeming objectification of the female body.

<sup>125</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>126</sup> The headline, "Stimulate his brain, not his penis" caused the government's reaction. Cover Page, *Cosmopolitan*, April 1995.

<sup>127</sup> Sibel Kilimci, (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>128</sup> This legal code (#5237) was accepted on 9/26/04 and passed on 6/1/05.

Ciftci notes, “We can’t do Cosmo without using the words boyfriend or lover.”<sup>129</sup> Ciftci explains, however, that the editors never faced a collective uproar against the magazine: “Apart from those cases and a few other instances when we received critical letters from the mothers of our readers, there has never been a real protest. It’s because people either don’t know how to organize or those that would hate us simply don’t read us!”<sup>130</sup> Ciftci’s remark also explains the lack of critical letters by readers who align themselves with one or more of the contested images of womanhood and sexuality in the magazine.

Analysis of the eighteen issues in the present research sample demonstrates that fourteen have direct references to sex or sexuality on the cover with twenty-two additional references in the inside story headlines and the “Cosmo Sex” section, initially entitled “Health Report.”<sup>131</sup> Both the “Health Report” and “Cosmo Sex” sections include translated tips for better sexual pleasure along with special features on women’s health and contraception.<sup>132</sup> Except in features on birth control, editorial content (between 1992-1999 in particular) avoids any direct focus on the issue of motherhood, which is primarily presented as an obstacle to career success. The text alludes to motherhood through the metaphor of pregnancy, an unwanted state to be prevented by *Cosmo* girls unless they are consciously trying to conceive.

An article entitled, “What if I don’t have a maternal instinct?” from the June 1992 issue remains the only explicit critique of motherhood within the textual space of

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<sup>129</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 156.

<sup>132</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, January 1993; *Cosmopolitan*, January 1997. Of the remaining four issues, two (April 1993, October 2001) do not contain any use of the words sex/sexuality on the cover but each has one heading in an inside article. Of eighteen issues, only two contain no reference to “sex” or “sexuality” in either the cover or the contents.

*Cosmopolitan*.<sup>133</sup> Writer Gulsum Soner, a newly-wed herself, reacts against societal expectations of motherhood and expresses her feelings of pity for women who are not brave enough to express their ambivalence.<sup>134</sup> Although the re-claiming of reproductive choices has always been part of population control discourses endorsed by the Turkish government, articulations of an anti-motherhood view in favor of alternative paths for women are still scarce in Turkish popular media.<sup>135</sup>

In contrast with *Cosmopolitan*'s self-proclaimed stance as in favor of female desire and women's sexual liberation, the magazine's neo-feminist depictions of female sexuality allow for patriarchal discourses about proper female behavior. An article entitled, "Lies about Sex," by male contributor, Umit Sayin, emphasizes the learnable nature of female sexuality while also drawing attention to the "myth-making" role of media, including Western women's magazines, of which *Cosmopolitan* readers should be aware.<sup>136</sup> Aligning himself with the radical approach of some critics of *Cosmopolitan*, Sayin deconstructs the sexual myths perpetuated by heteropatriarchal media culture. Nevertheless, the subtext to his article embodies the very same patriarchal concerns about women's unlimited celebration of their sexuality. The author's anxieties are best shown in his remark about the depiction of a sex scene in an erotic story. In regard to the "giant penis that gives such immense pleasure that the female character can almost die," he asks, "Which woman would like a giant penis to kill her from pleasure? Of course, only a

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<sup>133</sup> Soner also incorporates patriarchal concerns about "out-of-wedlock children" and single mothers in the same article. She writes, "How about women who decide to have a child without getting married? It's the most selfish thing to deprive a child of his/her father." *Cosmopolitan*, June 1992, 68. This article still represents a radical voice in Turkish mainstream media in the 2000s.

<sup>134</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, June 1992, 70.

<sup>135</sup> For a discussion of the government's investment in educating women about birth control, see, for example, Yasar Yaser. "The Turkish Family Health and Planning Foundation's Entertainment-Education Campaign," in *Entertainment Education and Social Change: History, Research and Practice*, ed.s. Arvind Singhal et al (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2004), 321-329.

<sup>136</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1995, 90.

prostitute who is crazy for sex.”<sup>137</sup> Hence, as much as the writer attempts to liberate women from the sexual myths of media, his underlying discourse allows for only a prescribed level of female sexual pleasure within the confines of patriarchy that sets the fine line between skilled lover and prostitute.

Similarly, the magazine content promotes sexual experimentation for female sexual pleasures but little in the magazine itself refers to female orgasm, or alternative female sexualities.<sup>138</sup> No issue between 1995 and 2003 has any reference to lesbianism. Only one local text allows for a polysemic existence of contradictory views of homosexuality. This special forum section includes solicited responses from female readers as well as male respondents who answer the question, “If someone from the same sex fell in love with you, what would you do?”<sup>139</sup> Two of the only five references appear in passing and present lesbianism as a deviance from *Cosmo* womanhood.<sup>140</sup> The only positive uses of the word “lesbianism” appear in a book review by a male writer and in a free-lance article by a heterosexual female contributor who describes her pleasures from a lesbian woman’s sexual advances.<sup>141</sup>

*Cosmopolitan*’s naturalization of female sexuality and ideal romance, as the preceding analysis has demonstrated, remains hegemonic. Former Editor-in-Chief Funda Belendir justifies this textual privileging in the first Editorial of the magazine by claiming that, “We are interested in social, political, economic issues as well. But who can

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, March 1994. Of the eighteen analyzed issues, there is only one issue in which the word orgasm appears on the cover. Five other issues include seven inside references within headings or subheadings while the remaining twelve issues contain no reference to female orgasm whatsoever.

<sup>139</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, February 2004, 38.

<sup>140</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1993, 190; *Cosmopolitan*, April 2004, 126. There is one textual reference in an inside subheading in the April 1994 issue. This is a special feature on the results of a survey among one hundred Turkish women about the sexual variations they have experienced. Lesbianism is presented here in the same category with fetishism and transsexuality among others. *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 98.

<sup>141</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, June 1992, 22; *Cosmopolitan*, March 2005, 219.

disprove the fact that the world revolves around issues of male-female relationships? After all, feminists, too, fall in love, don't they?"<sup>142</sup> While the editorial focus on sexuality and relationships as central concerns for all women itself implies a limit to the readers' oppositionality, an analysis of readership should be situated within the Turkish setting, in which female sexuality remains a sensitive topic. Despite the strength of its depiction of a woman's sex life as heterosexual, submissive (centered on satisfying the male partner), and limited, the magazine—through its open discussions of sexuality and constant visualizations of sexually active women along with images of successful career women—still allows for some amount of resistive potentiality in the Turkish context. This potentiality emerges as a crucial aspect of the counterspace constructed by the readers' letters and identified by the editors.

### **The *Cosmo* Forum and “Dear Cosmo” Sections as Counterspace: Pleasurable Female Communities**

Readers' letters and e-mails sent to the “Dear Cosmo” and “Cosmo Forum” sections of the magazine (1996-2006) construct an imagined counterspace, a non-judgmental community of *Cosmo* and so-aspiring girls. This counterspace consists of an alternative textual and extratextual community, in which readers can connect with other like-minded women and learn from others' experiences as well as from editorial content—both written and visual. In this alternative sphere, readers also assert their pleasures from eroticized male images and challenge traditional concepts of proper female behavior tied in Turkish discourse to virginity and “female virtue.” Editorial comments also acknowledge the resistive qualities of readers' experiences.

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<sup>142</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 4.

This community nurtures the conditions for the emergence of an alternative female forum within and outside the magazine. This female sphere resembles the empowering spaces that feminist scholar Angela Miles envisions for non-western feminists: those women-only spaces that “support women’s changing view of the world and of their relationship to themselves and others.”<sup>143</sup> *Cosmopolitan* constructs a multivocal community that is dominated by women (but also open to male readers) and reinforced by the competing messages within the written and visual editorial content as well as those between the polysemic editorial content and the patriarchal advertisements. In this women-dominated counterspace, Turkish readers from various backgrounds describe their personal experiences of using the magazine as a legitimate resource on sexuality, relationships, career as well as consumer trends; they reflect on their pleasures from reading as well as from gazing at the images of the male bodies in the magazine; they refer to the hard day-to-day realities that Turkish women face; and they acknowledge their recognition of a feminist ideology within the editorial content.

The senders of the letters speak either directly to *Cosmopolitan* as their best friend (thus using the informal “sen”/ “you”), or to the editors and other readers whom they imagine to be supportive, particularly in sharing their criticism of Turkish patriarchy. A letter, in the June 1997 issue, for example, notes: “As I was reading last month’s interview, I was reminded of the oppressions that we face because we are female. Always supporting *Cosmo*’s brave stance.”<sup>144</sup> Another letter writer also refers to Turkish women’s struggle with patriarchy:

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<sup>143</sup> Angela Miles, *Integrative Feminisms: Building Global Visions, 1960s-1990s* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 92.

<sup>144</sup> L.U., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1997.

As World Women's Day is approaching, I want to share my feelings with you. In our extremely male-dominant society, *Cosmopolitan* makes us feel the privileges of being a woman. Although we live in a society in which women, for various reasons, still aren't at the place they need to be, and don't have the freedom they want, I haven't lost my hope and my enthusiasm in being a woman. I wish you all a life in which women aren't remembered only on Women's Day but every day of your lives. A life in which women's rights are fully put to practice.<sup>145</sup>

The sender of this letter understands the magazine's relationship to locally specific oppressions that Turkish women face. Readers' letters such as this also indicate an important aspect of this empowering sphere: the privileging of a textually liberated, imagined womanhood constructed by their preferred readership as well as by the act of letter-writing that indicates readers' extratextual agency. As a reader puts it, "Whenever I feel hopeless and unhappy, *Cosmopolitan* is like my emergency medication. You are a great friend with whom I shared my secrets in the past five years. I love you, *Cosmo*."<sup>146</sup>

Similarly, readers' letters since 1999 reflect a multiplicity of views that reveals a more diverse reader profile as well as the counterhegemonic space textually and extratextually opened up by *Cosmopolitan* content. Letter writers include those devoted fans of *Cosmopolitan* who self-identify as mothers, those who refer to their experiences of premarital sex and abortion, and those who merely ask for wedding tips. Readers' statements demonstrate their view of the 'Dear Cosmo' section as a safe forum in which to discuss, among other things, marriage as unquestionable devotion, engagement as a patriarchal structure, domestic violence, and abortion. One reader reflects on her disillusionment with the happily-ever after myth of marriage as she refers to her fiancé who had been secretly engaged to another woman. As she explains,

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<sup>145</sup> T.T., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, March 2002.

<sup>146</sup> N.B., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, April 2004.

Even after I had confronted him, he continued to sleep with the other woman. My whole world shattered. I want to end this relationship, but he showed me, by using physical violence, that I have no other choice. Please help me make the right decision.<sup>147</sup>

By presenting male-initiated violence as an experience that this reader, a *Cosmo* girl, can encounter, the above letter denaturalizes the lack of any coverage of violence in earlier issues.<sup>148</sup> The reader's comment also embodies a questioning of marriage/engagement as unquestionable devotion and, as such, demystifies the image associated with the imagined outcome of heterosexual romance.

The inclusion of this letter also helps assure other readers experiencing similar difficulties that women like them exist within the *Cosmo* community. The potentiality of other readers' real or fantasized identification with the letter writer functions as what media scholar Joke Hermes explains as part of an interpretive repertoire which she calls "emotional learning and connected knowing."<sup>149</sup> Hermes notes in reference to the problem pages and real-life feature stories in women's magazines that this emotional repertoire relates to "human emotions and how to deal with them. In some cases, the magazines are used to primarily learn about other people's emotions and problems, in other cases readers are more interested in learning [and thinking] about their own feelings, anxieties, and wishes."<sup>150</sup> Since Turkish *Cosmopolitan*, unlike its American counterpart, does not elsewhere have a real-life story segment or problem page, letters

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<sup>147</sup> D., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, January 1999.

<sup>148</sup> While the December 2002 issue also includes a cover story about violence against women, this letter remains the only reference to violence as an experience that may be shared by *Cosmo* girl-aspiring readers.

<sup>149</sup> Joke Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1995), 41-46.

<sup>150</sup> Hermes, 41.

such as this make a large contribution to the construction of a similar emotional learning repertoire.<sup>151</sup>

The above letter also contains a critical engagement with Turkish patriarchy that rationalizes sexual intercourse to be between a husband and wife only. At the same time, it denaturalizes some Turkish men's abuse of this system, by proposing to girls so they can convince them to have sex. In ultra-conservative households, particularly in rural areas, if a girl's family finds out she had sex with someone (even though it might be rape), the unquestionable solution would be her immediate marriage to that man. Although the letter writer does not seem to come from a traditional household, her comments reveal that she suffers from the deeply-rooted patriarchal conditioning around the possibility of marriage that will justify her (and the other fiancée's) consent to having sex with the man.

Another letter similarly refers to premarital sex, yet excludes the possibility of marriage or engagement as a rationalization for sex. Only when it comes to motherhood does the letter writer present marriage as a natural prerequisite. This nineteen-year-old reader writes about her post-abortion depression, as she asks for help from the editors, and other readers who may have had the same experience:

Please help me, I am about to go crazy. I got pregnant from this guy and had an abortion because we weren't married. Now I feel like I am a murderer. No one else knows. My boyfriend is doing all he can to help me, but I blame him for not understanding. Please write a piece on this

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<sup>151</sup> The only real-life story (apart from the career women features in the "Cosmo Career" section) appears in the December 2002 issue of *Cosmopolitan*, which has a cover story entitled, "Cosmo real life story: The Bride Who Fled Her Own Wedding." Senior Editor Ceyda Asar notes that the editors, indeed, wanted to include real-life stories on a regular basis but they did not have as many people who were willing to share their private lives with a general audience. She claimed that "this is a Turkish thing. They don't want to be exposed." Ceyda Asar (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey. It is thus worth noting that readers themselves were not hesitant about sharing their stories within the "Dear Cosmo" section.

issue. What can women like me do? How do they forget? I love you [Cosmo] so much.<sup>152</sup>

Although the reader's rationalization of her decision directly relates to the Turkish patriarchal belief that stigmatizes "out-of-wedlock" children and the women who bear them, her comment, nevertheless, brings abortion into the textual space as a realistic possibility. The fact that she confides in the editors and other readers with "this secret that I can't tell anyone else" also indicates her sense of alternative female community.<sup>153</sup> Her question about what other women like her would do in a case like this points to a process similar to an emotional learning or connected knowing she may have previously experienced in her readership of *Cosmopolitan*.

The act of letter-writing to share one's sexual experiences, desires or problems with the editors and with an imagined network of non-judgmental *Cosmo* girls also represents a counterhegemonic move. This relates to the patriarchal structure of Turkish society which keeps most women from publicly voicing their own desires and needs—not only sexual desire but also their aspirations for individual autonomy outside the confines of marriage. While in the 2000s female celebrities (as well as partners of male celebrities) exhibit a radical lifestyle of cohabitation and out-of-wedlock children and constant media coverage of their lives contributes to the normalization of these matters for privileged classes, it is almost unthinkable that an unmarried letter-writer from the small town of Karabuk, for example, could acknowledge her sexuality and publicly use the word "sex."<sup>154</sup> A majority of these readers who share stories of their sexual experiences in their letters and sign by their full real names are thus aware of the severe

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<sup>152</sup> M., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, April 1998.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> M.G., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1998.

social and personal risks (such as bad reputation, more strict rules in the home, being sent to the ‘father’s home,’ divorce, domestic violence) associated with their identification, if their families or acquaintances access these letters. The fact that these readers, like numerous others, share a secret in a letter to be published in the magazine reveals that letter writers feel safe sharing a real or fantasized sexual experience within the discursive community opened up by *Cosmopolitan*.

In addition to identifying a sense of a community, readers’ letters acknowledge the educational role of *Cosmopolitan* as a legitimate resource. Readers’ comments as well as self-reflexive editorial remarks point to the socially counterhegemonic aspects of the magazine’s guiding stance. Former Editor-in-Chief Funda Belendir explains the magazine’s pedagogical approach in the magazine’s first issue:

I am sure Turkey is full of ‘*Cosmo* women.’ The problem is to realize that you are one. *Cosmo* jumps in right there, to make you realize your own *Cosmo* womanhood. Our topics are all around that line; to teach you how to get joy from life, to succeed in anything, and to inform you about all walks of life...especially male-female relationships—both romantic and sexual.<sup>155</sup>

Readers’ letters indicate readers’ use of the magazine as a valid reference primarily for sexuality and consumer trends while some also refer to readers’ use of career-related tips. A number of these letters mention the practical help that the magazine provides readers who are busy professionals, and thus have no time to follow trends and new brands. Readers depict the magazine in these letters as a time-saving resource that guides them in their purchases and allows them to become their ideal selves. The readers’ statements therefore indicate readers’ use of an instructional inventory similar to what media scholar Joke Hermes has called “the repertoire of practical

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<sup>155</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 4.

knowledge [, which] furnishes [women's magazine] readers with a temporary fantasy of an ideal self [...], pragmatic and solution-oriented, and a person who can take decisions and is an emancipated and rational consumer; but above all, she is a person who is in control"<sup>156</sup> While this temporary fantasy of complete control remains text-based and illusionary to some degree, readers' letters indicate the liberating and healing ("emergency medication-like") implications of such experiences in real life.<sup>157</sup> Although Hermes explains this repertoire as an empowering resource for Dutch housewives, Turkish career women's comments reveal a similarly more complete, idealized Self associated with the practical knowledge that *Cosmopolitan* provides.

Former Editor-in-Chief Ciftci supports this claim when she argues for the "news value of ads" that "guide readers in their purchases," while former-Editorial Director Aysun Orhan presents a more cautious account of the relationship of advertising to patriarchal notions of beauty as she chooses to focus on readers' agency: "We aren't telling anyone to be one way or another. We just present alternatives for our readers to choose from, and that's how our ads should be approached as well."<sup>158</sup> Regarding the real-life impact of *Cosmopolitan*'s focus on self-assertion and beauty practices, a reader comments, "Thanks a lot for making it possible for us to live happier, fuller lives as social beings! Isn't it so nice to feel attractive and beautiful as we're leading that happy life you offer us? You've been the life-saving force for so many women, and as the *Cosmo* team, make sure to give yourselves a lot of love, since it is you who taught us how

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<sup>156</sup> Joke Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1995), 39.

<sup>157</sup> N.B., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, April 2004.

<sup>158</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, August 3, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey; Aysun Orhan (Former Editorial Director, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

to love ourselves.”<sup>159</sup> Numerous readers have also shared their personal view of the magazine as a resource for sexuality. As a high school student reader notes, “My friends and I can’t even go on a date with our boyfriends [...] but with *Cosmo* we learn about things that we can never ask people around us. Especially sex topics are taboo here. With *Cosmo*, we feel hope and are relieved that there are other people like us.”<sup>160</sup>

Another reader comments,

As a married 27-year old woman, I continue to enjoy the pleasures that you made me experience at the age of twenty. Thanks to your tips, I never lose the excitement in my relationship. As I’m reading [your sex tips], I’m thinking of the ways I can apply them. Thanks for letting me look at the world from a whole other perspective.<sup>161</sup>

Readers’ counterhegemonic pleasures from this alternative sphere, as a guiding resource about sexuality in particular, may extend to the extratextual world. The editors also acknowledge the progressive role of Turkish *Cosmopolitan*’s focus on sex. Editors’ remarks about many readers who have written to them to express their gratitude since they “learned about and discovered their sexuality” through *Cosmopolitan* indicate the extratextual implications of the editorial focus on sexuality.<sup>162</sup> Textual privileging of sex and readers’ non-critical (‘preferred’) readership contribute to the normalization of its public discussion. From this perspective, readership may elicit anti-patriarchal actions, thoughts or subjectivities in real life. Although Editor-in-Chief Ciftci claims to avoid any “teacherly” attitude in the magazine that tells readers how to act about their sexuality, the mission statement outlined in the first issue by former Editor-in-Chief Funda Belendir

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<sup>159</sup> O.Y., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, December 2004.

<sup>160</sup> M.G., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1998.

<sup>161</sup> S.O., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, December 2004.

<sup>162</sup> Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey; Aysun Orhan (Former Editorial Director, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

highlights the educational role of the magazine that “teaches women how to take pleasure in all walks of life.”<sup>163</sup> A recent project proposal by the Editorial Board for a *Cosmopolitan*-sponsored educational campaign to empower rural women also reveals that the editors have aligned themselves with a consciousness-raising role.<sup>164</sup>

Readers’ letters, with remarks such as “I have learned how to become a real woman. You changed my life!” indicate the extratextual implications of Turkish readers’ use of the magazine as a resource.<sup>165</sup> A letter from the May 2004 issue reads for instance, “There is so much you give me every month... With you, I remember that I am a woman and how lucky I should feel. You, my rainbow, have liberated my once-entrapped soul.”<sup>166</sup> One of the most striking comments of counterpatriarchal readership appears in a letter, by a village teacher in Kilis, in the rural, southeast region of Turkey. The letter writer explains her readership as follows:

As a devoted reader of your magazine, I’ve taken up a new hobby recently. I am a teacher in a remote village, and I introduced your magazine to young girls here. *Cosmo* opened in their small worlds, a beautiful, new window that helped raise their consciousness. While these girls were embarrassed at first to even look at the pictures, they’re now able to comment about the articles. I’m now even giving classes in my home to those girls who don’t know how to read and write but want to enjoy the magazine like their friends do.<sup>167</sup>

The reader’s view of the act of educating rural girls as a hobby initially reminds one of the editors’ view of their readers as well as of middle-class, Western feminist, and

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<sup>163</sup> Ciftci, interview; *Cosmopolitan*, April 1992, 1. I should note in this context that former Senior Editors Ceyda Asar and Sibel Kilimci also acknowledged a prescriptive mode within the content on sexuality, in particular, while Ciftci and former Editorial Director Aysun Orhan denied this claim. Ceyda Asar and Sibel Kilimci (Former Senior Editors, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey; Ciftci, interview; Aysun Orhan (Former Editorial Director, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>164</sup> As of 2009, the campaign had not been actualized. According to the initial plan, the educators would consist of external teachers and volunteers, not the editors themselves. Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, August 3, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>165</sup> Quoted by Leyla Melek Ciftci (Former Editor-in-Chief, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>166</sup> Z.O., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, May 2004.

<sup>167</sup> M.K., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, June 2002.

colonialist discourses that imagine a subaltern in need of guidance and enlightenment. Similar to those models, the above letter implies that ordinary women should receive feminist knowledge from outside sources, such as the more sophisticated editors or already-emancipated magazine readers, the *Cosmo* girls. To better understand this particular reader's experience, however, one needs to reach beyond over-simplified media effects or cultural imperialism models.<sup>168</sup> By teaching literacy and active readership practices to rural girls who can then start to question the limitations of their daily lives, this reader's approach parallels the editorial perspectives of *Cosmopolitan* that view the magazine as a good friend to their readers to whom they present alternatives.

The guiding role of the magazine and the counterpatriarchal connotations of its female readership are most visible in readers' remarks that challenge proper premarital female behavior. A letter about the sender's vacation with her fiancé and how much fun they had reading the magazine's engagement guide reveals such a subtext.<sup>169</sup> This reader's statement, while reinforcing the acceptable place of marriage in a *Cosmo* girl's life and supporting the institutional rationalization of sex only with one's husband or husband-to-be, challenges the Turkish patriarchal obsession with female virginity. From a Turkish patriarchal viewpoint, if an unmarried "girl" goes on a vacation with a boyfriend/fiancé, the implication is that she must be engaging in a sexual act. The fact that the letter writer signs with her full name also indicates the alternative female sphere

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<sup>168</sup> For discussions of cultural and economic imperialism through media see, for example, Peter Worsley, "Models of the Modern World-System," in *Global Culture: nationalism, globalization, and modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990), 87; and Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, ed.s., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998). The present analysis parallels alternative views of global culture flows which have the potential to lead to heterogeneity and diverse local responses. See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in *Global Culture: nationalism, globalization, and modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990), 295-310 for a detailed discussion.

<sup>169</sup> D.K. letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, August 2000.

opened up by *Cosmopolitan*, since she seems confident that her family cannot access her letter.

Turkish men have also identified the potentially counterpatriarchal nature of *Cosmopolitan* as an educational source. The diversity among male viewpoints is illustrated best in letters by two male readers. A letter signed “A Cosmo Man” reads,

I am a *Cosmo* fan. *Cosmo* opened new horizons for me. I used to be a macho man, unsuccessful in my relationships with women. What can I do, macho behavior is in our veins! Then my girlfriend introduced me to *Cosmo*. To tell the truth, until then, I used to think women’s magazines were stupid. But *Cosmo* introduced me to the inner depth of the female soul, and taught me how to have successful relationships with women. Please don’t publish my name. I’d be ruined if you do because I have male friends who think I am still ‘macho.’<sup>170</sup>

This reader can be viewed as a “Cosmo Man in the closet,” not yet ready to challenge the macho behavior of his male friends, or even to admit his newly found identity beyond the alternative sphere of the “Dear Cosmo” section. This letter still signifies an oppositional position as the writer announces the behavioral changes he experienced on an individual level. Another published letter by a male reader in the January 2003 issue further highlights *Cosmopolitan*’s educational potential in the public sphere: “We try to buy your magazine as our financial circumstances allow us. The complimentary books that you give are invaluable for education. I believe they could be used to educate other young people in rural areas.”<sup>171</sup> Such letters from men and rural women indicate the unanticipated personal and social consequences associated with non-*Cosmo* girls’ and men’s readership of the magazine. The letters also demonstrate the writers’ recognition

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<sup>170</sup> C.M., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1997.

<sup>171</sup> M.C., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, January 2003.

of the potential for *Cosmopolitan* readership to create and entice personal or ideological change among audiences other than the intended target audience of urban women.

The self-conscious stance of the editors in regard to their influence on Turkish understandings of gendered subjectivities manifests itself in the local editorial content in early issues.<sup>172</sup> The second anniversary issue demonstrates this critical editorial stance with a special feature entitled, “Why won’t we quit writing about sex?” which embodies the self-reflexive and defensive tendency about the coverage of female sexuality in much of the local content.<sup>173</sup> The article claims,

We know that life isn’t all about sex but we are well aware that the power structure of all societies is built upon male sexual domination. In our society, this creates an inherent chaos as younger generations want to experience healthy relationships while also struggling against the control of their conservative, patriarchal families. Almost everybody is confused. As sexuality controls all aspects of our lives, it is high time we raised awareness about it. We will never stop writing about sex until everyone realizes its importance, and accepts the fact that women should, indeed, celebrate and enjoy their sexuality.<sup>174</sup>

In response to criticisms about the magazine’s “immoral and daring representations of sex which lead Turkish women to the wrong path,” the article stresses the active readership position that the editorial voice imagines for the readers:

We had an article in our last issue about lesbianism. Did all our readers then become lesbians? It is foolish to think like that. The purpose of our magazine is to guide women so they can find the right and wrong on their own. Our mission is consciousness-raising.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Indeed, *Cosmopolitan* editors, since the magazine’s first issue, have suggested a causal link between readership and behavioral change, primarily in regard to readers’ views about sex and sexuality. They published the results of numerous audience surveys conducted by independent marketing companies and solicited additional reader feedback through ready-to-mail surveys included in the magazine. Each anniversary issue also contained self-reflexive editorials and articles about the guiding role of the magazine. With the establishment of the local website and online accessibility, it has become easier than ever for *Cosmopolitan* editors to collect data on their projected influence on readers. The magazine’s website, [www.cosmodergi.com](http://www.cosmodergi.com), was launched in 2007.

<sup>173</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 100-101.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 101.

Although this statement points to the shortcomings of a one-dimensional media effects analysis, it nonetheless contains patriarchal anxieties about alternative sexualities. What is also self-contradictory in this statement is the self-proclaimed mission of consciousness-raising which, indeed, does construct more passive readership positions so that their progressive ideas about female sexuality can be “learned. We have seen a huge transformation in the past two years [the magazine’s publishing history at the time] as Turkish women have started to enjoy their sexuality.”<sup>176</sup> Those that have not yet been able fully to live their sexuality are thus advised by the male writer of another article in the same issue to “read a library full of *Cosmos*.”<sup>177</sup> Both remarks reveal the editors’ self-conscious stance about *Cosmopolitan*’s role in naturalizing as well as teaching female sexuality that readers often associate in their letters with their reading pleasures.

Analysis of the readers’ letters, indeed, reveals that Turkish women’s reading pleasures allow them to question the sexual confines in their real or fantasized lives: these limitations relate to heterosexuality and the objectification of the female body in media including *Cosmopolitan* and its advertisements. As one reader describes her loyal readership turned into an ambiguous romance, her statements challenge the rigid category of “heterosexual Turkish woman.” The reader refers to *Cosmopolitan* as her new “lover, giving me such a feeling of love, completeness, and togetherness.”<sup>178</sup> Her reference to *Cosmopolitan* as her lover contains lesbian or transgender overtones. As she explains, “It has been such a wonderful feeling, a reading togetherness! I re-discovered myself,” her choice of words imply an orgasmic moment of reading *Cosmopolitan*, masquerading as

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<sup>176</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 62. This statement implicitly relates to the editorial assumption about the mission of advertising, which necessarily presumes that readers will ‘learn’ about products, trends and ways of presenting themselves by emulating the models shown in the advertisements.

<sup>177</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 88.

<sup>178</sup> S.S., letter to the editor, March 2005 (*Cosmopolitan* editorial files, Istanbul, Turkey).

either a female-to-male, or a female lover, which connotes that her reading experience parallels lesbianism or contains transgender pleasures.<sup>179</sup>

In this alternative discursive community, reading habits of the readers indicate a shared experience of a concentrated and loyal readership, so much that it is not uncommon to find statements in readers' letters such as "I don't want anyone to be around when I'm reading. The idea of having to share my magazine makes me crazy," "I can't wait to go home to start reading," "I memorize each and every word in Cosmo, from front to cover," or "All my connection with the outside world is lost as I enjoy my magazine."<sup>180</sup> Even when they experience non-solitary reading, as with their partner or with their female friends communally enjoying eroticized male images in the magazine, or when they reportedly share the magazine with their mother/sister and even their father (in two cases), the readers self-consciously enjoy the special time they set for their reading pleasures.<sup>181</sup> Despite frequent remarks about the escape value of the magazine, readers continually note that reading *Cosmopolitan* is simultaneously fun, educational and a life-transforming, personal experience.

Readers' pleasures from the magazine largely relate to the reversal of the patriarchal gaze structure and to the textual naturalization of female desire toward the male body. Turkish *Cosmopolitan* is a pioneer text in its visual and textual incorporation of eroticized images of Turkish and foreign men for the viewing pleasures of the

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<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> C.G., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, June 2004.

<sup>181</sup> Four readers specifically comment on their reading pleasures that they share with their boyfriend/husband. Three group letters and an individual letter indicate readers' communal viewing pleasures from male spectacles. Seventeen readers refer to their shared reading experiences with their mothers/sisters, as two readers comment about their father's shared readership of *Cosmopolitan*.

readers.<sup>182</sup> Since 1992, Turkish male pop stars and celebrities have posed nude or semi-nude for feature interviews as well as the cover page.<sup>183</sup> The earliest inclusion of nude images of a Turkish male celebrity was in a 1992 interview with talk show host, Cem Ozer, to be followed in April 1994 by a cover page and interview devoted to the semi-nude poses of Tarkan, famous pop star and sex symbol.<sup>184</sup> Other examples include an annual calendar with photos of Turkish and foreign male celebrities, and the Cosmo Man section, a semi-annual insert that includes interviews and photos with well-known men, usually from media or sports industries.<sup>185</sup>

This visual focus on the male body embodies an ideological stance as reflected in editorial comments within the magazine text and in personal interviews. Editors acknowledge the ideological consequences of such textual reversals of patriarchal gaze structures. Former Senior Editor Ceyda Asar points out that inclusion of eroticized male images has an educational function as well: “We have so many articles about sex, so I believe the male body must always be included. These images create some familiarity with the male body so women do not get scared when they actually see a real one.”<sup>186</sup> Editors also claim that they not only want to empower their readers by overturning subject male-object female binaries, but they also want to equip their readers with the

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<sup>182</sup> Of the eighteen analyzed issues between 1992-2005, there are 155 images of nude or eroticized male bodies, of which forty-nine belong to Turkish male celebrities; while 146 images belong to foreign men. Only two issues (April 1992; April 1993) lack any inclusion of eroticized male images.

<sup>183</sup> Cover page, *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994.

<sup>184</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, April 1994, 114-7.

<sup>185</sup> *Cosmopolitan*, since 2000, has included more images of the semi-nude foreign male body and less visual content of the eroticized Turkish male body. Images of foreign (mostly American) men often are given out in posters, accompany translated articles on sex, or appear in the “Male beauty of the month” and “Cosmo Man” sections that include photographs borrowed from the archives of American *Cosmopolitan*. Former Editorial Director Aysun Orhan notes that Turkish *Cosmopolitan* editors could request visual or editorial material from American archives as well as from other *Cosmopolitan* franchises. Turkish editors also received similar requests from the franchises in other countries. Aysun Orhan (Former Editorial Director, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 29, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>186</sup> Ceyda Asar (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

ideological background to question that role reversal which, indeed, sustains subject-object structures by replacing the gazed-at female body with the male body.<sup>187</sup>

Magazine content such as an unsigned article (1992), entitled “The Penis Came Out of the Closet,” complements this ideological stance. The article questions the societal taboo around visual representation of male genitalia in media and claims that “every millimeter of the female body has been exposed while male bodies remain to be viewed as ungazeable, especially because men have historically been hesitant to any representation of their bodies.”<sup>188</sup> This remark also embodies the inherent tensions within the magazine created by the constant inclusion of eroticized images of the female body in its editorial content and advertisements while oppositional views that expose the hetero-masculine viewing position and alternative gazing structures that objectify male bodies contribute to the multivocality of the magazine. Editorial content as well as editors’ personal remarks thus reflect an ideological engagement with eroticized male images as a textual strategy to grant readers agency and to denaturalize the normalization of female nudity. At the same time, the dominance of the passive, female object in most advertisements continues to complicate the offered oppositionality.

Analysis of the readers’ letters demonstrates the existence of readers’ pleasures from the magazine’s inclusion of eroticized images of male bodies both within the editorial content and the advertisements.<sup>189</sup> It also points to the emergence of a counterspace within the magazine, and, at times, in the extratextual world of the readers, in which women can actively engage in undoing the patriarchal gaze structures and

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<sup>187</sup> Asar, interview; Sibel Kilimci, (Former Senior Editor, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*), interview by the author, March 28, 2005, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>188</sup> Quoted in *Cosmopolitan*, April 2000, 49.

<sup>189</sup> Of the 231 analyzed readers’ letters between 1996-2006, there are nine published letters with explicit references to readers’ pleasures from specific nude or eroticized images of male bodies.

express their pleasures from male bodies, without fears of condemnation or embarrassment. This becomes evident in the numerous published letters signed by readers who often choose to use their real full names as they articulate their passion toward and pleasures from the photographed male bodies. A reader's letter signed by her full name reads: "In your past two issues, the handsome guy in the ad on your back cover drew me to the magazine. I think if you move this image to the front cover, you'd double your sales."<sup>190</sup>

As indicated in some group letters signed by readers who experience social reading as opposed to an isolated readership, challenging the Male Subject/Female object binaries may take the form of women communally gazing at certain male images and sharing their pleasures from them.<sup>191</sup> In reference to the "Cosmo Man" section that includes a photo zooming on the torso and genital area of a Turkish male model, a group letter from six self-identified college students reads, "On behalf of all the girls in our dorm, we'd like to thank you for the Cosmo Man section, especially for the cover photo of Ankara's pride, Fuat Cingiller."<sup>192</sup>

Positioning one's self as an active subject may also take place beyond the textual sphere as in the case of readers putting up male images on their walls for uninterrupted and ongoing viewing experiences which they enjoy sharing with their female friends in their real lives as well as within the textual world of the magazine.<sup>193</sup> A letter signed by "A group of Cosmo Girls" refers to the same Cosmo Man section, "We can't thank you

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<sup>190</sup> S.M., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, September 2002.

<sup>191</sup> I.A., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1997; S.B., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1997.

<sup>192</sup> I.A., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1997.

<sup>193</sup> BGCK., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1997.

enough for giving us the opportunity of having a special photo of this attractive man. Looking forward to others. We have lots of room on our walls!”<sup>194</sup>

Continuing the active female subject position may also take the form of writing to the editors to request photographs of other celebrities to be included in future issues or to be sent directly to them.<sup>195</sup> Writing a group letter to the editor, using their full real name while expressing their sexual attraction to a particular male celebrity, and requesting further information and images in itself challenges the conventional norms of Turkish womanhood, which assign women the object position, one that women are typically told they should passively accept, not reverse. Readers’ pleasures, in line with a preferred readership pattern non-critical of the textual privileging of female agency and bonding, thus make possible a counterspace, a safe female community that *Cosmo* Girl-aspiring readers view as a legitimate resource for their diverse problems, from make-up issues to random virginity tests.

## Conclusion

Turkish *Cosmopolitan* is a commercial women’s magazine franchise not independent of broader cultural, political, and economic power relations. Regardless of the seeming limitations of its format, however, the magazine provides a perfect example of the engagement of a localized American import with local notions of femininity and feminism in contemporary Turkey. Turkish *Cosmopolitan*, through the Turkish *Cosmo* Girl trope, has combined the collective tone of 1980s’ Turkish feminism and of earlier feminist-identified Turkish magazines with the individualist and consumerist emphasis of

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> T., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, April 1998; E., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, December 2004; A., letter to the editor, *Cosmopolitan*, June 1999.

the American *Cosmo* formula. With careful attention to local gender and industry norms, editors have turned the magazine into a semi-local counterspace for themselves as well as their readers—at least to some degree. As I have demonstrated, Turkish *Cosmopolitan*'s polysemic textual quality—in both the written and visual material including the advertisements—has contributed to its neo-feminism. The ideological effectiveness of its neo-feminism is based on the tensions and contradictions inherent in the magazine, thus making this counterspace a non-intimidating community for most Turkish feminists and non-feminists alike. Distinct from the US version, Turkish *Cosmopolitan* has served as a neo-feminist source, a culturally and politically conscious cultural text that incorporates capitalist, patriarchal and counterpatriarchal as well as anti-consumerist discourses, images and editorial voices.

Throughout the publishing history of *Cosmopolitan*, this chapter has approached the readers, the editors, and the magazine as historically interdependent and diverse categories, rather than ahistorical, monolithic entities. By closely attending to textual evidence, processes of reception, and the changing attitudes of the producers, I have identified an ambivalent relationship to capitalist and patriarchal views of femininity and, at times, to readers' level of agency. The analysis revealed, however, the multiple ways in which the editors “sneaked in” their own neo-feminist views within the text and in their business decisions. Reception analysis has also shown that the magazine's target audience includes not only urban, middle-class professional women, but a small, yet important, group of housewives and rural girls for whom the editorial content functions in more oppositional ways.

The conflicting codings in the magazine's textuality, the construction of a female-dominated counterspace in the magazine content and in the readers' letters, and the editorial strategies to incorporate competing anti-patriarchal perspectives all point to the creation and real-life "try-outs" of a new type of "New Turkish woman," a *Turkish Cosmo* girl, who is not afraid to stand up and change. As the Turkish *Cosmo* Girl trope and the semi-local magazine continue to serve a resistive function for most Turkish women, another American import, pop-rock, which, like *Cosmopolitan*, was popularized in the 1990s, represents a more participatory mode of female empowerment for a very different group of urban women – young Turkish 'rockers,' the focus of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### Belly Dancing to Rock Music?

#### ‘Turkification’ of American Rock and Women Rockers’ Re-articulations of Gender

“As long as we have American imperialism, our society will never experience progress. The only means of real development in Turkey depends on the dismissal of all things American.” Late activist Deniz Gezmiş

Quoted in Online Forum Signature, of a Turkish Rock Fan<sup>1</sup>

On the outskirts of Istanbul, September 6th, 2003 marked a significant milestone in the history of rock music and youth culture in Turkey. Tens of thousands of people ecstatically attended Rock’n Coke, the first-ever open-air rock music festival in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> There, young men and women who could afford to pay about \$ 115 per person, entered a carnivalesque city within a city, one removed from the poor living conditions of the neighboring working class neighborhoods. For the first time, they enjoyed the freedom to safely camp and attend the on-site activities and the concerts of their favorite musicians together. Just one year after the first Rock’n Coke, not far from the festival site, a young single mother from the countryside by the name Guldunya Toren would be the victim of an “honor crime,” murdered by her own brothers appointed by her family.<sup>3</sup> Several years later, this incident inspired a collaborative album in which female pop and

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<sup>1</sup> Online user, “Takott,” “Forum: Ozlem Tekin Fan Website,” comment posted October 24, 2006, <http://www.ozlem-tekin-net.alevihabermerkezi.com/forum/index.php?topic=267> (Accessed January 3, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Rock’n Coke, the biggest and first successful open-air rock music festival in Turkey, is a commercial, corporate-sponsored youth event that has taken place in Istanbul since 2003, with the exception of a one-year gap in 2008. The performers have included well-known foreign and Turkish musicians of rock, as well as rap and electronic music.

<sup>3</sup> Toren’s two brothers first attempted to kill Toren on February 26, 2004 and left her seriously injured. She was murdered, at their second attempt, in her hospital room. For more details on Toren’s death, see, for example, Ali Aksoyer, *Hurriyet*, April 9, 2004, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?viewid=395483>, and “Turkish Single Mother in ‘Honour Killing’” *BBC News*, February 27, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3494270.stm>.

rock musicians such as Sebnem Ferah, who had also performed several times at Rock'n Coke, would dedicate songs to Toren to raise consciousness about gender violence.<sup>4</sup>

Turkish rock culture embodies this inherent conflict in urban Turkey, one caused by the presence of global consumerism, the state's promotion of West-oriented modernity, and the continuing presence of feudal and capitalist patriarchies in the music industry as well as society. This conflict makes possible the problematic co-existence of rural women such as Toren struggling with patriarchies threatening their lives, while young women on the nearby concert grounds enjoy camping and dancing with their male friends as their favorite female musicians sing about the plight of women, with each group of women practicing different forms of resistance. This chapter investigates the impact on gender norms of the mainstream rock musicians' and their audiences' negotiations of globalization and patriarchal industry norms as well as the commercialization of rock music, negotiations that yield a localized Turkish music culture, one open to both men and women. Overall, this study attempts to re-contextualize gender and female sexuality as a focus for studies of rock music in non-US cultures.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Various Artists, *Guldunya Sarkilari* ["Guldunya Songs"], with Naim Dilmener and Hulya Demir, © 2008 by DMC (Dogan Muzik Yapim), B001TY1C08, Compact Disc.

<sup>5</sup> The existing scholarship focuses on European and Oceanic settings and often disregards an analysis of gender. See, for example, Tony Bennett et al., ed.s, *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Sara Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Umberto Fiori and Michael Burgoyne, "Rock Music and Politics in Italy," *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 261-277; Edward Larkey, *Pungent Sounds: Constructing Identity with Popular Music in Austria* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1993); Shane Homan, "Losing the Local: Sydney and the Oz Rock Tradition," *Popular Music* 19: 1, (2000): 31-49; C. McLeay, "The Dunedin Sound: New Zealand rock and cultural geography," *Perfect Beat* 2: 1 (1994): 38-51; Tony Mitchell, *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania* (London and New York, 1996); Sabrina Ramet, ed., *Rocking The State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); and, Timothy W. Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc: a History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). The few studies of non-Euro-Oceanic experiences of localized rock music include case studies of rock culture in Latin America, China and Israel. See, for example, Pablo Vila, "Rock nacional and dictatorship in Argentina," in *Rockin' The Boat*, ed. Reebee Garofalo (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 209-29; Charles A. Perrone, "Nationalism, Dissension, and Politics in Contemporary Brazilian Popular Music," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 39: 1 (2002): 65-78; Andrew F. Jones, *Like a Knife: Ideology and Genre in Contemporary Chinese Popular Music* (Ithaca: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1992); Motti Regev, "Israeli rock, or a study of the politics of 'local authenticity'," *Popular Music*, 11:1 (1992): 1-14.

Turkish rock culture – performers, audiences and texts, including songs and music videos, performances, media interviews and fan-produced texts – demonstrates the relationships between musical and technological change as well as between localization and Turkish gender norms. Unlike the American-identified soap operas or the semi-local Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazine that has partially retained its American ties, locally-produced rock music in Turkey functions as an organic part of the contemporary urban music scene. Turkish rock offers female musicians and their young female audiences a localized space of resistance in which to exert agency in opposition to traditional Turkish norms of femininity and masculinity as well as in opposition to the music industry rules. Female Turkish musicians have frequently navigated within and between the mainstream and alternative spheres to assert their personal perspectives not only about the plight of urban women, but also about the patriarchal oppressions faced by rural Anatolian and immigrant women such as Guldunya Toren. Female rock stars, within the limiting structures of the music industry, incorporate their own, often self-contradictory, views of femininity and female empowerment in their lyrics, performances, public personae, and business decisions. A communal space emerges out of the musicians' mediating processes and audiences' diverse interpretations of them. This alternative, yet mainstream, space takes on a resistive role, often through commercial feminism, homosocial bonding, and reconfigurations of the role of women as cultural producers and active listeners –as more than the 'chick singer' or 'groupy.' The resistive features of Turkish rock are largely informed by the women musicians' negotiations of the state's regulation of national and gendered identities and by their ambivalence toward female empowerment, the masculinist discourses of rock, and political activism.

In this chapter, I analyze the audiences, music and solo careers of three such ambivalent figures: Sebnem Ferah and Ozlem Tekin, formerly of the first Turkish all-female underground hard rock and metal band, Volvox, and Nil Karaibrahimgil.<sup>6</sup> Each performer has a unique musical and personal style, and even Ferah and Tekin, who once performed together, demonstrate very different ideological and musical tendencies in their successful solo careers. Nil Karaibrahimgil, a self-proclaimed “Madonna wanna-be,” with a comfortable relationship to commercialization of her alternative lyrics in ad jingles and with an audience of devoted young women and girls who may not identify as rock listeners, does not, at first glance, fit neatly into the same group with Ferah and Tekin. She does not convey a distinctly rock sound, and her music is often identified by her fan community as alternative pop or pop with a rock-like mission.<sup>7</sup> Yet Karaibrahimgil views her worldview as aligned with rock culture and her music as pop rock or “pop with an attitude.”<sup>8</sup> She has also received a “Best Female Rock Singer” award and was the only female local musician on the main stage in the first Rock’n Coke rock festival.<sup>9</sup> Karaibrahimgil also shares with Ferah and Tekin an engagement with the localization of American musical genres. All of these performers challenge Turkish music industry norms through their incorporations of Turkish styles with American hard rock and alternative musics.

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<sup>6</sup> This chapter focuses on the solo careers of Ferah and Tekin (1996-2009) and of Nil Karaibrahimgil (2000-2009). I take into account the history of Volvox (1988-1994) in order to present a comprehensive analysis of the historical significance of former group members, Tekin, Ferah and Ferah’s accompanying bassist Buket Doran in the post-Volvox stage. The focus of analysis is the solo careers of each musician, their audiences and the texts that musicians and their audiences produce.

<sup>7</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey [Translated by the author. All quotations from Turkish sources in the present chapter are translated by the author].

<sup>8</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>9</sup> Karaibrahimgil received this award from the Turkish Magazine Journalists Association in 2003 and she performed in the first Rock’n Coke Festival in the same year (September 7, 2003). Between 2003-2009, this had been her only Rock’n Coke performance (Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey). Prior to her solo career, Karaibrahimgil collaborated with Turkish psychedelic rock band, *siddhartha*, and wrote and performed a song in their first album (“om” in *siddhartha*. © 1998, by Ada Muzik, Compact Disc). During her college years, she also formed an amateur rock band, “kopuk,” which was disbanded shortly after.

Turkish rock, in this context, does not refer to a monolithic entity that takes as its reference a fixed notion of ‘Turkishness.’ The part of Turkish rock that I examine rather refers to a constantly shifting formation that destabilizes subcultural-political/popular-apolitical binaries and offers multiple points of pleasure to diverse groups of audiences. Broadly defined, “Turkish rock” in this study refers not to underground, subcultural or explicitly politicized rock music, but to popular music – also known in Turkey as pop rock or alternative pop. This rather fluid category includes musicians who, at times, view their music and/or personal ideologies aligned with rock, and are often viewed as rock performers by festival organizers and the media. Their music, lyrics, and countercultural celebrity personae exhibit traces of rebellion not only against gender norms in the music industry and Turkish society in general but also against genre conventions. Yet these musicians have also avoided rigid categorizations with their use of multiple genres and their comfortable relationship to commercial culture. Each has achieved star status and is part of Turkish popular music and memory. Unlike their many underground counterparts in Turkey, Ferah, Karaibrahimgil and Tekin do not now carry explicitly political and subcultural connotations, although they did so at the beginning of their careers.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the earlier success of Ferah and Tekin as cultural producers in rock culture paved the way for subcultural female artists, such as Aylin Aslim, to enter mainstream culture since the late 1990s.<sup>11</sup> “Popular” rock performers such as Sebnem Ferah also collaborated with subcultural musicians to help spread their political, feminist messages. For example, Aylin Aslim’s music video for her song written for honor crime victim Guldunya Toren

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<sup>10</sup> Since the onset of Ozlem Tekin’s and Sebnem Ferah’s successful solo careers, several subcultural female rock musicians have achieved high popularity among the Turkish youth. Rock musicians such as Aylin Aslim and Asli appear more overtly political both in terms of their more edgy public personae, explicitly political lyrics and the free-admission rock festival, Rock for Peace (2003-2008), they chose to perform in.

<sup>11</sup> Asli and Aylin Aslim performed at the commercial Rock’n Coke festival in 2007 and 2009 respectively, thus indicating their crossover into mainstream culture.

had been banned on TRT, the official Turkish television channel, but her song later became the focus of a collaborative album in which Aslim and Ferah as well as several other female performers of celebrity status participated.<sup>12</sup> The album also inspired a television series by the same name and helped blur the rigid divide between “pop” rock stars and subcultural rock musicians. Despite these interactions, pop rock stars have always had an ambivalent stance toward politics, feminism, military imperialism, and capitalism. Audiences and female musicians, with a seeming ambivalence toward macropolitics and toward consumerism, re-imagine traditional understandings of politics, gender and rock music within a less intimidating communal space that often appears apolitical in the traditional sense. Indeed, musicians deny any personal alignment with politics, but the contradictions among their lyrics, publicity photos, performances, and interview statements yield a multivocal text, one that incorporates varying modes of female empowerment.

Each musician’s distinct musical and personal styles address and reflect different kinds of women: strong, feminist, yet romantic, heterosexual women not afraid to confront men in Sebnem Ferah; the macho female dominating men and not being scared of replicating or parodying male behavior while simultaneously exhibiting her sexuality and her passion for men, in Ozlem Tekin; and cheerful, feminine, yet alternative, popsters with an attitude in Nil Karaibrahimgil. As will be examined, the audiences’ diverse experiences of each musician’s styles which range from confrontational (Ferah) and violent (Tekin), to deliberately infantile, parodic and participatory (Karaibrahimgil), reveal the resistive potentiality of localized rock music in Turkey.

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<sup>12</sup> Aslim’s song “Guldunya” was banned from airing on TRT (2005) due to its explicit reference to rape and honor crimes. Sevinc Akyazili, “Bu ilkel tavir karsisinda sessiz kalmayacagim,” *Aksam*, July 17, 2005, <http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=887391>.

These musicians challenge and re-define what rock culture signifies in contemporary Turkey through their creative strategies of intertextuality and musical synthesis, their negotiations of Turkish gender norms in their lyrics and performances, as well as their presence and decision-making power in the male-dominated Turkish music industry. Regardless of what type of recording company they have worked with, each musician asserts control in all aspects of her music, from lyrics and music videos to marketing strategies.<sup>13</sup> Unlike their counterparts in both American and other non-US settings who remain marginal to masculinist rock culture, Turkish female musicians as well as their audiences have achieved ‘insider’ status in Turkish rock.<sup>14</sup> The presence of Volvox in particular, while only peripheral at first, helped naturalize the role of women in Turkish rock culture.<sup>15</sup> The visibility of female rockers in rock bars, concerts and festivals, their use of their bodies and sexuality, and their ambivalence about politics helped provide a resistive space for re-imagining different configurations of womanhood, sexuality and rock music in Turkey.

As such, Turkish rock represents a localized music culture which may function as a means to resist capitalist patriarchy and American imperialism. Processes of localization reveal multiple negotiations by and among cultural producers, audiences and the nation-state, negotiations of national and gendered identities and of American culture

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<sup>13</sup> Tekin, for example, worked for a long time with a local production company, Istanbul Plak, founded by musician Hakan Peker. Ferah established her own independent company after having worked under Universal Turkey while Karaibrahimgil worked with another glocalised company, Sony Turkey (Epic Records; BMG).

<sup>14</sup> For the earliest study that explores the relationship between rock and sexuality and views rock culture as statically masculinist, see Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie’s 1978 article, “Rock and Sexuality,” reprinted in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 371-389.

<sup>15</sup> The absence of any accomplished female journalists and critics in Turkish rock, except Oya Birgöl Yaylı, remains the only exception which partially maintains women’s exclusion from rock. But this should be situated within Turkish culture in which there are only a handful of music critics and publishing on any aspect of rock music is a very new trend for Turkish scholars and music critics. Some prominent critics and writers include Ali Akay, Tolga Akyıldız, Gökhan Aya, Ahmet Durakçı, Çağlan Ekil, Güven Erkin Erkal, Serdar Oktem, İzzet Öz, Münir Tireli, and Sener Yıldız. Metin Demirhan, who was also a comic book illustrator and the inventor of the female character, Fisilti, a female ‘metal’ warrior, is also worth mentioning, [http://mavimelek.com/manyak\\_savasci.htm](http://mavimelek.com/manyak_savasci.htm).

in Turkey. As I will argue, Turkish rock culture - due to a mediating strategy I call “Turkification” - signifies seemingly competing processes: Turkish rock is glocalized – inflected with Turkish specificities – as a marketing tool to benefit transnational recording companies based in Turkey as well as companies such as Coca Cola that sponsor rock festivals. It thus retains some of its ideological and structural ties to American culture - as in its appropriation of rock ‘counterculture.’ At the same time, however, Turkish rock represents a domesticated form created by local musicians and promoted by Turkish-owned production companies. This localized culture is often devoid of all connotations of Americanness. Rock culture in Turkey is Turkified due to its complexity as both a glocalized and an artistically and culturally re-appropriated form, one that parallels the unresolved processes of national and gendered configurations and understanding of politics in Turkey itself.

This Turkified culture is most visible through musicians’ use of the Turkish language – while they often subvert the rules of proper Turkish – their synthesis of American and Turkish popular and folk musical styles, their intertextual references to Turkish and American popular cultures, and their use of traditional Turkish rhythms, genres and instruments along with their use of visual iconography from American rock culture. All of these strategies point to the musicians’ subversion of pop/rock, female/male and American/Turkish binarisms and indicate their re-conceptualization of a former U.S. import.

Turkish rock music also provides a participatory culture in which female audiences can interact with and produce their own versions of Turkish rock. Through their interaction with this rebellious culture exemplified by strong female musicians,

female audiences appropriate their own versions of female empowerment, images that comprise one or more of the following: re-claiming and questioning conventional femininities *and* masculinities as well as asserting women's right to occupy the traditionally male-only spheres of rock bars, music, and business life. Turkish women claim their agency as cultural producers – particularly as instrumentalists and critics – and as active listeners producing their own texts. Musicians' constructions of their songs and stage personae within a locally specific textual space provide their fans a communal sphere of resistance, particularly through their nonhierarchical experiences and the erasure of rigid performer/spectator binaries on fan websites and at festivals and rock bars. This musical space–non-intimidating, yet always in conflict with societal gender norms, connotes a level of textual and real-life politics taken up by audiences in diverse ways.

Any study of the political effects of rock music in Turkey should account for the locally specific means of negotiations that are not independent of the historical context. As described earlier, a text or cultural practice that promotes conventional femininities and avoids an explicit stance on macropolitics may appear patriarchal or co-opted in a Euro-American setting while it may have different social implications in Turkey. “Resistance,” in the Turkish setting, connotes multiple levels of negotiation and addresses (social and textual) that often incorporate a conceptualization of politics as a multivalent concept for both musicians and their audiences.

Micropolitics and macropolitics are not binarized in Turkified rock. Rock performers challenge monolithic assumptions about resistance through seemingly self-contradictory strategies. These strategies include an emphasis on female empowerment

in the lyrics, varying re-articulations of rock iconography (which has been traditionally viewed as phallic), their use of conventional femininities and images of patriarchal girlhood, and occasional social affiliations. For example, Ferah, Karaibrahimgil and Tekin have each internalized the male-associated guitar hero stance in a majority of their performances in which they simultaneously sing and play the electric guitar while also using self-objectified, ultra-feminine images in their publicity photos, music videos and concerts. Yet they also reflect on the constructedness of femininity in interviews and, in the case of Karaibrahimgil and Tekin, use varying modes of girlhood (good girl/bad girl) as an empowering strategy on the stage while simultaneously parodying feminine looks and masculine codes in their lyrics and music videos.<sup>16</sup> The feminist implications of Ferah's and Karaibrahimgil's albums often revolve around micropolitics, as they each focus on women's private issues (frustration with failed romance in Ferah and a humorous critique of the mundane aspects of beauty culture as well as marriage and motherhood in Karaibrahimgil), which are not commonly associated with political activism in Turkey. Yet both have also taken part in large-scale consciousness raising campaigns for women. Ferah supported an anti-gender violence stance in a collaborative album and Karaibrahimgil participated in an educational campaign for girls, and more recently a women's health campaign. In contrast, Tekin has avoided participating in any social events or campaigns but her debut album reflected a critical engagement with macro-political themes such as arranged marriages, militarism and homelessness. Fans of Tekin and Ferah have also mobilized around other political issues: Tekin fans focused on global warming and planted a forest in Tekin's name while Ferah fans participated in

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<sup>16</sup> As discussed by Linda Hutcheon, "Parody is an act of repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity...[It] is a perfect postmodern form, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies." Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 11, 26.

demonstrations against global warming as well as racism. In contrast, each musician has challenged any social roles she may be assigned by highlighting her detachment from macropolitics.<sup>17</sup>

The seemingly conflicting meanings made available by the musicians and their audiences' interpretations contribute to the transgressive potentiality of Turkish rock music and to its Turkification. While I argue that Turkified rock connotes full localization, I am less interested in legitimating Turkish rock music as a purely Turkish music, or in authenticating its alignment with American rock (which itself incorporates diverse musical styles and is not a monolithic entity) than in revealing that localization through the contextually specific negotiations of musicians and audiences. The present study also attempts to challenge any such notion of musical purity and a static national and gendered identity. I will explore why rock culture has appealed to many women when it did, how it has been part of the Turkish popular repertoire, and what meanings specific musicians and their fans construct out of their pleasures of engaging with and re-interpreting this particular music in a given historical setting.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This case study draws on a variety of theoretical approaches: debates about rock music in non-US settings as discussed by Tony Bennett *et al*, Sara Cohen and Uta G. Poiger; the theory of glocalization as conceptualized by Roland Robertson; studies of rock music as in the works of Peter Wicke; feminist ethnographies of women rockers by Mavis Bayton and Mimi Schippers; and listener pleasures as conceptualized by Robert

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<sup>17</sup> In Ozlem Tekin's case, her rejection of social roles and detachment from social reality became most visible when she admitted in an interview that her only reference for gender oppression in rural areas was television coverage and that she "hated social movements of any kind." Ahmet Tulgar, "Sacina Gore Sevgili," *Milliyet Pazar*, March 10, 2001, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2001/03/10/pazar/ropop.html>.

Walser.<sup>18</sup> This multifaceted analytical approach allows me to explore texts, contexts, fans, and musicians as interdependent dynamics.

Turkified rock is informed by contradictory social and cultural forces such as global consumer capitalism, glocalization and patriarchy as well as youth rebellion, feminism and feminine pleasures. The present study approaches the music created by women performers as a cultural text which cannot be completely independent of economic profit, concerns about its authenticity, the power of American record companies and the prevalence of patriarchy in the Turkish music industry. Yet I will demonstrate that for its participants rock music offers a multi-vocal text that challenges Turkish gender norms as well as discourses of rock as a statically masculinist genre.

Views of rock music as inherently male dominate rock scholarship and part of this emphasis is due to the minimal presence of women scholars who themselves are actively engaged in rock and/or let their personal voices be heard through their writing.<sup>19</sup> The ignored presence of women rock instrumentalists and audiences who follow, even idolize, both all-male and female rock bands, as well as the absence, in Turkey, of accomplished female rock critics also contribute to the maintenance of published discourses about rock as masculinist and women rockers as exceptions.

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<sup>18</sup> Tony Bennett et al., ed.s, *Rock and Popular Music* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Sara Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Uta A. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in *Global Modernities*, ed.s. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (London: Sage, 1995), 25-44; Peter Wicke, *Rock Music: Culture, Aesthetics and Sociology*, trans. Rachel Fogg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Mimi Schippers, *Rockin' Out of the Box: Gender Maneuvering in Alternative Hard Rock* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Robert Walser, "Popular music analysis," in *Analysing Popular Music* ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16-38.

<sup>19</sup> Susan Fast's study of the male rock band Led Zeppelin's music, performances, audiences, and her own pleasures from the band represents one of the few works that re-contextualizes gender, sexuality and the empowering potentiality of female pleasures from what has often been identified as oppressive, sexist lyrics and performances. Susan Fast, *In the Houses of Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). See also, Susan Fast, "Rethinking Issues of Gender and Sexuality in Led Zeppelin: A Woman's View of Pleasure and Power in Hard Rock," *American Music* 17: 3 (Fall 1999): 245-299.

The earliest work on the relationship between rock and sexuality, a 1978 article by Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, characterized the music as “cock rock” due to the explicit expression of male sexuality in rock performances and contrasted it to “teeny bop...a blend of pop ballad and soft rock” in which the audience consisted only of girls.<sup>20</sup> The authors claimed that “rock’s euphoria depends on the absence of women” and “it is boys who are intellectually interested in rock, who become rock critics and collectors.”<sup>21</sup> While the authors’ view of these two genres and their audiences has been criticized by several other scholars including Frith himself and feminist writers, rock remains a male-only or male-associated genre in most of the existing scholarship.<sup>22</sup>

In her ethnographic study of British women instrumentalists and all-female rock bands in the 1980s and 1990s – the same period in which Ferah and Tekin’s band Volvox rose to popularity – Mavis Bayton deconstructed such static views by bringing “women to center stage, for a change, displacing the male-as-norm.”<sup>23</sup> She criticized approaches which viewed the masculine “as the universal in rock, the norm” because of which “the absence of women is unnoticed, underestimated or denied.”<sup>24</sup> While Bayton’s analysis offers some useful insight into studying Turkish women rockers, underground rockers in particular, her analysis emphasizes the plight of women musicians as performing against the ever-present masculinist discourse of rock and the only solution seems to be an

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<sup>20</sup> Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, “Rock and Sexuality,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 372, 375.

<sup>21</sup> Frith and McRobbie 1990, 375, 376.

<sup>22</sup> For critiques and re-assessments of Frith and McRobbie’s position, see, for example, Jennifer Taylor and Dave Laing, “Disco-Pleasure-Discourse,” *Screen Education* 31(1979); 43-48; Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), 259-260; and Simon Frith, “Afterthoughts,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 419-424. For feminist studies of rock that internalize the “hard rock as a male genre” notion, see, for example, Norma Coates, “(R)evolution Now: Rock and the Political Potential of Gender,” in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997), and Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology* (New York: Lexington Books, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), x.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

escape from, rather than re-thinking or undoing, the status quo. Such an approach, as Judith A. Praino also observes, reinforces the male-centered perspective of earlier studies of rock, in which women are excluded or seen as exceptions.<sup>25</sup> Any analysis that does not problematize the fixity of gender in rock (and metal) and that, as Robert Walser notes, “understands it only as a reproduction of male hegemony runs the risk of duplicating the description it describes.”<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, Mimi Schippers’s ethnographic study of gender performance in the alternative hard rock scene offers an insightful analysis that shows that musicians and fans use multiple strategies to “transform the culture of rock into one that is not sexist.”<sup>27</sup> These include everyday strategies by both male and female individuals who construct a gender and sexual order that destabilizes and affirms an existing one, a complex process that she calls “gender maneuvering.”<sup>28</sup> The concept of gender maneuvering is particularly relevant to the experiences of Turkish women musicians. As they employ rock iconography often symbolic of male power or self-objectification, female instrumentalists employ multiple strategies which include self-parody, gaze reversal, erasure of gender and appropriating machismo. These strategies blur gender binaries and challenge views of rock as sexist and statically masculinist. While much of the music industry is male-dominated in Turkey and women musicians, in the early 1990s, encountered a great deal of ideological, structural and legal resistance in their attempts to prove they could be ‘one of the boys,’ Ferah and Tekin, in particular, spearheaded a

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<sup>25</sup> For a good evaluation of the shortcomings of Bayton’s analysis, see, Judith A. Praino, “Review: Girls with Guitars and Other Strange Stories,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 54: 3 (Autumn 2001): 703-707, 704.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 130-1.

<sup>27</sup> Mimi Schippers, *Rockin’ Out of the Box: Gender Maneuvering in Alternative Hard Rock* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), x.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

radical change in Turkish rock culture, one in which women's presence has been naturalized. Turkish women performers, regardless of their ongoing struggle with Turkish patriarchy, their self-contradictory statements and ambivalence toward phallic symbols, no longer have to prove that they can perform.

From a global perspective, Turkish women's experiences also complicate monolithic views of rock in Turkey solely as homogenization, diversification, or as exploitative co-optation of counterculture leading to "hip consumerism."<sup>29</sup> A complete analysis of Turkish rock should thus avoid reducing this complex cultural text by an analysis on a single level, such as merely focusing on rock's potential for political rebellion in the public sphere, its authenticity as "pure" rock or as an art form, or its co-optation by global capitalism.<sup>30</sup> I draw from Robert Walser who suggests a historicized account of pleasures in music analysis claiming that, "Instead of aestheticizing popular music, we should be historicizing all music and accounting in each case for the particular pleasures that are offered and thus for the values on which they depend and to which they appeal."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, I will examine a variety of such pleasures, not those that merely appeal to certain values, but those that may simultaneously deviate from and re-code them in everyday life.

As Peter Wicke has argued in reference to the British context,

Rock songs are *cultural* texts, which circulate in the profane language of gestures, images, fashionable ideas and sounds, linked to the unprepossessing elements of everyday life...The songs form a moveable coordinate system for everyday

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<sup>29</sup> For an extensive discussion of the commercialization of counterculture in general and the notion of "hip consumerism," in post-1960s American advertising, see, Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Aforementioned studies of rock music in non-US settings tend to emphasize those issues at the expense of a more multivalent approach.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Walser, "Popular music analysis," in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16-38, 20.

cultural activities and leisure, that is open to different opportunities for use, for imparting meaning, for fun, for sensuousness and for pleasure.<sup>32</sup>

This remark demonstrates Wicke's view of rock as a meaning-producing practice that relies on both the music and surrounding discourses and images as well as the audiences' participatory, and yet diverse, experiences of each. Wicke also claims that "any music- or art-centred approach will fail to uncover this change from the production of meanings and values, of 'contents,' to the plane of cultural systems of interaction which go far beyond music."<sup>33</sup> According to Wicke, rock scholarship should not confine itself to content analysis or a preoccupation with authenticity and sincerity (in terms of its relation to commercialization and transnational production companies). Wicke's study provides helpful insight into the experiences of listeners, rock music as a cultural practice and the fluidity of such concepts as musical authenticity. Yet Wicke's study is limited to the British setting and, like the majority of the existing scholarship on rock, primarily focuses on a Western experience. It also does not account for gender-specific cultural systems of interaction and interpretation, and it privileges examining the creation and experience of emotions through rock at the expense of a historicized text analysis.<sup>34</sup> As I will illustrate

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Wicke, *Rock Music: Culture, Aesthetics and Sociology*, trans. Rachel Fogg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 26.

<sup>33</sup> Wicke 1990, 182.

<sup>34</sup> Lack of a historicized, interdisciplinary approach is a major shortcoming of the existing scholarship on rock and other forms of US music in non-US settings. Historicized or ethnographic research specifically on Turkish rock music culture and female rockers is also non-existent. The only relevant scholarly publications include three articles, one on hip hop in Turkey, an encyclopedia entry on Turkish rock and pop music by Martin Stokes, and another on Turkish pop music that tangentially explores Turkish rock, as well as a documentary film on Anatolian rock by Kaan Demirkiran. Non-academic book-length studies by Ali Akay *et al*, Guven Erkin Erkal *et al* and Cumhur Canbazoglu, and a critical essay by Metin Demirhan that discusses Turkish punk and metal from a sociological perspective, are also worth noting. Thomas Solomon, "'Living Underground is Tough': Authenticity and Locality in the Hip-Hop Community in Istanbul, Turkey," *Popular Music* 24: 1 (2005): 1–20; Martin Stokes, "Turkey/Turkish Rock and Pop," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Kurt Reinhard *et al*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/44912>; Songul Karahasanoglu and Gabriel Skoog, "Synthesizing Identity: Gestures of Filiation and Affiliation in Turkish Popular Music," *Asian Music* (Summer/Fall 2009): 52–71; Gökçe Kaan Demirkiran (Dir.), *Muzikte Bir Deney, Anadolu Rock* ["A Musical Experiment, Anatolian Rock"], (Prod. Istanbul University Studios, 2006); Ali Akay *et al*, *Istanbul'da Rock Hayati* (Istanbul: Baglam, 1995), Guven Erkin Erkal and Deniz Durukan, *Türk Rock 2000* (Istanbul: Studio Imge, 2001); Cumhur Canbazoglu, *Kentin Turkusu: Anadolu Pop-Rock* ["The Folk Song of the City: Anatolian

through both historical and audience analysis and with careful attention to the rock songs and surrounding discourses as texts (of particular emotions as well as meanings), the several opportunities for use of rock, from alternative meaning-making to pleasure, surface in culturally and gender-specific ways in the Turkish setting.

A historicized text analysis reveals that Turkish rock has an ambivalent engagement with global brands and consumerism. As such, it complicates theoretical models of imperialism and views of mass manipulation through corporate control of cultural capital. As Theodor Adorno has argued, the modern culture industry turns music into a standardized commodity and even improvisational forms such as jazz have been co-opted and stripped of any oppositional potential due to their being subjected to “the capitalist requirement that they be exchangeable as commodities” with radically altered formal elements.<sup>35</sup> A more nuanced interpretation of the culture industry argument is offered by Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo who argue, in regard to rock-‘n’-roll, that popular music does have a radical social potential for oppositional statements but the opposition itself is never fully realized due to corporate control over creative choices.<sup>36</sup>

Such approaches of textual determinism and their many versions in Marxist rock and popular music scholarship lack sufficient historicization of cultural capital and thus they fail to account for the complexity of rock music in Turkey and the experiences of the

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Pop-Rock”], (Istanbul: Pan, 2009); Metin Demirhan, “Onsoz” [“Preface”], in *Manyak Savasci* [“The Maniac Warrior”] (Istanbul: Evreca, 2006), in [http://mavimelek.com/manyak\\_savasci.htm](http://mavimelek.com/manyak_savasci.htm). Unpublished online studies include an essay on rock and pop audiences by Resat Calislar, and two conference papers on Nil Karaibrahimgil’s public persona. Resat Calislar, “Rockci Turk Gencinin Dnyasi,” [“The World of the Young Turkish Rocker”], unpublished essay, June 11, 2008, [http://www.resatcalislar.org/2008\\_06\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.resatcalislar.org/2008_06_01_archive.html); Berrin Yanikkaya, “The *Free Girl* vs. Feminism Part I: ‘Don’t get me wrong, I’m not a feminist or something!’” (Paper presented at the “Freedom and Prejudice Conference,” Istanbul, Turkey, October 5, 2006), and “The *Free Girl* vs. Feminism Part II” (paper presented at the ESF-LIU “Cities and Media: Cultural Perspectives on Urban Identities in a Mediatized World Conference,” European Science Foundation, Vadstena, Sweden, 25–29 October 2006), <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/020/026/ecp072026.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On Jazz,” *Discourse* 12: 1 (1989 [1936]): 44–69, 52.

<sup>36</sup> Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo, *Rock ‘n’ Roll is Here to Pay: The History and Politics of the Music Industry* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1977).

selected musicians and their fans in particular.<sup>37</sup> Ferah, Karaibrahimgil and Tekin have each been associated with American corporations as their concert sponsors, and they all preferred to perform at commercial festivals. Karaibrahimgil and Tekin also participated in television commercials for several non-music-related products, and Ferah and Karaibrahimgil have each worked with transnational recording companies. Yet each musician has also exercised creative control over her albums, not complying with the easy listening formula of popular music criticized by Adorno and others. The current challenge in analyzing Turkified rock “is how to theorize capital as simultaneously diversifying culturally and segregating economically and spatially.”<sup>38</sup> The production and consumption of Turkish rock, in its interrelatedness to global capitalism, exemplify this process of diversifying through commodification.

Commercial rock festivals such as Rock’n Coke, sponsored by Coca Cola and other American and local companies, and the business choices made by musicians to work with Sony Turkey and Universal Turkey vividly reveal a relationship, one conceptualized by Roland Robertson as indicative of glocalization, the interpenetration of the global and the local.<sup>39</sup> Glocalization, from this perspective, indicates the simultaneous presence of the global and the local, the co-existence of US-style capitalism and local particularities for enhanced commercial benefits to the American corporations. Similar to McDonald’s Turkey serving a traditional Turkish drink, Sony Turkey and Universal Turkey work with local musicians and find a Turkish niche within the global sphere of popular music. The Rock’n Coke rock festival can also be viewed as a

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<sup>37</sup> For studies that take a Marxist approach, see, for example, Dave Harker, *One for the Money: Politics and Popular Song* (London: Hutchinson, 1980) and Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

<sup>38</sup> Adam Krims, “Marxist Music Analysis Without Adorno: popular music and urban geography,” in *Analysing Popular Music* ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 131-157, 140.

<sup>39</sup> Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,” in *Global Modernities*, ed.s. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (London: Sage, 1995), 25-44.

glocalized product of the commercial rock festival concept in the US. While the performers include both globally successful non-Turkish and locally known Turkish musicians, its main sponsor Coca Cola indicates the corporation's control over decisions as well as its attempts to blend in the local society. As Michael Maynard notes, globalization sometimes refers to "locals' reaction to globalization, or a reinforcement of cultural identity at the local community level."<sup>40</sup> In a similar fashion, non-commercial, subcultural Turkish rock festivals, such as Rock for Peace, internalize American rock music and rock counterculture to protest what the organizers perceive as American imperialism. As I will illustrate, the experiences of participants in Turkified rock culture, those of female musicians and listeners in particular, complicate discussions of co-optation, globalization as well as localization as fixed processes. Turkification, in this context, refers to the localization of rock culture through its deconstruction of "rock as a male-only space," prevalent in the West, and through its dropping all connotations of non-Turkishness – a process that parallels the state discourses of Western-style modernity and equality feminism. Similar to the polysemic nature of Turkish culture itself, the Turkification of rock culture results from this unresolved amalgam of formations. In other words, Turkish rock is Turkified *because* it simultaneously is globalized and localized. The existing scholarship on rock and other forms of imported US music falls short of addressing the role of gender in processes of musical production and consumption, and the specificity of a Muslim-majority setting that re-defines and adopts a formerly American musical style, the focus of the following analysis.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Michael L. Maynard, "From global to glocal: How Gillette's SensorExcel accommodates to Japan," *Keio Communication Review* 25 (2003): 57-75, 60.

<sup>41</sup> The only book-length studies of rock music that address gender as well as localization include Uta A. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), which remains limited in scope due to its focus on the German setting in an earlier historical period, and

## Methodology

Rock music is a mixed form including verbal, audio, visual and discursive aspects. I therefore examine lyrics, public performances, music videos, stage costumes, media coverage, personal interviews and fan discourses to present an in-depth analysis of the localized and gendered meanings of the music, understood in the broadest sense, and the uses of the music by female musicians and their female fans between 1988 and 2009. I take into account individual interviews I have conducted with these pop rock stars and my personal immersion in the music and its culture as well as the multiple genres in which each musician works, including Ozlem Tekin's acting career and Nil Karaibrahimgil's weekly newspaper columns, television commercials and ad jingles.<sup>42</sup>

To illustrate the locally specific nature of Turkish rock, I explore the communicative roles of Turkish rock music and female rockers; the means by which music gets transmitted; and the ways in which listeners interpret and use rock culture in a variety of contexts including daily life, music festivals, albums, and the Internet. The sample for textual analysis includes five solo albums each by Sebnem Ferah and Ozlem Tekin between 1996 and 2009; three solo albums, two ad jingles and television commercials as well as weekly newspaper columns by Nil Karaibrahimgil (2000-2009).<sup>43</sup>

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Sara Cohen's research on the rock music scene of Liverpool, Sara Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) which questions the sexual and male-only codes of rock but focuses on localization and rock's relationship to the corporate music industry. In a later article, Cohen explored the issue of masculinity in more detail and argued that the local rock scene, while strictly male, exhibits alternative modes of masculinity when compared to the hypermacho features of heavy rock and metal, rap or funk, "Men making a scene: rock and the production of gender," in *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997), 17-36.

<sup>42</sup> For interview questions in English, see Appendix C-II.

<sup>43</sup> The sample for textual analysis includes solo albums of Sebnem Ferah, Nil Karaibrahimgil and Ozlem Tekin, as well as Karaibrahimgil's ad jingles, commercials, and articles in *Kelebek*, supplement to the mainstream newspaper, *Hurriyet*. Sebnem Ferah, *Kadin* ["Woman"], © 1996 by Raks Muzik, B000RJYLCM, Compact Disc; *Artık Kisa Cumleler Kuruyorum* ["I Now Form Short Sentences"], © 1999 by Universal Muzik, MU970105LF124, Compact Disc; *Perdeler* ["Curtains"], © 2001 by Universal Muzik, MU960279NA390, Compact Disc; *Kelimeler Yetse* ["If Only Words Were Enough"], © 2003 by Universal Muzik, Compact Disc, and *Can Kiriklari* ["Pieces of Heart"], © 2005 by

Also included in textual analysis are selected music videos, publicity photos and live performances of each musician. Reception analysis is based on observation of audience behavior in selected live performances as well as an extensive analysis of fan comments and of the interaction among fans and between musicians and fans on fan and official websites.<sup>44</sup> The present study also accounts for rock-affiliated Turkish websites and blogs as well as fan art shared in print form and on video/audio sharing websites such as YouTube and its Turkish versions.<sup>45</sup> To better analyze the discursive and social role of this localized culture, it is important to look closely at the history of rock music in Turkey.

## Historical Context

Rock music entered Turkish culture in the mid-1950s with Elvis Presley, whose films and records “initiated a wave of imitators in Istanbul.”<sup>46</sup> While many critics viewed the appeal of rock’n roll among the youth as alarming and detrimental to local culture because rock was seen as evil and seductive, the Turkish government and the military did

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Pasaj Muzik, B000VY4VIW, Compact Disc. Ozlem Tekin, *Kime Ne?* [“Who Cares?”], ©1996 by Peker Muzik, Compact Disc; Öz [“Essence”], © 1998 by Istanbul Plak, Compact Disc, *Laubali* [“Reckless”] © 1999 by Istanbul Plak, B000VYIX9A, Compact Disc; *Tek Basima* [“On My Own”], © 2003 by Istanbul Plak, B0000894PC, Compact Disc, and *109876543210*, © 2005 by Istanbul Plak, B000VHFR1E, Compact Disc. Nil Karaibrahimgil, *Nil Dunyasi* [“Nil’s World”] © 2002, by Epic Records/Sony, B001V5DK0A, Compact Disc; *Nil FM*, © 2004 by Epic Records/Sony, B001V3E4VG, Compact Disc; and *Tek Tasimi Kendim Aldim* [“I Got Myself My Own Diamond Ring”], © 2006 by Sony BMG, B0024L2P88, MP3. Karaibrahimgil has since released her fourth album, *Nil Kiyisinda* [“Inshore the Nile”] © 2009 by Sony BMG, B001Z397AK, Compact Disc), which is not included in the detailed analysis. The analyzed ad jingles and television commercials of Karaibrahimgil include “Hazirkart” [“Prepaid card”], for a wireless commercial for Turkcell (Dir. Sinan Cetin, Prod. Y&R Reklamevi, Istanbul, 2000), and “Penti: My Multiple Design Soul,” (Dir. Umur Turagay, Prod. PTT, Istanbul, 2007) for a pantyhose brand.

<sup>44</sup> The sample for audience research includes one rock-affiliated website, three fan websites for Ferah, two fan websites for Tekin, and one fan website for Karaibrahimgil: [www.turkrock.com](http://www.turkrock.com), [www.seboistnet.com](http://www.seboistnet.com) (discontinued in 2009), [www.sebokolik.com](http://www.sebokolik.com), [www.shebomaniac.com](http://www.shebomaniac.com); [www.ozlemtekin.biz](http://www.ozlemtekin.biz), [ozlemtekin.us](http://ozlemtekin.us); and, [www.nilkaraibrahimgil.net](http://www.nilkaraibrahimgil.net).

<sup>45</sup> Turkish versions of Youtube that have been surveyed for this study include four websites: [www.herkesdinlesin.com](http://www.herkesdinlesin.com), [www.izlesene.com](http://www.izlesene.com), [www.klipdunyasi.com](http://www.klipdunyasi.com) and [www.kliplerimiz.com](http://www.kliplerimiz.com).

<sup>46</sup> For example, the band, Jaguars, co-founded by Cem Karaca, was an Elvis Presley cover band in the early 1960s. Another performer, Erol Büyükburç, achieved pop star status in the late 1950s and early 1960s with his Elvis imitation. Songul Karahasanoglu and Gabriel Skoog, “Synthesizing Identity: Gestures of Filiation and Affiliation in Turkish Popular Music,” *Asian Music* (Summer/Fall 2009): 52-71, 59.

not condemn this music.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the first Turkish band to perform rock'n roll was the naval college orchestra (1955), whose performances supported the development of Euro-American popular music and future musicians of jazz and rock'n roll.<sup>48</sup>

From the early 1960s until the mid-1970s, two types of rock performers appeared in urban Turkey, and crossovers were common. "Anadolu rock" (Anatolian Rock) musicians created a semi-local, often political, musical style, while other musicians became popular by imitating the American and British rock sounds, doing covers for well-known foreign songs (such as the band, Dynamites), and writing Turkish lyrics for popular foreign songs – a process called 'aranjman' (arrangements).<sup>49</sup> In the early 1960s, 'aranjman' performers would re-record foreign rock'n roll songs in Turkish, without modifying the compositions, and release them into the Turkish market, while Anadolu Rock musicians, from mid-1960s on, offered an original form and socially conscious lyrics.<sup>50</sup> Anatolian rock reflected an "east-west synthesis and as a genre, lies at the crossroads between the popularization of folk music and the Westernization of Turkish music."<sup>51</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, Tulay German and Selda Bagcan were the only female singers performing in the Anatolian pop-rock idiom. German's fusion of western polyphonic and Turkish folk styles popularized folk music while Bagcan had a distinct alignment with rock. With her synthesis of progressive-psychedelic and Turkish folk styles and her political lyrics, Bagcan achieved a substantial fan base in the 1970s.

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<sup>47</sup> This critical view is seen the earliest Turkish study of rock music, a 1956 book-length sociological analysis focusing on Elvis Presley. Oguz Alpacin and Vecdi Benerli, *Dunya Sarsiliyor–Rock'n Roll* ["The World is Shaking –Rock'n Roll"] (Istanbul, 1956).

<sup>48</sup> Well-known musicians such as Durul Gence and Erkut Taçkın received training in this orchestra and later became popular performers in jazz and rock'n roll respectively.

<sup>49</sup> Naim Dilmener, *Bak Bir Varmış Bir Yokmuş* ["Look Once Upon a Time"] (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> Songul Karahasanoglu and Gabriel Skoog, "Synthesizing Identity: Gestures of Filiation and Affiliation in Turkish Popular Music," *Asian Music* (Summer/Fall 2009): 52-71, 60

<sup>51</sup> Songul Karahasanoglu and Gabriel Skoog 2009: 61.

Other Anadolu rock performers and bands such Cem Karaca, Erkin Koray and Barış Manço, as well as Apaşlar, Kardaşlar and Moğollar became popular with their rock-Turkish folk fusion.<sup>52</sup> These performers also defied normative modes of masculinity with their long hair, which male audiences began to emulate as a form of resistance in the 1970s.<sup>53</sup> With the 1980 military coup, many of the folk-rock performers were prosecuted by the government due to their leftist lyrics.

The re-emergence, in the mid-1980s, of Turkish rock and metal as a seemingly less political popular genre that was also open to women, and the later success of other kinds of US-origin genres such as hip hop has to do with the prevalence of the Western-oriented project of the Turkish government and the effects of the 1980 military coup. Until the 1990s, the state, in line with its modernization project, privileged Western musical styles, controlled Turkish classical music instruction and performances – associated with Ottoman culture – banned ‘arabesque’ music and refused to air Anatolian pop-rock songs on the official TV and radio channel, TRT, an action which effectively ruined the folk genre.<sup>54</sup> Western-style Turkish music, particularly the synthesis of Turkish and Western musical styles, was perceived as part of modernization, while controlling Turkish classical music symbolized the state’s attempts to block access to

<sup>52</sup> Moğollar was the earliest Turkish rock band to achieve international acclaim. Their record, “Ternek/Haliç’te Gün Batışı” [“Ternek/Sunset on the Golden Horn”] won the prestigious French award, Grand Prix du Disque of the Charles Cros Academy (previously won by such groups as Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix) in 1971. © 1970 by SACEM, 45rpm. The only other rock performers that received international recognition include Emre Aydın, whose rock performance earned him the Best European Act Award at the MTV European Music Awards in 2008, and the all-male band Manga that won the same award in 2009, <http://www.trtdari.com/trtinternational/en/newsDetail.aspx?HaberKodu=b854b568-7a53-4402-ad2f-10bd3b1fe3cd>.

<sup>53</sup> Until the late 1980s, male rock fans, who had long hair, faced verbal or physical abuse in public areas while those who attended college were often not allowed to enter classrooms or take exams. The increased popularity of long-haired (and heterosexual-identified) Turkish male performers as well as the influence of foreign music videos, in the early 1990s, contributed to the naturalization of multiple masculinities. As a result, male fans no longer faced systematic discrimination. A crucial factor that caused this shift was the changing connotations of long hair: What had started as a sign of subcultural, youth resistance became a mainstream fashion statement in the 1990s.

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the Turkish state’s regulatory control of ‘oriental’ music, see, Martin Stokes, “Islam, the Turkish state and arabesk,” *Popular Music*, 11: 2 (1992): 213-27. For a comprehensive survey of Anatolian pop-rock and its relationship to the state, see, Cumhur Canbazoglu, *Kentin Turkusu: Anadolu Pop-Rock* [“The Folk Song of the City: Anatolian Pop-Rock”], (Istanbul: Pan, 2009).

remnants of its Ottoman musical history and its multi-ethnic make-up.<sup>55</sup> The 1980 military coup that was followed with a military government and later the right-wing government led by Turgut Ozal, an avid supporter of all things American, allowed western-style Turkish pop music (categorized as ‘light’ music) to enter popular culture without any regulatory control as the government’s bans focused on leftist works.<sup>56</sup>

Overall, the relatively unproblematic entry of hard rock, punk and metal in the post-1980s reveals the historical specificity of Turkish rock as distinct from rock in other countries which implemented bans or quotas to control the spread of American music cultures in their countries.<sup>57</sup> The major examples of state intervention in Turkey include the prosecution and arrest of Anatolian folk-rock performers such as Selda Bagcan and Cem Karaca; the police monitoring of concerts in the 1980s; stage arrests of some punk group members, such as those of the first Turkish punk group, Headbangers, when they performed anti-government songs; the ban on the MTV music channel that was aired without a permit to use Turkey’s terrestrial stations (1994); the license requirement from Volvox for performances in rock bars; and, most recently, TRT’s censorship of rock performer Aylin Aslim’s music video about an honor crime victim in 2005.<sup>58</sup> Yet these

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<sup>55</sup> For example, shortly after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the traditional classical music conservatory in Istanbul, Darulelhan, was replaced with The Istanbul City Conservatory which taught only European classical music (1926). It was only in 1945 that Turkish classical music was allowed into the curriculum, and then instrumental instruction was still excluded until the 1980s. For a good discussion of the state’s modernization project and its control of Turkish classical/Ottoman art music, see, Karl Signell, “The Modernization Process in Two Oriental Music Cultures: Turkish and Japanese,” *Asian Music*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (1976): 79-82.

<sup>56</sup> During this period, many artists, writers as well as Anatolian pop-rock performers, such as Cem Karaca of Armenian descent, who were associated by the government with separatist ideologies, were prosecuted, and some left the country to live in exile. Karaca returned in 1987 when prime minister Ozal issued an amnesty for Karaca and other artists such as female folk-rock performer Selda Bagcan.

<sup>57</sup> Examples of state resistance to foreign music include, for example, Albania, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Iran, Israel, and Russia. For an extensive discussion of these and several other nation-states’ control of pop music and rock, see Martin Cloonan, “Pop and the Nation-State: Towards a Theorisation,” *Popular Music* 18: 2 (1999): 193-207.

<sup>58</sup> Censorship was not limited to TRT as private music television channels have, at times, censored rock videos that seemed political. For example, a 2005 music video of the famous anti-militarist (all-male) band, Bulutsuzluk Ozlemi, was temporarily censored on PowerTurk TV by blurring the “No to War” sign on a group member’s guitar. Upon massive protest, the video was aired in its original form. “Bagdat Café Bulusmasina Yasaklama,” *Sabah*, May 17, 2005, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gny/gny101-20050517-200.html>. For a brief discussion of the problematic relationship

cases reveal more about state concerns over Turkishness and gender than a systematic control of rock culture or Americanization.<sup>59</sup> The government thus had a relatively smooth relationship with performers who did not directly question its authority. The state support became crystallized when a pop-rock group, Mazhar-Fuat-Ozkan (MFO), was selected to represent Turkey in the Eurovision Music Contest in 1985.<sup>60</sup>

Ozal's support of private television and radio channels in the early 1990s, the establishment of Turkish Kral TV music television channel, and later the accessibility of the Internet helped set the background for an emerging music industry. Similar to women's genres that were considered by the state and the military officials as apolitical and associated with the middle classes, western-style music was considered non-subversive. While never state-sponsored as in some cases in Europe, mainstream rock is still associated with the urban middle-class citizens of modern Turkey.<sup>61</sup>

An informal survey of both female and male rock musicians does show that a majority of these cultural producers come from urban, middle class backgrounds with at least a college degree or foreign schooling, and most of their audiences fall into those same groups. Yet unlike Turkish adaptations of European classical music that were

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of political and 'anarchist punk' bands and the state, see, Murathan Duman, "Manyakti, Savasciydi" ["Was a maniac, and a warrior"], *Mavi Melek Dergisi* 32 (November 24, 2008), [http://mavimelek.com/manyak\\_savasci.htm](http://mavimelek.com/manyak_savasci.htm).

<sup>59</sup> The Turkish government's ban on MTV reflected their concern that Kurdish broadcasts might follow using the same illegal means. Cloonan, "Pop and the Nation-State: Towards a Theorisation," *Popular Music* 18: 2 (1999): 193-207, 196. I should note, however, that Cloonan's interpretation of this state ban as a strategy to "counter the influence of MTV" lacks a historicized account. As the present study argues, the Turkish case rather shows the lack of systematic regulatory control because pop-rock culture in the 1980s and 1990s was not considered as subversive, and rock, along with other forms of foreign culture, was associated with modernity and Turkishness.

<sup>60</sup> The Eurovision Music Contest remains a symbol of national pride for a majority of the Turkish people and the performer/s were selected after a televised national final on the state-controlled TV channel, TRT until 2004. Recently, executive director of TRT announced that TRT initiated a web poll on its website [www.trt.com.tr](http://www.trt.com.tr), and the winner from the pop-rock category, would represent Turkey at Eurovision 2010. This comment also indicates the state's comfortable relationship with mainstream rock performers today. <http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=5776213>.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, a study of rock in East Germany by Peter Wicke and J. Shepherd, "The cabaret is dead: rock culture as state enterprise - The political organization of rock in East Germany," in *Rock and Popular Music*, eds. Tony Bennett *et al* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 25-36. Sabrina P. Ramet's edited collection of essays, *Rocking The State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), also includes several case studies of rock music which has been censored as well as promoted in domesticated forms by different nation-states. For a good discussion of the Turkish state's modernization efforts in relation to popular music, see Orhan Tekelioglu, "The Rise of a Spontaneous Synthesis: The Historical Background of Turkish Popular Music," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32: 2 (1996): 194-215.

produced and only tolerated by the urban elite, Turkish pop rock achieved a mass appeal that reached across gender strata and took on a resistive function for women after the 1990s. Its resistive nature was revealed in its negotiations of the state-sanctioned notions of national and gendered identities as well as of American rock – a process that helped set the background for the localization of other US-origin forms as hip hop that would later be associated with the immigrant or diasporic musicians and a subaltern, working-class audience.

The tension that results from these negotiations of national and gendered identities is most apparent in the relationship of rock musicians to the state-controlled TRT. Starting in the late 1970s, TRT TV channel and FM radio station aired programs on American music and Turkish light music, and TRT broadcast the first specialized program on rock music.<sup>62</sup> Female rock performers such as Ferah and Tekin were also showcased on TRT music shows in the late 1980s and, throughout their solo careers, each had a smooth relationship with the state.

Rock music in Turkey, especially after the 1980s, has thus received mixed feedback and part of the critical response draws from the unresolved quest for a pure Turkish identity as well as from the spread of mass media culture in the early 1990s when female rockers rose to popularity. In regard to the complexity of the Turkish rock experience and the question of authenticity that arises with it, music critic Metin Solmaz comments, “All these musicians consider their music pure rock; but they are the people of a country where, in every town, daily prayer calls from the mosque are heard in the five different styles of Turkish art music.”<sup>63</sup> Most bands, however, have challenged the

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<sup>62</sup> The show was called, Rock Market, and later re-named as Donence.

<sup>63</sup> Metin Solmaz, *Türkiye’de Pop Müzik* [“Pop Music in Turkey”], (Istanbul: Pan, 1992), 25.

notion of ‘pure’ rock and redefined ‘Turkish rock’ by deliberately incorporating traditional Turkish rhythms, from art music to old Sufi hymns, as well as different American musical styles in their albums. Indeed, “cross-pollination between the different popular musical genres in Turkey became so prevalent,” after the 1980 coup in particular, that “by the 1990s, the early distinctions between foreign and domestic genres almost disappeared.”<sup>64</sup> As scholar Songul Karahasanoglu and her co-author note in regard to the Turkish popular music since the 1990s, musical genres in Turkey are “no longer clearly ‘foreign’ or ‘domestic’ because decades of performing foreign musical styles had effectively integrated them into an amalgamated Turkish popular style.”<sup>65</sup>

With the influence of the music videos in the 1990s, there was a significant increase in the number of female rock singers in mainstream media. These young women such as Sebnem Ferah and Ozlem Tekin became popular in part because of their “independent city woman” image.<sup>66</sup> They openly challenged traditional roles for Turkish women in their songs, performances and public appearances. Singing about female sexuality and problems of women living in big cities, and confessing that she cheated on her boyfriend, Ozlem Tekin quickly became the symbol of rebellious young women.<sup>67</sup> The music and stage personas of Ferah, known as “Sebo, the goth queen of Turkish rock” and of Tekin, “Oz, the rebellious girl of rock” have also given these performers the status of being the first female musicians in Turkey to integrate hard rock and metal rhythms, instruments and iconography in their solo careers.

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<sup>64</sup> Songul Karahasanoglu and Gabriel Skoog, “Synthesizing Identity: Gestures of Filiation and Affiliation in Turkish Popular Music,” *Asian Music* (Summer/Fall 2009): 52-71, 62.

<sup>65</sup> Songul Karahasanoglu and Gabriel Skoog 2009, 63.

<sup>66</sup> Feza Tansug, “Turkish Popular Music: the Political Economy of Change” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1999), 135.

<sup>67</sup> “Ask Herseyi Affeder mi,” [“Does Love Forgive Everything?”], *Kime Ne?* [“Who Cares?”], ©1996 by Peker Muzik, Compact Disc.

Ferah and Tekin as well as Nil Karaibrahimgil, known as “Nil, the free-spirited girl” or the “Turkish Bjork,” continue to assert their presence in a predominantly patriarchal industry as well as within a male-dominant club scene. As women performers playing in rock bars, going on tours, and participating in festivals on college campuses as well as on large concert grounds, Ferah and Tekin’s Volvox spearheaded an attempt to subvert the 1990s male-dominated rock scene.<sup>68</sup> The solo careers of Ferah and Tekin further drew attention to a gap that could be filled, a male-only rock scene ripe for invasion and a new gender-integrated rock space to be created and naturalized.

In late 1980s to early 1990s, it was not common for female musicians to perform in night clubs/private venues that served alcohol. Volvox members faced being dragged from the stage and arrested for police interrogation because they worked without a legal license.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, Volvox members had refused to apply for the only existing license, called ‘vesika,’ which was for governmental regulation of sex workers or burlesque-type performers at night clubs known as ‘pavyon.’ The Turkish state’s attempts to control Volvox in the early 1990s signified its struggle to regulate gender while also negotiating the public presence of female rockers within its official discourse of modernity.<sup>70</sup> Through their resistance to receiving a ‘vesika’ for their ongoing performances in rock bars, Volvox protested the Turkish government’s regulatory control. Indeed, Volvox

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<sup>68</sup> Volvox was formed by four young women in the college city of Bursa. Original members of the band included Sebnem Ferah, who played the electric guitar, performed the group’s main vocals, and wrote and composed most of the songs, along with Duygu Karpuz, Ebru Bank, and Gul Agirca. They named themselves, Volvox, a term they learned in their biology class, that means “colony of single-cell organisms” and “all voices” in Latin. Bank and Karpuz were later replaced by Buket Doran and Ozlem Tekin in 1992. In Ferah’s future solo career, Doran and Agirca continued to share the stage with her, and Doran also worked as Sebnem Ferah’s manager until 2006.

<sup>69</sup> Ozlem Tekin, e-mail message to author, February 19, 2009. Sebnem Ferah and Ozlem Tekin also comment about their arrest in an interview with Bora Ciftci, “Mahserin 4 Rock’cisi” *Rock!* (1994), quoted in Turgay Suat Tarcan, <http://www11.brinkster.com/turgay/rockvolvox.htm>.

<sup>70</sup> The license requirement for live performances appears as an important issue in other nation-states, particularly those in the former eastern bloc. However, those other states emphasize national identity, local music and the monitoring of youth in general, rather than the regulation of gender as in Turkey. Such a licensing system was used, for example, in Czechoslovakia as documented by Sabrina Ramet, ed., *Rocking The State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 9.

members later applied for membership cards from POPSAV, Popular Artists Association. Being considered a pop singer rather than a ‘pavyon’ employee was the better choice of the time for Volvox. As Ferah commented in the early 1990s,

The police aren’t even aware that it’s a rock bar, not a ‘pavyon.’ We went to the Police Headquarters to inquire about what was going on. They offered to give us a ‘vesika.’ So when they run a background check on me in the future, they’ll say ‘This woman has vesika. We can never accept this. We are trying to do art here, nothing else. What else can we do with these instruments in our hands on the stage?’<sup>71</sup>

The existing legal structure and cultural values in place during the early 1990s thus did not have a category in which to fit these new female performers. The presence of Volvox and the solo careers of Ozlem Tekin and Sebnem Ferah radically challenged the make-up of the Turkish music industry and societal values at the time. As Tekin noted, “When we got dragged from the stage, we gave a statement to the police explaining what we do, and after that, neither Volvox nor any other women rocker ever got treated that way.”<sup>72</sup> As they said in the media, Volvox members, and especially Ferah, wanted to be perceived as a “normal rock band,” without drawing any attention to their gender.<sup>73</sup> The only antidote to the patriarchal sexism in the societal and legal structure, at the time, thus seemed to be ‘gender erasure,’ which led to the naturalization of female musical presence in the night scene and concert performances in the early 1990s.

Gender erasure would be re-articulated by each performer’s strategies of “gender maneuvering” in later years.<sup>74</sup> Starting in the late 1990s, Ferah and Tekin began to incorporate a parodic use of femininity and masculinity in their solo careers, and

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<sup>71</sup> Bora Ciftci, “Mahserin 4 Rock’cisi” *Rock!* (1994), quoted in Turgay Suat Tarcan, <http://www11.brinkster.com/turgay/rockvolvox.htm>.

<sup>72</sup> Ozlem Tekin, e-mail message to author, February 19, 2009.

<sup>73</sup> Ciftci 1994.

<sup>74</sup> Mimi Schippers, *Rockin’ Out of the Box: Gender Maneuvering in Alternative Hard Rock* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

Karaibrahimgil's 'girlish vamp' style further contributed to the female musicians' subversion of Turkish gender and industry norms in the 2000s.

### **Re-conceptualizing Turkish Womanhood: Female Musicians as Destabilizing Agents in the Industry and in the Public Sphere**

Ferah, Karaibrahimgil and Tekin each make use of diverse strategies to incorporate their own views of female empowerment in their lyrics, performances, public personae, and business decisions. They challenge patriarchal views of Turkish womanhood as they subvert the traditional image of a Turkish woman, both urban and rural. Rebelling in their lyrics as well as through their public and stage personae in interviews, concerts, and extramusical performances, each musician disrupts the conventional image of how a Turkish woman should look like and behave and how a female performer should act. Ferah publicly aligns herself with feminism and supports her position with her lyrics (typically directed at a male partner or ex-partner), her non-compromising public persona as well as with her recent role in a collaborative album about gender violence.<sup>75</sup> Despite an ongoing engagement with the "Live this moment" motto, however, her lyrics remain largely personal and one does not find explicitly socially conscious songs in her solo albums. In contrast, Ozlem Tekin sings about a range of women's issues from forced marriage to female sexuality as well as the problems of urban women. Yet she resists any categorization as a feminist and notes that she is "macho," claiming dominance in her relationships.<sup>76</sup> Tekin's stage acts and costumes emphasize her sexual appeal, while her

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<sup>75</sup> Various Artists, *Guldunya Sarkilari*, with Naim Dilmener and Hulya Demir, © 2008 by DMC (Dogan Muzik Yapim), B001TY1C08, Compact Disc.

<sup>76</sup> Dilek Dalliag, "Azgin Teke Sendromu," *Hurriyet*, November 15, 2006, <<http://kelebek.hurriyet.com.tr/magazin/5434421.asp?gid=90>>

publicized interest in kickboxing complicates her stance and reveals her ambivalent perception of female strength.

Similarly, Nil Karaibrahimgil rejects any public affiliations with feminism which she perceives as man-hating practice. Yet the singer associates herself with ideas spearheaded by late Turkish feminist Duygu Asena – even though she admitted that she had not read Asena’s books.<sup>77</sup> Karaibrahimgil has also participated in social campaigns to empower women, “Baba Beni Okula Gonder,” (“Dad, send me to school”), to support rural girls’ right to education and a women’s health campaign, sponsored by Penti, a women’s pantyhose company, to raise awareness about breast cancer. Karaibrahimgil’s albums, performances, ad jingles and newspaper columns reveal a commitment to exploring themes that deal with the urban women’s daily struggles and conflicts, those caused by patriarchal beauty standards in particular. Yet, Karaibrahimgil’s public persona and ad jingles illustrate her sometime support of consumerism. Her role in a television commercial for a pantyhose brand, for example, portrayed a ‘vamp-ish’ character with several close-ups of her legs while the jingle, which she had written and performed, highlighted women’s multiple subjectivities symbolized by the act of wearing pantyhose of a different pattern each day. The commercial and the jingle illustrated her trademark ‘commercial feminism,’ an empowering practice that required the consumption of a commodity product – pantyhose in this case. Contrasting her style with that of Ferah, Karaibrahimgil comments, “Unlike Sebnem Ferah’s songs, there isn’t a ‘You screwed me and I hate you for that’ tone against men in mine. You can’t find oppressed women in my universe.”<sup>78</sup> While her view of feminism as man-hating

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<sup>77</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

practice remains problematic, Karaibrahimgil's consciously crafted songs about women's issues, her famed "Free-spirited Girl" image, and her participation in women's campaigns demonstrate her deliberate use of popular culture for women's empowerment.

Arguably, the most visible aspect of musicians' power emerges from their multiple roles in each aspect of the album-making process as singers, songwriters, composers, and, recently in Sebnem Ferah's case, as their own producers. They have each written and composed almost all of their songs, and continually highlight in interviews their musical background as the foremost quality that sets them apart from pop singers with no such skills. As Karaibrahimgil proudly notes:

I am a rare example, especially in the Turkish music industry, where there are many women working but the decision-makers mostly are men. There is an amazing submissiveness and trust that I feel from the production company. From day one, I have been the sole decision maker in every detail of my music. Most importantly, they never asked me not to make songs about cellulite cream, for example.<sup>79</sup>

In agreement with Karaibrahimgil, Ferah adds that writing one's own songs gives the singer the ability to share with her listeners her personal worldview and attitude toward life. In reference to her album, "If Only Words were enough" (2003), she finds an indirect link between her gender and her courage to openly share her personal world with others.<sup>80</sup> As a male reporter puts it, "Those female singers who make their own songs are more brave and honest like Sebo."<sup>81</sup> Indeed, each musician finds their talent and musical competence closely tied to the decision-making power they exercise at the production stage. Ozlem Tekin comments in an interview,

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Onur Basturk, "Askin Hesabi Kitabi Olmaz," *Aktuel* (2003), quoted in <http://www.seboist.com/aktuel-dergisi-askin-hesabi-kitabi-olmaz-t1439.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Basturk 2003.

I graduated from the Conservatory, am able to write and compose my own songs, and have great performance skills. Any attempt to impose anything on me like, say, forcing me to put emphasis on my physical appearance instead of my music, would only come from an idiot. I initiate whatever I want when I want it, no proposals needed.<sup>82</sup>

Tekin's independent stance has also drawn the attention of the media. Critic Kahraman Cayirli writes, for instance, "Ozlem has always tried to challenge industry rules with no fears of losing her audience. Actually, she has nothing to fear as we are already used to her changing her sound each time," thus indicating Tekin fans' acceptance of her experimentation in diverse musical styles.<sup>83</sup>

None of these stars believes they are bound by top-down production company decisions. Indeed, these musicians' highly successful albums have led production companies to trust them in their choices. Examples of musicians' anti-mainstream decisions that were supported by the production companies include Tekin's socially-conscious songs about forced marriage and homelessness in her highly successful debut album, and her use of electronic music in her second album, Ferah's explicit lyrics about sexuality, and Karaibrahimgil's songs about such day-to-day problems of women, as cellulite. All, except Tekin's experimentation with electronic music, proved to be commercially successful. Karaibrahimgil partly relates such artistic freedom to changes in musical production:

The singer-songwriter concept in the global music industry means that there is no more compartmentalization like the studio and the composer. These days, singer-songwriters make their albums in their homes by putting in whatever sounds they like, and give the completed album to the

<sup>82</sup> Ayla Onder, "Rock'in Asi Kizi 'Hip Hop'a Sevdali," *Yeni Asir*, August 7, 2005, <http://ya2005.yeniasir.com.tr/08/07/index.php3?kat=ana&sayfa=sar2&bolum=guide>.

<sup>83</sup> Kahraman Cayirli, "Ozlem Tekin/109876543210," *Derki*, June 20, 2005, [http://www.derki.com/haberportal/index2.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=267](http://www.derki.com/haberportal/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=267).

production company. Leaving the musicians uninterrupted is the smart thing to do for the producers as it allows you to be unique.<sup>84</sup>

Musicians' choice to work with production companies, such as Epic (Sony) and Universal Music Turkey, also indicates their aspirations to become a part of the global music community. Indeed, Sebnem Ferah, when confronted in an interview about why she worked with Universal, which invests in pop singers with no musical talent, something that she criticizes, explained that she decided to work with that company once she was certain of her musical freedom.<sup>85</sup> Ferah later produced two of her own albums, an accomplishment that she proudly highlighted in interviews, and after that established her own production company, Pasaj Muzik, an independent company that aims to "support similarly enthusiastic and talented musicians" in their independent endeavors.<sup>86</sup>

Each musician's concert appearances also allowed them to subvert the traditional view of the female body as immobile and passive. Volvox and post-Volvox Sebnem Ferah, Ozlem Tekin, and Nil Karaibrahimgil privileged the live, improvised performance over any edited appearance. These musicians' visible mobility in concerts all over Turkey, on college campuses, in particular, continued to disrupt the male-only rock scene, which has tended to include women only as passive consumers, as fans of male musicians up until the 1990s. As they went on tours and participated as performers in youth and rock music festivals, they further demonstrated their mobility. While musicians remained largely distanced from the local public and their only interaction appeared to be with their audiences at the concerts, their presence nevertheless helped challenge industry norms about rockers and societal gender norms about women confined

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<sup>84</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>85</sup> Mefaret Aktas, "Mutsuz Ask Sarkilari," *Milliyet Cumartesi*, October 17, 2001, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2001/10/17/cumartesi/cum01.html>.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

to the domestic sphere. In a way, the female musicians' mobility, especially through patriarchal rural Anatolia, demonstrated their realization of the "Free-Spirited Girl" image from Nil Karaibrahimgil's popular TV commercial.<sup>87</sup>

In the commercial, Karaibrahimgil played an independent city girl on a hiking trip with her boyfriend in rural Anatolia. In search of her boyfriend, whom she had lost, Karaibrahimgil's character hiked across streams and natural landscapes on a mountain. She wore a loose T-shirt, denim shorts and hiking boots, clearly emphasizing her choice of comfort and personal choice over mediated fashion and societal values about proper attire in rural Anatolia. The ad jingle, "I am free," which she had written, composed and performed, further drew attention to women's quest for independence:

I went to that village of ours – far away  
I did.  
The world apparently wasn't made up of line borders - as on the map  
I saw it.  
Don't call me a (spiritual) master- I am not.  
Don't call me a tourist – I am not.  
I am free – only free...I am free<sup>88</sup>

The highlight of the commercial, with the added impact of the song, is this character's freedom to go wherever she pleases because the uninterrupted reception of her cell phone gives her a feeling of security even when she is in the wild and without her boyfriend. The commercial coupled with the ad jingle turned Karaibrahimgil into an 'independent star,' the free-spirited girl.

Female musicians' tours in rural Anatolia appear, at first glance, to be a realization of a similar kind of female mobility. Yet female musicians, at times, also exhibit an exotifying stance toward the locals. Ferah, Karaibrahimgil and Tekin act as

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<sup>87</sup> "Hazirkart" ["Prepaid card"], (Dir. Sinan Cetin, Prod. Y&R Reklamevi, Istanbul, 2000).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

the urban elite by limiting their interaction with the local public to their experiences from behind the window in their tour buses.<sup>89</sup> Tekin, in a TV show she hosted, showed her sense of superiority over rural populations in a conversation with an elderly shepherd she had come across in Anatolia.<sup>90</sup> As she approached the local shepherd, she addressed her as ‘sen’ (the ‘informal you’ as opposed to ‘siz’/formal You) not acceptable in first-time encounters. Doing the heavy metal symbol with her hand, she asked the shepherd, “Do you know me? Do you know what we are here for? Do you know metal?” Not leaving much speaking opportunity to the shepherd who could only say “No,” she added “Of course, what would you understand from metal?” While revealing her edgy persona, Tekin’s approach perpetuated the urban, elitist connotations of rock music. Moreover, her response revealed a reversed oppressive gaze traditionally aimed at women.

Indeed, Ozlem Tekin as well as Sebnem Ferah and Nil Karaibrahimgil, have each subverted traditional gaze structures and exhibited a parodic stance toward female self-objectification. Although they avoid the celebrity look in their daily lives by not wearing make-up, their constructed sexy look in their stage performances and public appearances and self-reflexive comments in interviews and lyrics reflect a sophisticated understanding of the role of their constructed femininity as a spectacle.

Sebnem Ferah draws attention to and parodies the constructed nature of her image for performances and photo shoots. While she has made critical comments on consumerism-fed femininities, she chooses to wear transparent outfits in some photo

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<sup>89</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, for instance, expressed her experiences and observations in rural Anatolia as highly limited by her “being on the tour bus most of the time.” Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey. Similarly, there have not been accounts of other musicians’ immersing themselves in the local culture where they performed.

<sup>90</sup> Ozlem Tekin was a one-time host of a behind-the-scenes show following her around on a concert tour, “24 Saat 1 Star” [“24 Hours, 1 Star”], *PowerTurk TV* (May 2005), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1p6tNNuPVc&NR=1>.

shoots, music videos and concerts, which she notes “are just part of a fantasy image.”<sup>91</sup> She also admits that she needs to “pose like a rocker” for photo shoots, referring to the male-associated codes of rock performances.<sup>92</sup> As she humorously notes in a backstage interview: “In about an hour, around my eyes will be painted black, my looks will be more defined and angry, then my teeth will grow, arm muscles will pop, and I’ll be the ‘rocker Sebnem.’”<sup>93</sup> Ferah’s remark reveals her parodic appropriation of the masculine codes in cock rock, identified by Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie as aggression, domination, creation of fear and explicit expression of male sexuality.<sup>94</sup> As the interviewer comments upon seeing Ferah after the ‘transformation,’ “She is completely in black, holding her guitar, looks like a true rocker...so different from her daily cute look. Yet, as we watch her perform in the concert that feels like seconds, we understand once more that her success has nothing to do with costumes or make-up.”<sup>95</sup> Ferah’s use of the “guitar-hero stance which features the guitar-as-phallus” coupled with her assertive lyrics, her vocal styles of screaming, her frequent use of black leather in her stage costumes, and her distinct eye make-up allow her to pass as a true rocker.<sup>96</sup> While these external attributes seem important in the interviewer’s account, Ferah’s vocal and performance skills are highlighted as key to her “true rocker” identity.<sup>97</sup> Ferah’s performance strategies thus reveal the effects of her “gender maneuvering.” Her

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<sup>91</sup> Sebnem Atilgan, “Sokaklar Sakin, Konserler Full,” *Top Pop* April 23-29, 1997, quoted in, <http://www.sebnemferahciyiz.biz/sebnem-atilgan-top-pop-vt2041.html>. In another interview, Ferah criticizes consumerism-fed femininities. She notes, for example, that “Unlike all women, I don’t have a shoe or bag fetish. I’m more into jeans and baggy trousers.” Cagnur Hatipoglu, “Sarkilarim pornografik degil,” *Milliyet*, July 26, 2003.

<sup>92</sup> Oben Budak, “Nutella’dan baska takintisi olmayan star!” *Aktuel*, August 20-26, 2003, <http://www.seboist.com/aktuel-20-agustos-2003-tek-takintisi-nutella-olan-star-t546.html>.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, “Rock and Sexuality,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 372.

<sup>95</sup> Budak 2003.

<sup>96</sup> Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 120.

<sup>97</sup> Budak 2003.

subversion of existing performative codes of gender in rock culture is shared by Tekin and, to a lesser extent, by Karaibrahimgil.<sup>98</sup>

Each musician has also popularized songs critical of traditional femininities and women's use of their sexuality. Sebnem Ferah's song, "Cigarette," embodies her self-reflexive critique of such constructed femininity: "In fact, I, too, would like that...running before crawling, wearing make-up and going around in fancy dresses, speaking without thinking, being the important person in a tiny game."<sup>99</sup> This song reflects Ferah's critical view of women's daily use of their looks, instead of their intelligence, to obtain power both in their personal lives and their careers. Such deliberate use of one's femininity may provide a shortcut to power, particularly in the music industry. Yet, she assigns this feeling of strength to a false consciousness since such constructedness limits one's world to a "tiny game field."<sup>100</sup>

Ozlem Tekin and Nil Karaibrahimgil, in their different ways, also demonstrate a critical stance against women's use of their constructed femininities. Yet, their position seems rather ambivalent as each musician also uses their sexuality and varying modes of girlhood in stage performances and a variety of public appearances including commercials. Karaibrahimgil reserves her use of sexuality to the concert stage and commercials, and reflects a critical metafictional look in her songs and album covers. Metatextuality or metafiction refers to any creative visual or written text which directly or indirectly points to and explores its own becoming, its constructedness. Metafictional texts also explore the audiences' perception of reality as transformed by and filtered through the discursive impact of such nontraditional conventions. As Mas'ud

<sup>98</sup> Mimi Schippers, *Rockin' Out of the Box: Gender Maneuvering in Alternative Hard Rock* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

<sup>99</sup> Sebnem Ferah, "Sigara," *Perdeler* ["Curtains"], © 2001 by Universal Muzik, MU960279NA390, Compact Disc.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

Zavarzadeh explains in regard to literature, metafiction is like “a mask which points to itself. [Its] intense self-reflexiveness [...] is caused by the fact that the only certain reality for the metafictionist is the reality of his own discourse; thus, his fiction turns in upon itself, transforming the process of writing into the subject of writing.”<sup>101</sup>

Karaibrahimgil exemplifies Zavarzadeh’s ‘metafictionist’ with her metacommentaries in her songs and newspaper columns on music as well as on the performative, constructed aspect of a musician’s persona. She employs metatextuality as a discursive strategy and extends her commentary to the topics of sexuality as a spectacle, and the process of writing and performing music. Her columns describe the creation stage of her albums, music videos, and ad jingles as well as present her thoughts about her song lyrics. She borrows from both literary forms and nonliterary patterns (including images and myths from mass media and popular culture) and constantly draws attention to the constructed nature of her albums. She also reveals her reservations about which words to use in her lyrics because she fears prosecution by the authorities.<sup>102</sup> Most importantly, she presents her music as “raw material,” which requires an interactive experience from the audiences who submit their input in the form of e-mails or edited music videos.<sup>103</sup> As such, Karaibrahimgil privileges active meaning-making and collaboration in musical production.

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<sup>101</sup> Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, *The Mythopoetic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 39.

<sup>102</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, “Bir baskadir benim memleketim,” Nil FM, *Kelebek* (Hurriyet), July 7, 2008, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=9370221&yazarid=113>.

<sup>103</sup> See, for example, Karaibrahimgil’s article, “Periler Varmis,” Nil FM, *Kelebek* (Hurriyet), February 12, 2007, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=5934301&p=2>.

The cover of Karaibrahimgil's album, "I Got Myself My Own Diamond Ring" exemplifies her engagement with metafiction as a discursive strategy.<sup>104</sup> It shows Karaibrahimgil sitting on the floor being made-up by a male make-up artist. Her legs, however, are positioned apart, in a way that rural men sit, and which Turkish audiences would understand as an unacceptable posture for women in public. She also wears a bowtie, an implicit parody of women's tendency to imitate masculine behaviors to succeed in the world. While this cover, at first glance, depicts a woman in a seemingly passive mode, readily accepting an image imposed on her by a man, it also demonstrates Karaibrahimgil's ongoing critique of women's internalization of both male-perpetuated beauty myths and masculine codes. Indeed, here she clearly appears to be the one in charge, and enjoys her self-initiated transformation, similar to her conscious use of her sexuality on stage.

Karaibrahimgil's self-reflexive songs, such as "Madonna Wanna-Be" from her first album, also illuminate the constructed nature of stardom and music in general:

So she wants to be Madonna  
 Don't make fun of her  
 Just stop and listen to her for five minutes,  
 She obviously has something to say.  
 Oh and there's something else  
 She says she is different from us.  
 Say 'Yes, you are.'  
 Says she was born a star  
 Say 'Knock on wood.'  
 She wants to be Madonna  
 Don't laugh at her.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, *Tek Tasimi Kendim Aldim*, © 2006 by Sony BMG, B0024L2P88, MP3.

<sup>105</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, "Madonna Olacakis," *Nil Dunyasi* ["Nil's World"] © 2002, by Epic Records/Sony, B001V5DK0A, Compact Disc.

Karaibrahimgil describes the song as a self-parody of her pursuit of Madonna-like power, particularly in terms of her own search for individuality as a young woman, and her comfortable use of her sexuality as a performer.<sup>106</sup> The song also sheds light on the origins of her non-traditional celebrity image, one heavily influenced by Madonna.

Similarly, Ozlem Tekin plays with her constructed image in her performances and in interviews. She comments, for instance, on her make-up and costumes for a photo shoot, “This is something I can’t handle! Only for photo or video shoots! My friends will tease me when they see me wearing red lipstick. This is all a construct.”<sup>107</sup> Tekin exhibits her critical position in her song “I’ve Drilled the Mountains,” that criticizes women’s looks as an inherent attempt to “land a husband,” thus differentiating her use of her sexuality from those of women looking for husbands.<sup>108</sup>

Despite her lyrics and public remarks, Tekin exhibits her unconstrained sexuality in the media-documented public displays of affection and sexual attraction, particularly between her and her ex-husband.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, in an interview in the mainstream newspaper, *Sabah*, she posed the rhetorical question about whether she should play with the notion of constructed femininity.<sup>110</sup> Soon after she posed that question, Tekin appeared nude on the cover of Turkish *FHM* magazine, revealing her deliberate use of her self-objectification.<sup>111</sup> During live performances, she has emphasized her sexuality with her costume choices and through her attempts to uncover her body. In a

<sup>106</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>107</sup> “Popcular Ortaliktan Yok Oldu, Cok da İyi Oldu,” *Sabah* (Gunaydin), July 16, 2005, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2005/07/16/gny/mag101-20050716-200.html>.

<sup>108</sup> “Daglari Deldim,” *Tek Basima* [“On My Own”], © 2003 by Istanbul Plak, B0000894PC, Compact Disc.

<sup>109</sup> See, for example, this article that represents the media frenzy over the death of Tekin’s ex-husband due to AIDS, a view that implies that the couple’s uninhibited lifestyle must have caused it, “Sosyetede Panik Buyuyor,” *Haber Vitrini*, November 12, 2002, <http://www.habervitrini.com/haber.asp?id=57357>.

<sup>110</sup> “Cici Bici Rockci Olmaz,” *Bazaar*, July 17, 2005, quoted in <http://www.ozlemtekin.biz/forum/index.php?action=printpage;topic=1074.0>.

<sup>111</sup> Turkish *FHM* 28 (December 2006). Ozlem Tekin had also posed semi-nude, with her upper body exposed on an earlier *FHM* cover, December 2003.

performance at a bar, for instance, when her mini-skirt exposed her lingerie and this got noticed by the audience, she pulled her skirt further up and kneeled forward during her continued performance.<sup>112</sup> When groped by a male audience member at one of her later concerts, however, Tekin gave a negative reaction. As an online user put it, “Her costumes and stage acts probably misled that person.”<sup>113</sup> This remark, indeed, crystallizes the inherent patriarchal mindset in Turkey that each musician struggles with. An ongoing tension present in Turkish society about ‘proper womanhood’ is seen particularly in debates on rape where commentators believe that the victim’s provocative acts could have caused the sexual violence.

Textual analysis of musicians’ lyrics and music videos further demonstrates the diverse views of each musician about the relationship between constructed sexualities and women’s empowerment, and about the role of rock culture in leading to feminism. Indeed, the texts often reveal an ambiguity that becomes most visible in albums or songs that contain both traditional and rebellious elements, leading to an unresolved tension. Sebnem Ferah’s “I’ve Given up on the World” from her debut album “Woman” illustrates her ambiguous stance toward conventional femininities:

I, too, loved and (he) didn’t love me back  
 Take me from this world, there’s no one who loves me  
 Even before wearing a wedding gown,  
 Before seeing the light,  
 Before my baby, I’ve given up on the world  
 I was ashamed of myself for not having defeated my fate  
 I’ve given up on the world before feeling loved.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>112</sup> *Medyafaresi*, March 10, 2007, <http://www.medyafaresi.com/?hid=3516&cid=4>.

<sup>113</sup> “absent,” comment on “Ozlem Tekin,” comment posted August 22, 2005, <http://www.birebir.net/goster.asp?d=%C3%B6zlem+tekin>.

<sup>114</sup> Sebnem Ferah, “Vazgeçtim Dünyadan,” *Kadin*, © 1996 by Raks Muzik, B000RJYLCM, Compact Disc.

The lyrics show Ferah as a woman who, in response to her unrealized dreams of romance, simultaneously yearns for and rejects patriarchal values and traditional femininities. She dreams of mutual love leading to a wedding as well as motherhood. Her disappointment, however, leads to frustration, alienation as well as a fantasy of self-destruction (the implied suicide). Most of her songs similarly depict an unhappy romantic relationship and varying degrees of female reaction, from suicidal desperation to assertion that may co-exist within the same album or song. From Ferah's perspective, female strength connotes pride and anger that typically result in her overall rejection of a failed romance and, as the above song implies, a rejection of life itself.

Nil Karaibrahimgil and Ozlem Tekin offer very different images of female strength in their songs about the same theme of non-satisfying relationships. Karaibrahimgil, while being critical toward radical feminism and what she identifies as feminist anger in Ferah, makes fun of those love songs that demonstrate female vulnerability, particularly in dealing with break-ups. Her song "Don't Go, or..." presents a satirical look at a woman who threatens to commit suicide if her boyfriend left her.<sup>115</sup> While initially perceived as a song that encouraged suicide, this song criticizes women's desperation to stay in an unhappy relationship as well as the "love song" genre from which Karaibrahimgil distances herself.<sup>116</sup>

Arguably the most out-spoken of the three musicians, Ozlem Tekin represents in her songs a drastically different image of female strength, which, in most cases, refers to self-assertion through confrontation, adultery and even physical violence against the male

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<sup>115</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, "Gitme Yoksa," *Nil FM*, © 2004 by Epic Records/Sony, B001V3E4VG, Compact Disc.

<sup>116</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

partner.<sup>117</sup> Instead of feeling rejected or thinking about suicide, Tekin takes pride in acting “macho” (which she defines as being dominant in a relationship) and her songs and music videos reflect women who “wouldn’t collapse” after a separation.<sup>118</sup> Tekin’s songs represent women who, at their most extreme, may murder their lover, and are often relieved that an unsatisfactory romance is over.<sup>119</sup> Tekin and Karaibrahimgil thus offer very different images of female empowerment (humorous critique of heteropatriarchy in Karaibrahimgil versus aggressive confrontation in Tekin) when compared to Ferah whose songs offer often suggest walking out when love ceases to be mutual.

Ferah’s first hit song, “This Love is too much for you,” about an ongoing relationship that does not emotionally satisfy the woman, provides one of the few exceptions that reflects a direct confrontation with the male partner. This song depicts a woman who does not fear confronting her partner about her feelings of dissatisfaction:

Doesn’t matter when I am here or not  
 ... Your love is so far away  
 Even though you breathe right by my side  
 This love is just too much for you.<sup>120</sup>

The above lyrics exemplify the way Ferah has centered women and their emotional dissatisfaction which gives her songs a feminist stance.

Each Ferah album reflects her feminism in a different period of her life. Yet she privileges her music over any social or political action. As she explains,

I like being associated with women’s organizations because my heart is with people who do similar work. But this doesn’t mean that I should automatically feel certain responsibilities because of my album title and

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<sup>117</sup> See, for example, the music video of “Bahar” [“Spring”] (Dir. Omer Vargi, Prod. Filma-Cass and Arya Muzik, 1998), at <http://www.kliplerimiz.com/ozlem-tekini/bahar-klip-izle.html>.

<sup>118</sup> “Daglari Deldim,” *Tek Basima* [“On My Own”], © 2003 by Istanbul Plak, B0000894PC, Compact Disc.

<sup>119</sup> “Bahar” (Dir. Omer Vargi, Prod. Filma-Cass and Arya Muzik, 1998), music video.

<sup>120</sup> “Bu Ask Fazla Sana,” *Kadin*, © 1996 by Raks Muzik, B000RJYLCM, Compact Disc.

focus. My next album could very well be called ‘Man.’ My goal wasn’t primarily to voice women’s rights but share my vision of myself.<sup>121</sup>

While she is cautious about presenting her stance as political, Ferah still recognizes the social implications of her ‘personal’ music.

Most importantly, constant yearning for freedom in Ferah’s songs naturalizes female sexual freedom as a crucial aspect of a modern woman’s life. Her popular songs normalize its presence and reinforce its possible acceptance in the public sphere. Her “Good morning, darling,” in which she asks her boyfriend if he’d like to “make some more love before breakfast” indicates an edgy stance toward acceptable behavior in Turkish society and in what can be represented in popular music.<sup>122</sup> Ferah’s “Let me be your woman,” actually pushes her radical stance forward, although the song may, at first glance, appear supportive of patriarchal ideals:

This song is a beseeching  
This dream shouldn’t end but go on  
You, too, think and say something  
Where this love disappeared to  
Stop, don’t leave.  
Let me be your woman.<sup>123</sup>

The above lyrics seem to perpetuate myths of heterosexual romance. They reflect female submissiveness and imply a sexual act that serves as only an incentive to keep the man from leaving. From a Turkish perspective, however, Ferah’s emphasis on her being a ‘woman,’ and her word choice of woman over girl reflect her rebellious stance toward conventional images of Turkish womanhood. ‘Woman’ (‘kadin’), especially in the mainstream discourse, refers to either a widow or a sexually active female, thus someone

<sup>121</sup> Sebnem Atilgan, “Sokaklar Sakin, Konserler Full,” *Top Pop* (April 23-29, 1997), quoted in, <http://www.sebnemferahciyiz.biz/sebnem-atilgan-top-pop-vt2041.html>.

<sup>122</sup> “Gunaydin Sevgilim,” *Perdeler* [“Curtains”], © 2001 by Universal Muzik, MU960279NA390, Compact Disc.

<sup>123</sup> “Birak Kadinin Olayim,” *Kadin* [“Woman”], © 1996 by Raks Muzik, B000RJYLCM, Compact Disc.

no longer a virgin/“girl” (“kiz”), states which remain the prerequisites for a majority of marriages in Turkey. Even in metropolitan areas such as Istanbul, female sexuality is not a common theme in popular culture or in everyday life. In this song, however, Ferah voices her sexual attraction toward her male lover. As she popularizes the phrase, “Let me be your woman,” Ferah challenges Turkish patriarchy which links proper womanhood to sexuality only within the confines of marriage.

Ferah’s lyrics, at times, received criticism for being pornographic. Her song, “As I Sing my Song,” drew negative reactions not only from some media but also from the Turkish Ministry of Culture that was rumored to be getting ready to ban the song.<sup>124</sup> The alleged “pornographic” lyrics are in the first half of the song that Ferah wrote to a former boyfriend who had cheated on her:

Did you think the small, slippery hole you went in  
Was a grand, new world?  
Let me hold a mirror to help but you wouldn’t care.<sup>125</sup>

The Turkish Ministry did not ban the song, or the music video that accompanied it, but this album served to further crystallize Sebnem Ferah’s radical position in singing about issues that had not been voiced before. As Ferah defends herself against media criticism,

I am not an idiot. I could have avoided any problems by using ordinary words but I remained honest to my feelings.<sup>126</sup>

This is my difference: my honesty about conveying in my lyrics what I genuinely feel. I could have used cliché phrases that are sure to sell but that wouldn’t help me go a step further musically... Also, people in the traffic, on the streets swear at each other, at each other’s mothers. This

<sup>124</sup> For media criticism, see, for example, Arzu Akbas, “Kirmizi Noktali Bir Sarki Daha,” *Hurriyet*, May 21, 2003, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=148008>.

<sup>125</sup> “Ben Sarkimi Soylerken,” *Kelimeler Yetse* [“If Only Words Were Enough”], © 2003 by Universal Muzik, Compact Disc.

<sup>126</sup> Onur Basturk, “Askin Hesabi Kitabi Olmaz,” *Aktuel* (2003), quoted in <http://www.seboist.com/aktuel-dergisi-askin-hesabi-kitabi-olmaz-t1439.html>.

double-standard seems more problematic than my ‘so-called pornographic’ lyrics.<sup>127</sup>

Almost all of Ferah’s songs protest the pain felt by a woman who has realized that “men, even when they are in a relationship, have the urge to be with other women.”<sup>128</sup> While female acquisition of such manly attributes, such as the desire for polygamous relationships, is not acceptable to Ferah, she notes that “there are women who act like men as well,” a type of woman exemplified by Ozlem Tekin.<sup>129</sup>

Tekin’s lyrics, music videos and performances as well as public remarks simultaneously critique and reinforce the symbols and discourses of traditional Turkish manliness. Her songs reflect women who feel comfortable expressing their sexual attraction to men other than their partners; she acts “macho” at times while also claiming to be crazy about men.<sup>130</sup> In addition to songs about cheating on her boyfriend and challenging men by taking on masculine features of aggression, Tekin problematizes proper female behavior through her music videos, stage persona and through the publicized details of her personal affairs. She, indeed, reflects an internalization of “manly” behavior. She claims in an interview for the Turkish *FHM* magazine that “I would be a terrific Casanova if I were a man, and make women cry.”<sup>131</sup> As her erotic images (wearing only high black boots and a thong) accompany her statement, she reflects a public persona that embodies a parodic appropriation of patriarchal thinking.

<sup>127</sup> Cagnur Hatipoglu, “Sarkilarim pornografik degil,” *Milliyet*, July 26, 2003, quoted in, <http://www.sebnemferahciyiz.biz/cagnur-hatipoglu-milliyet-gazetesi-26-temmuz-03-vt2036.html?start=0&postdays=0&postorder=asc&highlight=>.

<sup>128</sup> “Sebnem Ferah Kirmizi Noktalik Sarkisini Savundu,” *Hurriyet*, May 24, 2003, <http://www.habervitrini.com/haber.asp?id=85785>.

<sup>129</sup> Basturk 2003.

<sup>130</sup> Female cheating was naturalized in Ozlem Tekin’s song, “Ask Herseyi Affeder mi,” [“Does Love Forgive Everything?”], which became an instant hit from her debut album, *Kime Ne?* [“Who Cares?”], ©1996 by Peker Muzik, Compact Disc. Dilek Dalliag, “Azgin Teke Sendromu,” *Hurriyet*, November 15, 2006, <http://kelebek.hurriyet.com.tr/magazin/5434421.asp?gid=90>.

<sup>131</sup> Oben Budak, “I would be a Terrific Casanova if I Were a Man,” Turkish *FHM* (December 2003) quoted in *Sabah* (Gunaydin), December 1, 2003, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2003/12/01/gny104.html>.

Tekin's music videos and lyrics reveal a similar contradiction among society-imposed beauty myths, male-objectified female bodies and female empowerment through internalization of patriarchal male behavior. Tekin's songs and her extramusical performances exhibit a rebellious, if contradictory, public figure. For example, her songs criticize women seeking husbands and she does not seem to care about separation from a boyfriend as she "can always find love in someone else's arms."<sup>132</sup>

The music video of her song, "Spring," embodies Tekin's internalization of masculine aggression.<sup>133</sup> Tekin portrays a woman who murders her lover after a fight, drives to the woods with the dead body in the trunk, and tosses the body in a grave that she has dug, singing "I'll find love in someone else's arms."<sup>134</sup> Here, Tekin's character subverts existing gender norms as she takes control of the relationship, of her ex-lover's body, of the car, the song, and her life. She asserts her independence by directing traditionally male-initiated violence against her lover which may also be read as a parody of male aggression in society and rock culture, a recurring theme in her other songs and music videos. Indeed, Tekin's use of the image of murder in this music video also represents a radical move in Turkish music industry which had not included images of violent women or implied murder until then.

Lyrics and performances of Tekin's songs such as "Does Love forgive everything?" and "Murder" exemplify a pioneering effort within Turkish mainstream culture, in terms of a parodic appropriation of masculinist discourses, and the uncritical

<sup>132</sup> Ozlem Tekin, "Bahar" ["Spring"], Öz ["Essence"], © 1998 by Istanbul Plak, Compact Disc. "Bahar" was written and composed by Barlas. Tekin's anti-marriage stance is visible in her song, "I've Drilled the Mountains" in which she distinguishes herself from the "paparazzi types" who try to "land a husband." "Daglari Deldim," *Tek Basima* ["On My Own"], © 2003 by Istanbul Plak, B0000894PC, Compact Disc.

<sup>133</sup> "Bahar" (Dir. Omer Vargi, by Prod. Filma-Cass and Arya Muzik), music video. For a discussion of masculine aggression and other male-associated codes in rock performances, see Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality," in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon, 1990).

<sup>134</sup> "Bahar" ["Spring"], Öz ["Essence"], © 1998 by Istanbul Plak, Compact Disc.

representation of female cheating.<sup>135</sup> “Murder” reflects a critique of uncontrolled male rage and murder in the name of love, with implied connotations of honor and passion crimes. In the music video and her live concert performances, Tekin wears a devil’s horn hairpiece as she sings, “Oh, you are the cause of cheating and murder.”<sup>136</sup> Her stage costume references society’s criticism of women who disrupt proper norms; it also implies that the devil must have overtaken her for her to think of the unthinkable, to commit adultery, murder anyone who gets in the way and to emulate those masculine codes of uncontrolled behavior in “cock rock” as a female performer.<sup>137</sup>

Tekin’s song “I’ve Drilled the Mountains” further illuminates her engagement with masculine codes.<sup>138</sup> Tekin draws from Turkish love legends such as *Kerem ile Asli*, in which the ultimate test of masculinity is to overcome obstacles like going through mountains and defeating many opponents on the way to his beloved:<sup>139</sup>

I’ve drilled mountains by myself.  
I crossed the deserts by myself  
I defeated men as a girl  
I wouldn’t collapse after you.<sup>140</sup>

While portraying the figure of a female warrior who does not fear the traditionally male spheres of nature and battle, Tekin also reflects a strong female personality that does not rely on a conventional relationship to survive. As she asserts in the song,

Man, I’m not looking for a husband.  
What are these songs for?  
Love, for love

<sup>135</sup> Ask Herseyi Affeder mi,” [“Does love forgive everything?”], *Kime Ne?* [“Who Cares?”], ©1996 by Peker Muzik, Compact Disc; “Cinayet” [“Murder”], 109876543210, © 2005 by Istanbul Plak, B000VHFR1E, Compact Disc.

<sup>136</sup> “Cinayet,” 109876543210, © 2005 by Istanbul Plak, B000VHFR1E, Compact Disc.

<sup>137</sup> Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, “Rock and Sexuality,” in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 375.

<sup>138</sup> “Daglari Deldim,” *Tek Basima* [“On My Own”], © 2003 by Istanbul Plak, B0000894PC, Compact Disc.

<sup>139</sup> For a critical analysis of the legend, see, Ali Duymaz, *Kerem ile Asli Hikayesi: uzerinde mukayeseli bir calisma* [“The Kerem and Asli Story: a comparative study”], (Ankara: Kultur Bakanligi, 2001).

<sup>140</sup> “Daglari Deldim,” *Tek Basima* [“On My Own”], © 2003 by Istanbul Plak, B0000894PC, Compact Disc.

I got it all the way to my core, that's another thing.<sup>141</sup>

I should note in this context that it is not traditionally acceptable for a Turkish female publicly to use the phrase, “I got it all the way to my core” as it contains an implied male phallic symbol “core” (literally, ‘stick’ in the original). As Tekin playfully appropriates other images of masculinity and manliness, she challenges traditional Turkish gender norms in the Turkish language and in society.

The music video of this song further reveals Tekin's simultaneous deconstruction of the traditional symbols of femininity and masculinity.<sup>142</sup> Shot in an indoor basketball court, the music video presents Tekin wearing a red mini skirt, a “Miss Turkey” banner (in English) and playing the electric guitar. In the first few frames, varying images of masculinity are juxtaposed through a close-up of a hand bomb and a helmet – both placed on an amplifier – and a Ken doll that is on the floor, holding the microphone for Tekin's character. In different shots, Tekin is shown attacking an invisible opponent, first with a sword, and later by punching into the air toward the camera. In three frames, Tekin portrays two characters side-by-side, the aggressive boxer and the cheer leader displaying her pompoms. The playing of the guitar juxtaposed with the beauty pageant and cheerleader images is significant for several reasons. Tekin incorporates the electric guitar as a phallic symbol of rock culture and its privileging of masculinity. The guitar and the microphone, however, are ornamented with cheerleader pompoms indicating the female intrusion into the male sphere of rock. Tekin also has runs in her pantyhose which represents her resistance to complying with ideal beauty standards and

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> “Daglari Deldim” (Dir. Murad Kucuk, Prod. Istanbul, 2003), music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpMQHULyzVg>.

expectations of a constructed femininity.<sup>143</sup> Images of basketball and cheerleading – both of which entered Turkish popular culture through American movies – may also serve as a critique of the emulation of American culture in Turkey. Tekin’s reference to beauty pageants also parodies the patriarchal industry norms that emphasize physical appearance over musical talent and the ‘Miss Turkey’ banner may allude to the diversification of rock across borders and genders. The beauty pageant also serves as a critique of the objectified “chick singer” image of many rock vocalists who are not considered serious musicians, an obstacle faced by Turkish women musicians in the early 1990s, and, according to scholar Mavis Bayton, still experienced by female rock performers in the West.<sup>144</sup> Tekin’s portrayal of the boxing and sword-swinging character presents a contradictory, yet critical perspective about static notions of manliness.<sup>145</sup> Here, Tekin draws attention to a recurring theme in her songs, the physical aggression of men, one that most women believe that they must appropriate to succeed in the world. The clever merging of traditional images of femininity and masculinity constructs a postmodern text in Tekin’s music videos and public persona, one that achieves its strength from its inherent contradictions and its use of self-referentiality and parody.

Arguably, the most political aspect of Tekin’s musical career has been her courage to tackle sensitive issues in Turkish culture such as forced arranged marriages and homeless children. Tekin explores the arranged marriage issue in her “Bride without

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<sup>143</sup> Tekin frequently uses this imperfect pantyhose image in her live performances as well, claiming that “With my outfits, I intend to free Turkish women from such fixations..it’s okay to have a run in your pantyhose,” September 27, 2004, *Takvim*, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/2004/09/27/yas118.html>.

<sup>144</sup> Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12-17.

<sup>145</sup> The image of boxing is incorporated in Tekin’s public persona as well. Tekin claims in interviews that she releases her aggression through kickboxing as a hobby. Ozlem Tekin, “Hulya Avsar Show,” *Kanal D* (2004), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xvu6lbQi0eI>.

a Veil” as she opposes those who force a young girl to marry someone she does not know:

It's enough that you had to put up with  
Say no, yell it out bride!  
You can't force someone to be a bride  
Isn't there anyone you know?  
You can't have a forced wedding.  
There can't be a bride without a veil.<sup>146</sup>

Such critical lyrics about rural patriarchy, indeed, contradict Tekin's public persona as distanced from rural women's lives, as she has admitted elsewhere that television has been her sole source for learning about arranged marriages.<sup>147</sup> While Tekin's later albums do not reflect a similar engagement with social themes, her appearance in a popular 2006 film as a runaway bride extended her earlier protest of arranged marriages in Anatolia.<sup>148</sup> Tekin also continues to reflect a rebellious tone as her later songs encouraging her fans to “make your own rules, never mind the others.”<sup>149</sup>

Nil Karaibrahimgil has also used her music as well as her public persona and her writing to demonstrate nontraditional views of Turkish womanhood. Unlike Tekin, however, she has consciously aligned her songs with ideas about women's empowerment. She has publicly claimed that music and popular culture have always been more effective in empowering women than books or official discourse.<sup>150</sup> As she puts it, “Although my initial goal was not consciousness raising, my popularity helped me spread my provoking ideas, particularly in terms of urban women's concerns such as relationships, issues of domesticity, marriage, career, and female sexuality. My lyrics have been empowering for

<sup>146</sup> “Duvaksiz Gelin,” *Kime Ne?* [“Who Cares?”], ©1996 by Peker Muzik, Compact Disc.

<sup>147</sup> Ahmet Tulgar, “Sacina Gore Sevgili,” *Milliyet Pazar*, March 10, 2001, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2001/03/10/pazar/ropop.html>.

<sup>148</sup> *Hokkabaz* [“The Magician”], (Dir.s. Ali Taner Baltaci and Cem Yilmaz, Prod. BKM, 2006).

<sup>149</sup> “Oz” [“Essence”], *Öz*, © 1998 by Istanbul Plak, Compact Disc.

<sup>150</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

women and even very young girls.”<sup>151</sup> Each of her three albums includes at least one women’s anthem, songs which become ultra-popular anthems of liberation and assertion. Karaibrahimgil uses her pop culture appeal to convey an ideological position in her songs as well as in her newspaper columns, a perspective that parallels Sebnem Ferah’s, yet she appears ‘lighter’ and less confrontational. As she puts it, “Through my lyrics and performances, I give out a crazy girl image; so much that it’s harder for people to protest my ideas.”<sup>152</sup> While Karaibrahimgil implies that most people do not take her seriously, her non-intimidating appeal and radical stance draw primarily from her ‘light’ image.

One of her newspaper columns titled, “Nil’in Gencligine Hitabesi” (“Nil’s Address to Her Youth”), in the major newspaper, *Hurriyet*, further illustrates Karaibrahimgil’s anti-establishment stance.<sup>153</sup> Here she refers to the national address of modern Turkey’s founding father, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, “Address to the Turkish Youth,” in which he directly spoke about foreign and internal enemies and ways to overcome national defeat.<sup>154</sup> While this particular column, at first glance, seems to be a monologue, it also demonstrates Karaibrahimgil’s awareness of her young followers and her potential impact on them. As she refers to the mythological figure Sisyphus, she tells her readers that her “first responsibility should be to de-mythify Sisyphus and related truth claims.”<sup>155</sup> This column reveals her radical stance not only because she instructs her young readers (in a Muslim-majority country) to “humiliate the gods,” but also because of her deconstruction of a national founding document and her parodic look at

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>153</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil. “Nil’in Gencligine Hitabesi,” Nil FM, *Kelebek* (Hurriyet), May 2, 2005, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=316050&p=2>.

<sup>154</sup> Atatürk’s “Address to the Youth” is a founding document of the modern Turkish Republic, originally recited by Atatürk in Ankara, October 20, 1927.

<sup>155</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, “Nil’in Gencligine Hitabesi,” May 2, 2005.

the ideologies of nationalism and religiosity. While this column went almost unnoticed by conservatives, Karaibrahimgil received one protest e-mail, in which the sender confronted her, “Who are you to use Atatürk’s important speech like this?” Karaibrahimgil has commented, “It is interesting that someone as narrow-minded as this person has actually read my column. When I see the protest email that other writers receive, I think I am lucky I don’t receive twice that. I think it’s because of my crazy outlook,” thus indicating her strategic use of her image for radical statements.<sup>156</sup>

As another main theme, Karaibrahimgil explores women’s fixation on body image as a prerequisite to attract future male partners. Her song, “Because of Men” shows her critical perspective and represents the first song in Turkish music that explores the mundane aspects of a modern woman’s daily life:

Cellulite cream and moisturizer  
 Smile, men like positive girls!  
 I must wear high heels because I am short  
 I must braid my hair, that’s the trend now  
 I am too busy because of men  
 Oh, my eyebrows, my lashes  
 My manicure, pedicure  
 Because of men, I have no other thing to do  
 My smile is always fake  
 Those tasteless diets, my manicure, pedicure...men!<sup>157</sup>

As she explains, “This is what is on the minds of most women today: cellulite creams, all those beauty products, just to look appealing to men. I don’t want to write or sing about traditional topics such as love just to sell.”<sup>158</sup> Karaibrahimgil also conveys her critique of

<sup>156</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>157</sup> “Erkekler Yuzunden,” *Nil Dnyasi* [“Nil’s World”] © 2002, by Epic Records/Sony, B001V5DK0A, Compact Disc.

<sup>158</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

women's constructed looks in her writing, thus repeating a theme from her songs.<sup>159</sup>

The song "I can both make a baby and a career," further exemplifies Karaibrahimgil's alternative style while revealing her comfortable relationship with the commercialization of her ideas.<sup>160</sup> She originally wrote and performed this song for a TV commercial for a feminine sanitary napkin, which served in many ways as a key to Karaibrahimgil's increasing popularity as the 'Career and Baby Woman.' The company executives had asked her to write a "women's anthem," one with which all women would associate their freedom and aspirations.<sup>161</sup> She then researched what most women wrote, read or sang about. As she recalls, "When I found that most independent women songs were from the perspective of the financially-independent woman and saw on Amazon that most bestsellers were about juggling career and motherhood, the song came naturally...it has nothing to do with that product, but is an outlet for me to express my own worldview."<sup>162</sup>

I am free, with wings  
 See what a beautiful woman I've become  
 All the men are after me  
 I am forcing the limits  
 I can't stay at life's periphery  
 Even if they put obstacles in front of me  
 I can make both a baby and a career  
  
 Even though they say, 'This, too, shall pass'  
 I can make both a baby and a career.<sup>163</sup>

With the added effect of the initial appearance of the song in TV commercials, this song's

<sup>159</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, "Ferrari'sini satan Nil," Nil FM, *Kelebek* (Hurriyet), January 2, 2006, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=3727413&tarih=2006-01-02>.

<sup>160</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil originally wrote "Cocuk da Yaparim Kariyer de" as an ad jingle for Orkid brand sanitary napkins, and included it in her second album, *Nil FM*, © 2004 by Epic Records/Sony, B001V3E4VG, Compact Disc.

<sup>161</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> "Cocuk da Yaparim Kariyer de," *Nil FM*, © 2004 by Epic Records/Sony, B001V3E4VG, Compact Disc.

title quickly became a household phrase naturalizing working motherhood as a both/and, rather than an either/or situation. As Karaibrahimgil comments,

This song is important for two reasons. First, in a country in which most girls are still not valued enough to be sent to school, I introduce to young girls the possibility of a career. Second, I focus on the ‘I’ in this song...on women’s power. *I will make a baby, not we. I can choose to make this and a career.* This is a radical thing to say. Even in the United States, this may be challenging to most conservatives. I could express all of this with the help of a TV commercial.<sup>164</sup>

In addition to the commercials, her successful advertising background has allowed Karaibrahimgil to popularize, in catchy lyrics, her image of an empowered Turkish woman.<sup>165</sup> As she notes, an independent woman “should not be ashamed of exhibiting her femininity, her financial independence, her power, or her stance in life, and she fully controls her reproductive choices and chooses her own man.”<sup>166</sup> Similarly, her song “Diamond” depicts a woman who has bought herself a diamond ring, the ultimate symbol of wealth in Turkey. Karaibrahimgil reflects her critical view of women who expect material gifts from men as a token of their love:

What would this girl do with all those material gifts? She can work and get those herself.

She got herself a diamond ring

...How many carats is your heart worth? That’s what she wonders

Come on, right hands in the air, all diamonds here

I got myself a diamond ring; put it on all by myself

...If I don’t have a lover in my arms, what to do with a diamond ring on my finger?<sup>167</sup>

<sup>164</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>165</sup> Prior to her musical career, Karaibrahimgil worked as a copywriter, and between 2000 and 2008, she wrote several ad jingles, two of which received, “The Crystal Apple,” the most prestigious award given to copywriters in Turkey.

<sup>166</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>167</sup> “Pirlanta,” *Tek Tasimi Kendim Aldim*, © 2006 by Sony BMG, B0024L2P88, MP3. I should note here the resemblance of the main themes to that of Destiny’s Child’s single, *Independent Women: Part I*, © 2000 by Phantom Sound & Visi, B000055R42, Compact Disc. Karaibrahimgil has declined to comment on this.

Like the other ‘modern women’s anthems’ she has popularized, Karaibrahimgil communicates her ideas in a fast-paced and humorous song. Since she uses the diamond ring as a metaphor for materialism and does not directly question its romantic connotations, this song did not receive a widespread negative reaction.<sup>168</sup> Columnists understood the metaphor and agreed that there exists a type of woman who expects monetary gifts from men. The song has taken on a quasi-political stance in the media as it became associated in news stories about “women who returned their diamond rings at divorces and did not accept their husbands’ diamond-bribes.”<sup>169</sup> Jewelry stores also offered sales and promoted installment campaigns so that a housewife could save up from the kitchen budget or a teenager from her allowance to buy her own diamond ring.<sup>170</sup>

In reference to the potential influence of her songs and her column on women’s self-perception, Karaibrahimgil asserts, “Giving edgy messages in a milder format helps. I get into people’s homes without resistance. After all, it’s easier to sing your way and belly dance through a song about women’s power...much more so than books.”<sup>171</sup> While her statement about the impact of her music may be challenged by other musicians such as Sebnem Ferah, who had commented in regards to her first album, “Woman,” that “After all, I didn’t write a book, I made a music album,” or Ozlem Tekin who hates

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<sup>168</sup> Two critiques in particular are worth noting. Feminist writer, Ahu Parlar, criticized the song for not being feminist enough, and creating a “fake feminism,” while another more conservative columnist criticized Karaibrahimgil for attacking the diamond ring, the “sacred symbol of love.” Ahu Parlar, “Sahte Feminizm Uretimi,” *Radikal Cevrimici*, July 16, 2006, [http://www.radikal.com.tr/ek\\_haber.php?ek=r2&haberno=6064&tarih=12/12/2009&ek\\_tarihi=YOK](http://www.radikal.com.tr/ek_haber.php?ek=r2&haberno=6064&tarih=12/12/2009&ek_tarihi=YOK); Quoted in Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>169</sup> Karaibrahimgil, 2006. For example, Turkish socialite Elif Germiyanligil (Durust) did not accept her husband’s 100.000 USD worth diamond gift after his affair and divorced him, and her decision was associated with Karaibrahimgil’s song, “Diamond.” Nuri Cintay, “Elif Germiyanligil ile Nil Karaibrahimgil’in Ortak Noktasi,” *Radikal Cevrimici*, May 8, 2006, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=186719>.

<sup>170</sup> Esin Ovet, “Tektasini kendisi alanlar cogaliyor,” *Gunaydin*, April 24, 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/04/24/gny/haber,79BFAF5541C2486D900E304017DBEC3A.html>

<sup>171</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

political movements, all three musicians have implied an awareness of the type of influence they may have on mainstream discourses as well as on their audiences.<sup>172</sup>

### **Participatory Fandom: The Case of Turkish Rock Fans**

The Turkish pop rock scene includes a participatory culture in which audience members can interact with the musicians and with each other. This interactive personal experience includes online, fan-initiated websites as well as official websites that allow audiences a free space in which to socialize (detached from parental controls and other authority figures), establish web polls and produce and submit their own texts in the form of criticism, journalism or fan art. While Turkish rock culture does not include any accomplished female critics, the accessibility of the Internet allows many female listeners to take on the role of critics and reporters from the field. Publicly shared creative fan productions also contribute to the interactive potentiality of rock culture. These include fan-initiated online radio stations and magazines, both of which represent a first in Turkish culture, as well as visual libraries of musicians' videos (promoted as the first online fan television in the case of Ferah fans), and personal video recordings, slide shows, documentaries, photo collages, calendars, poetry and edited or animated music videos that fans share on the Internet.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Sebnem Atilgan, "Sokaklar Sakin, Konserler Full," *Top Pop* (April 23-29, 1997), quoted in, <http://www.sebnemferahciyiz.biz/sebnem-atilgan-top-pop-vt2041.html>; Ozlem Tekin quoted in, Ahmet Tulgar, "Sacina Gore Sevgili," *Milliyet Pazar*, March 10, 2001, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2001/03/10/pazar/ropop.html>.

<sup>173</sup> For fan art, see, for example, drawings of Ferah in *Sebokolik Dergi* 1 (2007), <http://dergi.sebokolik.com/sayi-1/sebokolik-sanatsal-calismalar/>, fan poetry and fiction at <http://www.ozlemtekin.biz/forum/index.php?topic=6644.0>, and at <http://www.shebomaniax.com/forum/yazcizkarala-vt361.html>, a fan-created, six-part documentary of Ozlem Tekin at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GE9EJFMk-7E>, a slide show on Tekin fandom, called "tekinizm" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KofOD-DSkNI>. For fan-created music videos, see, for example, a fan-created music video in which a female fan of Karaibrahimgil acts herself, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pV4azCIGFCk>; <http://www.gazotube.com/ApXvYMEtF9I.html> for Tekin's "War for No Cause;" <http://www.kliplerimiz.com/sebnem-ferah/durma-klip-izle.html> for Sebnem Ferah's "Don't Stop;" and an animated version of Nil Karaibrahimgil's "Cake" at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AV6vYJrQs\\_0&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AV6vYJrQs_0&feature=related). For comments about fan art, see, for example, <http://sebnemferahfan.com/?s=forum&a=1&id=33> and <http://dergi.sebokolik.com/sebokolik-cizgisel>. Ozlem Tekin,

Through their participatory experience of this new culture, a culture exemplified by strong female musicians and their music, female fans appropriate their own versions of what it means to be empowered in today's urban Turkey. For these women empowerment means one or more of the following: reclaiming and redefining feminine and feminist identities, demonstrating self-assertion and the ability to take the initiative on socially conscious issues such as the environment and world politics while simultaneously embracing financial independence and motherhood and intruding into the traditionally male spheres of nightlife, rock bars and business life as audience members and as aspiring musicians. While these audience activities might not be evidence of agency in another culture, for young Turkish women most of this fan behavior serves as a form of resistance to the patriarchal make-up of the society.

I should note, in this context, that, while crossovers are common, two very different groups of rock audiences exist in Turkey. A radical activist group that remains subcultural, oppositional, politically active and explicitly anti-American, and a participatory, yet not univocally political, group.<sup>174</sup> Members of the subcultural group prefer political-identified musicians and they use rock music as a mode of expression of their critical attitude toward processes such as Americanization, military and cultural imperialism and patriarchy. They have fanzines and other publications, websites and their own festival, Rock for Peace that remains volunteer-run.<sup>175</sup>

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"Sevepsiz Savas," *Kime Ne?* ["Who Cares?"], ©1996 by Peker Muzik, Compact Disc. Sebnem Ferah, "Durma," *Kadin* ["Woman"], © 1996 by Raks Muzik, B000RJYLCM, Compact Disc. Nil Karaibrahimgil, "Kek," *Nil Dunyasi* ["Nil's World"] © 2002, by Epic Records/Sony, B001V5DK0A, Compact Disc.

<sup>174</sup> Crossovers from the subcultural to the mainstream rock scene are seen among both musicians and fans. Subcultural fans may occasionally follow such mainstream performers as Ferah and Tekin as well as attend mainstream festivals, while performers like Asli and Aylin Aslim enter the mainstream with performances at Rock'n Coke and other sponsored festivals. Asli and Aslim performed at the Rock'n Coke festival in 2007 and 2009 respectively.

<sup>175</sup> Some rock and metal fanzines that began as photocopies in the 1990s and later turned into print magazines and/or webzines include the first Turkish fanzine *Laneth* (1991-1994, 2002-), *Non-Serviam* (1997-1999) and *Deli Kasap* (2001-, [www.delikasap.com](http://www.delikasap.com)). The first print rock magazine, *Rock Art*, was published in 1986 (Istanbul: Studyo Imge

Fans of Ferah (“Seboists” or “Sebokoliks”), Karaibrahimgil (“Nilciler”) and Tekin (“Tekinists”) include urban, middle-class, heterosexual women as well as the underground female youth in Western and Anatolian cities, although each performer has a considerable male following, and a visible loyalty from young female children in the case of Karaibrahimgil. Seboists and Tekinists exhibit a more visible ‘rocker image’ in their experimentation, despite their parents’ resistance, with bodily modifications (piercings and tattoos) and in their outfits, eye make-up, blogs and their online forums. In contrast, Nilciler do not reflect an identifiable image. They, like Karaibrahimgil, use commercial culture to empower themselves. Since Ferah and Tekin have been performing since the early 1990s, it is also quite common to observe a multi-generational audience of parents and their teenage children at concerts.

During the Volvox period, listeners encountered the musicians solely at at concerts on college campuses in the cities of Bursa, Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara or at independent venues. These spaces provided a non-intimidating sphere in which current and prospective fans could gain a firsthand experience of this new culture, spearheaded by female performers. With increased fame, it became increasingly difficult even for such modest musicians as Sebnem Ferah to maintain that personal contact. Later, emails and letters to the performers as well as fans’ comments in online forums served to continue that contact. In reference to Ferah’s song, “As I sing my song,” a fan writes, for instance, “My feminist ideas get stronger each time I hear this song. Sebo, you genuinely

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Dergi). A more recent print magazine, *Yuxexes* (which also has a TV show on Dream TV by the same name), is also worth noting in terms of its underground appeal among both hard rock and metal fans (2005-), <http://yuxexes.deviantart.com/>. For a brief survey of rock and metal fanzines, see, “Türkiye’nin Fanzinleri,” *NTV-MSNBC* (May 7, 2002), <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/150488.asp>.

are a rebellious woman.”<sup>176</sup> Ferah has also noted that she frequently receives emails and letters from her “listener-friends who share with her their inner worlds and the inspirations they get from her” as future musicians.<sup>177</sup>

Audience members access this communal sphere of Turkish rock culture through multiple means. By the late 1990s, the albums they purchased were promoted by music videos thus giving those listeners unable to go to the concerts a visual experience. Newly affordable technology, such as cell phones with video and photo recording features, and the wide accessibility and popularity of the Internet and online sharing helped enhance and extend audience members’ concert experiences. Fans uploaded their concert recordings and photos on sharing websites, and more and more fans attended live “phone-in concerts” by calling their friends who attended the live performances.

Turkish girls and women exhibit the multiple ways in which this interactive music culture has challenged gender norms as well as masculinist views of rock in Turkey, and guided Turkish youth, both female and male, to “expand their horizons.”<sup>178</sup> Spearheaded by the rebellious image promoted by Volvox members, and later perpetuated by the popularity of Ferah and Tekin, in particular, more and more girls became associated with rock music and active music production. While in the early 1990s it was considered a deviation from the ‘normal’ for teenage girls to show interest in rock culture as listeners, let alone as active producers (as vocalists or instrumentalists), within a decade, girls’ interest in rock music had skyrocketed. More and more teenage girls began to show

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<sup>176</sup> Online user, “19izmir,” “Kelimeler Yetse,” comment posted January 2008, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_oZ8X23B0c4&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oZ8X23B0c4&feature=related).

<sup>177</sup> Sebnem Ferah, interview by the author, received via e-mail, September 5, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

interest in playing electric instruments, forming girl groups like their female idols, and convincing their families that performing in a rock band was an acceptable hobby.<sup>179</sup>

The first fan radio station, *Seboistnet*, and its successor *Sebokolik TV*, as well as the first online rock magazines *Sebokolik Dergi* and *Sebokolik Cizgisel* (all initiated by Sebnem Ferah fans) reflect the participatory experiences of rock music.<sup>180</sup> *Seboistnet* (2004-2009) was a twenty-four hour live radio station with three DJ's who played Ferah's albums, concert recordings and re-runs of Ferah's TV interviews as well as songs by other foreign and Turkish alternative rock musicians. While no media promotions announced the establishment of this online station, it succeeded in being recognized as a respectable radio station.<sup>181</sup> When *Seboistnet* was discontinued in 2009, Ferah fans of a different fan website established *Sebokolik TV*, an online video sharing center devoted to Ferah's videos and special appearances as well as videos of performances by her group members.<sup>182</sup> *Sebokolik TV* serves a participatory audio-visual library which is expanded with input from fans.

Ferah, like Ozlem Tekin, preferred to remain supportive about her fans' creativity but did not initiate any collaborative projects, while Nil Karaibrahimgil tapped into her fans' interest in an interactive musical experience. The same year in which *Seboistnet* was established, Karaibrahimgil used the radio format in her concerts with a pretend-

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<sup>179</sup> For comments about young women's interest in becoming instrumentalists and how they resist and negotiate their parents' reactions, see, for example, "gamze," comment posted August 17, 2008, <http://dergi.sebokolik.com/sebokolik-cizgisel/>, and "sarah," comment posted October 5, 2008, <http://www.ozlemtekin.biz/forum/index.php?topic=13277.30>. Also see comments by group members of all-female amateur rock bands, Rock's Heras (2004-) from Bartın, Sessiz Ciglik (2007-) from Erzincan, and Mikroterapi (2006-) from Elazığ. These groups are based in conservative Anatolia and heavily influenced by Volvox and Sebnem Ferah, [http://rocksheras.anatolianrock.com/grup\\_elemanlari.htm](http://rocksheras.anatolianrock.com/grup_elemanlari.htm); Gurkan Akgunes, "Turku varken rock da neymis," *Milliyet Pazar*, July 6, 2007, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/07/06/pazar/apaz.html>; [http://mikroterapi.rockmekan.com/grup\\_elemanlari.htm](http://mikroterapi.rockmekan.com/grup_elemanlari.htm).

<sup>180</sup> <http://radio.seboistnet.com>, currently discontinued (Accessed December 20, 2006); <http://tv.sebokolik.com>. The two fan magazines can be found at <http://dergi.sebokolik.com>.

<sup>181</sup> See, for example, "Seboistnet Radyo," *Haftalik* 74 (September 9-15, 2004).

<sup>182</sup> <http://tv.sebokolik.com>.

radio station, Nil FM, set up on the stage.<sup>183</sup> She accepted phone calls from the audience, and performed the requested songs. This strategic use of the radio format crystallized her interest in improvised performances, often associated with alternative rock, and it extended Ferah fans' experimentation with multiple media to the concert stage. This audio-visual sharing format was later appropriated by Karaibrahimgil fans as well.<sup>184</sup>

*Sebokolik Dergi*, which began in 2007 as a Turkish rock magazine, further turned fan creativity into a sophisticated text, serving as a dialogue among musicians and audiences as well as between Ferah and her fans. Since its first issue, the magazine has included extensive interviews with numerous well-known Turkish rock musicians as well as a section for educating readers about a specific rock instrument and a special section called "Sebokolik Art Works" featuring drawings of Ferah by her fans. The "From Sebocholics to Sebo" section included messages from Ferah fans and revealed that Ferah herself was considered the recipient of this fan-produced text. *Sebokolik Dergi* as well as its sister magazine *Sebokolik Cizgisel* (2009-), which includes artworks (mainly drawings of Ferah) and Ferah-related news and activities, have remained independent, volunteer-run publications devoid of the constraints of corporate advertising in commercial rock magazines.<sup>185</sup>

A significant role of both magazines has been their centralization of female presence and its naturalization of female rock fans as well as critics, writers and artists. This shift becomes most vivid in the visibility of many female senior editors, writers and

<sup>183</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil used a radio set-up in her Istanbul Harbiye Cemil Topuzlu Amphitheater concert, September 8, 2004. She explained her choice of a participatory radio theater' format in an interview. Tuba Akyol, "Nil FM Acikhava Tiyatrosunda Yayinda," *Milliyet*, August 31, 2004, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2004/08/31/cumartesi/acum.html>.

<sup>184</sup> Soon after Seboistnet Radio was established, a major Karaibrahimgil fan website included her videos and songs in an audio/video library format on its home page, <http://www.nilkaraibrahimgil.net/blog/#> (2005-).

<sup>185</sup> The magazines often included only one promotional page which was for a non-profit organization in Turkey. See, for example, <http://dergi.sebokolik.com/sayi-5/> and <http://dergi.sebokolik.com/sebokolik-cizgisel/>.

reporters in *Sebokolik Dergi* and in the numerous photographs of female rockers, as both musicians and audience members, included in *Sebokolik Cizgisel*.<sup>186</sup> The cover page of the fifth issue of *Sebokolik Dergi* announced, for example, that key editorial roles were held by two female writers, which represented a first in Turkish rock journalism.<sup>187</sup> Most recently, *Sebokolik Cizgisel* has documented how members of their fan website, [www.sebokolik.com](http://www.sebokolik.com), turned it into an interactive space that extends to a real-life, face-to-face community, open to both male and female fans of Ferah.<sup>188</sup>

These online networks have become a supportive communal space for fans of all ages and genders. These spaces function, in fans' words, as families for them.<sup>189</sup> Fans not only interact with fellow fans from across the country on the Internet, but they also organize get-togethers, host out-of-town fans and attend concerts as groups.<sup>190</sup> It is not uncommon to see young women and men carrying a banner that reads, for instance, "Sebnem Ferah Fan Meeting Point" as they meet fellow fans in public places, and use the banner to self-identify at concerts.<sup>191</sup>

Audience members continue to participate in rock culture in other ways as well. They emulate the behavior and the musical styles of the performers. Moreover, they take an active role in broader political issues such as gender inequality, either by the choices they make in terms of which rock festival to attend (commercial versus volunteer-run), by

<sup>186</sup> As of 2009, women hold nine of the fifteen editorial positions in *Sebokolik Dergi* and the feature interviews often include female rock musicians as Aydilge and Buket Doran.

<sup>187</sup> Music writers Bilge Kocarslan and Asena Ozcetin were announced on the coverpage of *Sebokolik Dergi* 5 (2009), <http://dergi.sebokolik.com/sayi-5/>. Similarly, Karaibrahimgil's fan website shows that two key editorial positions, as site administrator and news editor, are held by women, <http://www.nilkaraibrahimgil.net/blog/kategori/guncel/> (2008-).

<sup>188</sup> See, for example, the mixed-gender photo and captions in *Sebokolik Cizgisel* (2009): 8.

<http://dergi.sebokolik.com/sebokolik-cizgisel/>.

<sup>189</sup> See, for example, "Anelko," comment posted November 12, 2006,

<http://sebnemferahfan.com/?s=forum&a=3&id=1820&p=3>.

<sup>190</sup> Fans often have special forums about these events, and post comments about them in their forums. See, for example, <http://www.ozlemtekin.biz/forum/index.php?board=17.0>, and <http://www.turkrock.com/forum24.html>,

<sup>191</sup> See, for example, the following photographs of Ferah fans and their use of the banner, *Sebokolik Cizgisel* 1 (2009): 6-7, <http://dergi.sebokolik.com/sebokolik-cizgisel/>.

the campaigns they organize or by the comments they make on fan websites. Turkish audiences pushed rock music to become further politicized in multiple ways in the 2000s.<sup>192</sup>

Nil Karaibrahimgil and Sebnem Ferah acknowledge their influence on their audiences, which, as the fan websites and concerts in Anatolian college towns reveal, is not limited to urban listeners. Karaibrahimgil has pointed out that her music and public persona have an impact on women and girls in big cities and in eastern, rural Anatolia alike, mainly due to the accessibility of the Internet. She has also noted that, “I see in my readers’ emails and at my college concerts in Anatolia that those young women, even those wearing the headscarf, exhibit signs of open-mindedness and self-confidence, despite the drastically different living conditions.”<sup>193</sup> Online forums with comments by fans from all across Turkey reveal this diversification among pop-rock audiences.

Regarding her potential influence on her fans, Ferah says, “I think at least twice before making music about things that can impact people, especially those than can influence them in a negative way.”<sup>194</sup> Yet, she also emphasizes that she resists self-censorship in her lyrics.<sup>195</sup> This seeming contradiction relates to her negotiated vision of rock culture as an uninhibited space in which audiences should learn to exert themselves. Ferah’s notion of negative impact thus emerges out of what she perceives as the unidimensional nature of popular culture. She notes that, “The audience is young, and they are exposed to a different kind of pop culture which they think the world is made up

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<sup>192</sup> As will be examined in the next section, the volunteer-run rock festival, Rock for Peace (“Barisa Rock”), established in opposition to the commercial Rock’n Coke Festival and the audiences’ and musicians’ preferences of one festival over another, revealed the political ramifications of rock and Turkish people’s diverse interpretations of it.

<sup>193</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>194</sup> Caglan Ekil *et al*, “Sebnem Ferah’la Roportaj,” *NonServiam* (August 1999), <http://www.seboistnet.com/roportaj.php?id=44&foto=r&action=goster>.

<sup>195</sup> Asli Onat, “Sansursuz,” *Radikal*, June 1, 2003, [http://www.radikal.com.tr/ek\\_haber.php?ek=r2&haberno=2257](http://www.radikal.com.tr/ek_haber.php?ek=r2&haberno=2257).

of. We should put equal servings of each [pop and rock] in front of them so they can expand their horizons.”<sup>196</sup> This remark reveals Ferah’s view of rock as holding a privileged ideological position in guiding audiences to transcend limitations.

Listeners of Ferah, Tekin and Karaibrahimgil reflect a temporary disappearance of hierarchy and a participatory experience of liberation in Turkish music. The nonhierarchical and participatory nature of audience activity becomes most visible on Turkish fan websites and during live performances in concerts, rock bars and festivals. In online forums, the older, more experienced and the younger fans as well as male and female members have an equal say, or at least share a space in which they can freely express themselves knowing that they will receive fair treatment by fellow fans who may not agree with them. The shared pleasures of parent-teenage child or older/younger sibling audience members in live performances also point to the disruption of existing hierarchies of musical taste. A Sebnem Ferah fan’s candid description of her concert experience with her mother vividly illustrates this new, nonhierarchical experience while also destabilizing fixed understandings of rock culture as solely appealing to younger, subcultural audiences: “I was allowed to go to the concert only if my mother came with me. Then, to my surprise, my mother held my hand and took me to the front row. She started to scream and sing along to Sebo’s songs with the rest of us. My father was waiting in the car outside the whole time!”<sup>197</sup> While the mother and her daughter remained on the concert ground, the concert gave them a liberating space.

The relationship between young female fans and Karaibrahimgil exemplifies a similar bond. As she has pointed out, Karaibrahimgil receives numerous emails and

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<sup>196</sup> Sebnem Ferah, interview by the author, received via e-mail, September 5, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>197</sup> Online user, “seboist\_bjk,” “Forum: Sebnem Ferah Konserleri,” comment posted June 19, 2008, <http://sebnemferahfan.com/?s=forum&a=3&id=4351&p=2> (Accessed December 11, 2008; discontinued in 2009).

letters from her fans who affectionately address her as “Nil Abla,” (Big Sister Nil), thus indicating the erasure of monolithic adult/teenager, spectator/performer categories and, instead, implying a side-by-side alliance that her young fans envision.<sup>198</sup> Emails, especially those addressed to her column, describe the ways in which Karaibrahimgil’s songs and persona have inspired, strengthened and empowered the writers.<sup>199</sup> Such nonhierarchical experiences may be disrupted by such factors as the existence of VIP front seats in concerts, but fans find creative ways to subvert that structure as they enter the VIP section and share anecdotal experiences on the Internet in the form of comments and photos, showing their posters intruding into VIP spaces.<sup>200</sup>

Music festivals, rock bars and fan websites also help disrupt the spectator/performer distinction, functioning as resistive spaces, similar to those found in a carnival as everyone participates. Since the early 1990s, rock bars have become the hip space which more and more girls and young women freely navigate while listening to their favorite musicians, socializing with the rest of the underground community and asserting their independence as liberated girls. College concerts and rock festivals also function as new meeting grounds, and spaces of resistance for young women in big cities as well as in smaller college towns in Anatolia. Large-scale open-air rock festivals, in particular, function as carnivalesque spaces for young females. The days-long open-air rock festival concept, indeed, represents a first in Turkey, as no other festival gave the audiences the option of trouble-free camping on festival sites.<sup>201</sup> The mere fact that

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<sup>198</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> Online user, “sebomelekim,” “Forum: Sebnem Ferah,” comment posted September 8, 2006, <http://sebnemferahfan.com/?s=forum&a=3&id=1436> (Accessed December 11, 2008; discontinued in 2009).

<sup>201</sup> H2000, the only comparable festival that preceded the 2003 Rock’n Coke Festival, turned out to be a fiasco as local gendarmerie attempted to remove the audiences who had purchased camping spaces on the festival site. It had thus created an intense friction between local authorities and festival organizers as well as alienated the audience members.

young women go out at night, and, in some cases, miss school to travel to a different city to attend concerts, represents their rebellious stance. Dancing and singing with their friends or strangers in the festival site and communal camping in these non-intimidating settings also represent ways in which female fans actively participate in rock culture. As a Ferah fan recalls her first concert experience of Ferah, “Before the concert, some were bungee jumping, some performing songs and others dancing and having fun. I said, ‘*This is youth!*’”<sup>202</sup> Young fans are thus able to identify the resistive features of their participatory experiences.

A similar blurring of performer and audience categories takes place on the Internet. Sebnem Ferah’s fans, for instance, share their fan art and Ferah-related texts with everyone in their community including Ferah herself, who has noted on several occasions that she regularly checks fan websites to maintain the connection with her listener-friends. Comments by Ferah, Karaibrahimgil and Tekin fans also frequently include a direct address, thus implying an image of the musician as the co-consumer of the cultural text they actively produce. Within this unlimited digital space of forums and fan art, in particular, fans can take on the role of producers, as performers find themselves on the opposite end of the spectrum as consumers of this fan-produced knowledge.

Karaibrahimgil’s recent music video for “I love (you), I love you not,” in which her fans acted as themselves, and the music video of her song, “Fairy,” which was a result of a music video contest among her audiences, illuminate the deconstruction of the producer/consumer binarism in the Turkish music industry.<sup>203</sup> “Fairy” also demonstrates

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<sup>202</sup> Online user, “ozseboist,” Forum: Konserler,” comment posted June 9, 2008, <http://sebnemferahfan.com/?s=forum&a=3&id=4351&p=1> (Accessed December 8, 2008, website discontinued)

<sup>203</sup> “Seviyorum Sevmiyorum,” *Nil Kiyisinda* [“Inshore the Nile”] © 2009 by Sony BMG, B001Z397AK, Compact Disc), music video (Dir. Umur Turagay, Prod. BMG); “Peri,” *Tek Tasimi Kendim Aldim* [“I Got Myself My Own

the interactive experiences of Turkish fans that are encouraged by Karaibrahimgil herself. For the music video, Karaibrahimgil collaborated with her fans who submitted their input (for animation and remix) on the Internet and edited the song and the music video. Karaibrahimgil also promoted the contest in her newspaper column in the mainstream newspaper, *Hurriyet*.<sup>204</sup> The winners received awards from Karaibrahimgil at a publicized ceremony, also covered in television news programs, and the final music video was a product solely of audience members, representing a first in Turkish music.<sup>205</sup>

Female fans, those of Ferah and Ozlem Tekin in particular, have used online spaces to form intellectually and socially rewarding friendships that help expand their worldviews with discussions on all kinds of Turkish and foreign music, philosophy, literature and politics.<sup>206</sup> They also exchange their frustrations with life and assert their independence and self-confidence as they post articulate, thoughtful comments about ‘serious stuff’ such as women’s and ethnic rights, homophobia, capitalism, militarism and the role of music in politics.<sup>207</sup> Fans share their personal experiences, including anecdotes of resisting their families to attend night-time performances, their feelings at concerts and the pleasures they take from their communal after-concert experiences at

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Diamond Ring”], © 2006 by Sony BMG, B0024L2P88, MP3. Audience members posted their versions of the music video at [www.periliklip.com](http://www.periliklip.com), currently an inactive website, by the February 2007 deadline.

<sup>204</sup> See, for example, Nil Karaibrahimgil, “Periler Varmis,” *Kelebek* (Hurriyet), February 12, 2007, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=5934301&p=2>.

<sup>205</sup> I should note, in this context, that both award winners were male (Best animated music video, Sinan Dinç and Murat Kuşçu; best remix Tarkan Ergün). “Eurovision’dan Teklif Gelirse Kabul Etmem,” *Kelebek* (Hurriyet), May 18, 2007, <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=6530149>. For national news coverage of the contest, see, for example, *SHOW TV*, May 19, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vtUyvkvhEI>. The winning video can be seen at, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfRhN-151-0>.

<sup>206</sup> See the broad range of forums at <http://www.sebokolik.com/forum/>, <http://www.shebomaniax.com/forum/>, <http://www.ozlemtekin.biz/forum/index.php>, and <http://www.turkrock.com/forums.html>. The forum section of Karaibrahimgil’s fan website, [www.nilkaraibrahimgil.net](http://www.nilkaraibrahimgil.net), focuses only on Karaibrahimgil’s music. The only website in the present research sample that does not have a special forum section is the Tekin fan website “ozlemtekin.us.”

<sup>207</sup> For “serious” fan forums, see for example, <http://www.turkrock.com/ftopic12186.html>, <http://www.ozlemtekin.biz/forum/index.php?board=40.40>, <http://www.sebokolik.com/forum/index.php?board=29.0>, and <http://sebnemferahfan.com/?s=forum&a=1&id=39>.

nights.<sup>208</sup> Their online postings also include frequent comments such as “I love you all” as they refer to their bond with their fellow fans.<sup>209</sup>

Online fan forums indicate an inherent loyalty toward one musician and show a visible rivalry between Tekin and Ferah fans, one acknowledged by Tekin herself.<sup>210</sup> While audience behavior at live performances often reflects extreme fandom, a majority of online users consciously attempt to transcend such behavior. They post critical comments about the nature of mindless fandom as an unwanted state for rockers. As a Tekin fan notes in response to a few of his fellow fans’ reaction to a Ferah fan-poster:

There is nothing as stupid as an assumption that someone who likes Ozlem Tekin will not like Sebnem Ferah or vice versa. We have three thousand users on our website and ninety percent of our users specify that their second favorite musician after Oz is Sebnem Ferah, after all.<sup>211</sup>

Turkish fans’ online experiences thus illustrate their level of sophistication as they criticize extreme behavior and take an active part in their community.

Fans’ online sharing experiences also reveal the specificity of the Turkish setting and demonstrate fan’s resistive strategies against the control of the nation-state. For example, access to the sharing website Youtube has been banned by the Turkish government since March 2007.<sup>212</sup> Rock fans in Turkey find creative ways around this censorship by accessing Youtube through links from proxy websites which they share in

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<sup>208</sup> See, for example, “Excalibur,” comment posted May 19, 2008, <http://sebnemferahfan.com/?s=forum&a=3&id=4351&p=0> (Accessed December 1, 2008; discontinued in 2009).

<sup>209</sup> Online users, “Soul\_s\_free,” and “kertenkele,” comments posted November 12, 2006, <http://sebnemferahfan.com/?s=forum&a=3&id=1820&p=2>.

<sup>210</sup> Asli Cakir, “Asi Rock’ci Kiz Rollerini Reddediyorum,” *Milliyet*, April 22, 2004, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2004/04/22/cumartesi/cum02.html>.

<sup>211</sup> “tekinist,” comment posted November 2, 2004, <http://www.turkrock.com/post322305.html>.

<sup>212</sup> The censorship was due to the government’s attempts to block viewings of an offensive, anti-Ataturk video posted by an international user.

fan forums.<sup>213</sup> The government's censorship has pushed fans to create new sharing websites in Turkish.<sup>214</sup> Fans' strategies have also been supported by musicians such as Karaibrahimgil who publicly protests such state bans.<sup>215</sup>

Fans frequently demonstrate proactive and rebellious attitudes in their online comments on videos posted on sharing websites and in forums, although, at times, their rebellion reflects a level of commercial feminism, one supported by some feminist activists as well.<sup>216</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil's young fans, for example, have responded to her song, "Diamond" with comments such as, "I, too, will buy myself my own diamond ring when I grow up and finish school."<sup>217</sup> Karaibrahimgil has also commented that she has received tremendous feedback from young girls who, upon seeing her in person, hug her legs, cry and offer to sing her one of her famous 'women's anthems.' Karaibrahimgil recalls her encounter with a four-year-old fan who sang "Diamond" to her:

This four-year-old ambitiously sang my 'I got myself my own diamond ring,' as her mother humorously commented, 'Honey, don't follow Abla, she is on the wrong path.' This is significant because this was a modern, professional woman, who had an ambivalent attitude about my song while her child seemed to be inspired by it. This indicates a huge, radical impact to me...to normalize such things in girls' minds so they can realize their uninhibited selves in their lives. I felt exactly that way about Madonna when I was a young girl.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> See, for example, [www.youtubevideolari.net](http://www.youtubevideolari.net) which includes links to original Youtube videos. Other non-Turkish proxy sites, such as [www.gazotube.com](http://www.gazotube.com), which allows users to search for and view Youtube videos, have also been used by Turkish fans.

<sup>214</sup> Some of these new Turkish websites include [www.herkesdinlesin.com](http://www.herkesdinlesin.com), [www.izlesene.com](http://www.izlesene.com), [www.klipdunyasi.com](http://www.klipdunyasi.com) and [www.kliplerimiz.com](http://www.kliplerimiz.com).

<sup>215</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, "Youtube: ruhum desen desen," *Hurriyet*, February 4, 2008, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=8160428&yazarid=113>.

<sup>216</sup> See, for example, an article by feminist activist and writer Gulay Gokturk, March 8, 2007, <http://www.nuveforum.net/946-erkek-kadin-iliskileri/9534-onun-kalbini-kazanmaya-calisma%3B-satin-al/>.

<sup>217</sup> Online user, "pazarciguzeli46," "Text response to music video," comment posted, June 2009, [http://www.youtube.com/comment\\_servlet?all\\_comments&v=PcNTnb29kXk&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DPcNTnb29kXk%26feature%3Drelated](http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=PcNTnb29kXk&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DPcNTnb29kXk%26feature%3Drelated).

<sup>218</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

This remark points to the appeal of Karaibrahimgil's performance of girlish femininity, a strategy that partially draws on Madonna's appropriation of girlhood in the 1990s.

Karaibrahimgil's use of 'girlishness,' similar to that of women pop rock performers in the West, "simultaneously functions as a strategy of feminism and a strategy of commerce (where feminism and commerce exist in a complex and shifting, rather than a simple and binary, relation to one another)."<sup>219</sup> The mother's reference to the musician as "Abla" ("Big Sister") also reflects a view of her as infantile. From this perspective, the mother (adults in society) may disregard the critique as one offered by a naïve, girlish performer, while the daughters—younger fans—embrace it.

Ozlem Tekin's display of multiple modes of girlhood in her public persona and in her extramusical appearances has drawn the attention of her fans as well. Tekin fans have been more critical as revealed in their remarks about Tekin's seeming ambivalence which, they think, conflicts with her rocker identity and the anti-mainstream values she has introduced to the youth. While they often acknowledge her successful acting, Tekin fans often criticize her focus on acting as being at the expense of her musical creativity. Most importantly, fans challenge her appearance in mainstream texts such as the Turkish *Cosmo Girl* magazine.<sup>220</sup> They see a contradiction between her appearance in such magazines and her rocker identity. They urge Tekin to make up her mind instead of bouncing from one genre to another.<sup>221</sup> As one online user comments, "If rock music means rebellion against current mainstream trends, what is a 'rock' musician doing on the cover of a teenage girl magazine aimed to train new sex-and-the city types? Why can't

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<sup>219</sup> Gayle Wald, "Just a Girl? Rock Music, Feminism, and the Cultural Construction of Female Youth," *Signs* 23: 3 (Spring, 1998): 585-610, 589.

<sup>220</sup> Ozlem Tekin appeared on the cover of Turkish *Cosmo Girl* magazine's August 2007 issue, which featured an extensive interview with the musician.

<sup>221</sup> Online user, "sutkardes," comment posted August 8, 2007, <http://www.turkrock.com/ftopic1339-0-asc-2220.html>.

we see her in music magazines instead?”<sup>222</sup> Similarly, another fan challenges Tekin’s appearance in TV serials: “She’s got talent, voice, physique, performance skills...so why would this girl go and act in a crappy TV serial? Where else in the world does a female rock vocalist act in housewives’ shows?”<sup>223</sup> These comments also point to the ways in which rock fans distinguish themselves from the urban *Cosmo* Girl-type women as well as housewives, thus expecting a similar self-identification from the musicians themselves.

Fans also take the initiative to apply in daily life what, to them, being a rocker or devoted listener signifies. Most of the time, they demonstrate collective, anti-establishment characteristics. Fans of Sebnem Ferah and Ozlem Tekin show an explicit sophistication about global warming, racism, military and cultural imperialism and capitalism. The Ferah fan website, [www.shebomaniax.com](http://www.shebomaniax.com), promotes activist organizations on its homepage, as its members participate in related events such as, the “No to Global Warming” demonstrations and the “Rock for Peace” festival, from which Ferah has distanced herself.<sup>224</sup> The Tekin fan website [www.ozlemtekin.biz](http://www.ozlemtekin.biz) further illustrates the communal consciousness of Turkish rock fans with their “Let’s plant a forest for Ozlem,” campaign. The campaign info web page provides fans and online guests information about global warming and proudly reminds them of the eco-friendly position of Tekin’s fans.<sup>225</sup> With 2000 trees planted, the campaign, in association with the Turkish Department of Forestry, proved to be very successful and received media

<sup>222</sup> Online user, “sutkardes,” comment posted August 9, 2007, <http://www.turkrock.com/ftopic1339-0-asc-2220.html>.

<sup>223</sup> Online user, “mantarpano,” comment posted July 11, 2007, <http://www.turkrock.com/ftopic1339-0-asc-2200.html>.

<sup>224</sup> In 2007, Ferah fans participated in protests in Istanbul and Ankara, <http://www.shebomaniax.com/link.php>.

<sup>225</sup> <http://www.kuresel-isinma.org/content/view/82/31/>.

attention.<sup>226</sup> Fans also organized a ribbon-cutting ceremony as Ozlem Tekin officially opened the site, named “Ozlem Tekin Spring Forest,” in 2007.<sup>227</sup>

Active audience participation in meaning-making and fan-initiated original projects, from campaigns to online magazines and television, demonstrate audience agency and challenge traditional consumer-producer binaries. Fans’ pleasures from the nonhierarchical fan websites as well as the festival spaces and rock bars further illuminate the resistive potentiality of Turkish rock culture that allows young women to disrupt images of proper Turkish womanhood with their diverse appropriations.

### **‘Turkified’ Rock: Strategies of Localization and Politics in Turkey**

Turkish rock culture, including its performers, texts and the experiences of its audiences, represents a localized American import that not only has been adopted by Turkish people but also redefined as a naturalized part of the urban music scene. Turkish rock culture exhibits features of glocalization as well as re-appropriation by Turkish people, both of which allow for its internalization in Turkish culture, a mediating and mediated process I call Turkification. Turkified rock connotes a localized culture that is constantly re-articulated by the Turkish people themselves – a culture that is indicative of the absence of systematic state control and sponsorship but is informed by the state discourses of pro-West modernity. Turkification is most visible through musicians’ use of the Turkish language slang and in their references to Turkish popular and folk cultures, their synthesis of Turkish and American musical styles, their use of traditional Turkish

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<sup>226</sup> See, for example, Oben Budak, “Asi Kralice artik duruldu (mu)?” *Sabah*, December 7, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/12/07/cp/yas127-20061202-101.html>.

<sup>227</sup> The name of the site refers to Ozlem Tekin’s previously-discussed music video for her song “Bahar” (“Spring,” 1998) in which she portrays a woman, who murders her lover and buries his dead body in the woods.

genres and instruments as well as their subversion of pop/rock binarisms, all of which point to the musicians' agency in re-conceptualizing a former U.S. import.

Arguably, the localized nature of Turkish rock becomes most visible in the absence of references to its American origins and in its occasional anti-American stance. Indeed, American culture remains an important reference for the lyrics and music videos of Ozlem Tekin and Nil Karaibrahimgil in particular, and most musicians and audiences follow American rock music. All three musicians have also had American companies sponsor their concert tours, as well as taken part in the large-scale mainstream rock festivals, which explicitly associated rock music with sponsoring American companies.<sup>228</sup>

The anti-imperialistic and anti-American stance of audiences and musicians may thus appear self-contradictory due to the competing meanings made available in the musicians' business decisions and their performances. Ferah, Karaibrahimgil, and Tekin each exhibit an ambivalent attitude toward capitalism. They claim not to care about sales figures, and a majority of their lyrics criticize capitalism's focus on consumerism and its reinforcement of beauty myths. Yet they prioritize individual choice as they continue to perform in commercial festivals.<sup>229</sup> Their ambivalence becomes most vivid in their cautious distancing of themselves from the anti-capitalist rock festival, Rock for Peace, established in opposition to the Rock'n Coke Festival in Istanbul.<sup>230</sup> The musicians' choices to disassociate themselves from Rock for Peace also reveal the complexity of their relationship to global capitalism. While some political youth groups protested Rock'n Coke, it promoted a festival culture in both mainstream and niche circles, thus

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<sup>228</sup> At Rock'n Coke, for example, sponsors, in addition to Coca Cola, included American companies such as McDonald's and Dunkin Donuts, which have franchises in Turkey.

<sup>229</sup> Major commercial rock festivals include Rock'n Coke, (Istanbul, 2003-) and Ankirock (Ankara, 2006-).

<sup>230</sup> "Rock for Peace" took place between 2003-2008, with an intentional one-year gap in 2009, to resume in 2010.

preparing the way for Rock For Peace.<sup>231</sup> Mainstream events also began to use the festival space for the expression of mottos such as “Rock for the World,” and, following the trend set by Rock for Peace, for raising awareness of social responsibility.<sup>232</sup>

In this context, it is important to note the rationale behind the anti-American stance of the Rock for Peace festival. As the festival organizers explain,

Our process began with the American invasion of neighboring Iraq. We had also been informed by the World Social Forum’s ‘boycott of Coca Cola’ which was based on this company’s alleged role in Colombia, in the murder of eight union organizers by local paramilitary forces. This information coupled with the news that the same company was about to launch a rock festival in Turkey, we had no other option but take action...We offered an ‘alternative action-tainment.’<sup>233</sup>

This remark illuminates Turkish activists’ political use of rock music and their strategic use of ‘rock counterculture’ to mobilize the audience members in their protest of American capitalism.

The above statement also demonstrates the political differences between the subcultural fans and the fans of Ferah, Karaibrahimgil and Tekin. While both sets of fans may show an interest in macropolitics, their activism focuses on different areas.

Subcultural fans (as well as musicians) univocally protest American, capitalist, and imperialistic values and reflect an awareness of global issues. Mainstream rock fans, however, tend to be engaged in environmental activism and anti-discrimination protests,

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<sup>231</sup> Since the onset of Rock’n Coke and its subcultural counterpart Rock for Peace in 2003, numerous open-air festivals have taken place mostly on the outskirts of the large cities of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. A new alternative festival, ProgIstanbul, was promoted in 2005 as the first and only progressive rock/metal festival of Turkey and Eastern Europe. Other annual mainstream rock festivals include, for example, Uni-Rock (since 2008), geared toward university students, and RockIstanbul (2004-2005). All of these festivals brought together established as well as upcoming Turkish and foreign musicians. All, except Rock for Peace, remain commercial festivals.

<sup>232</sup> For example, Rock’n Coke increasingly included civil organizations in the festival: Local groups such as Narcotics Anonymous, Alternative Lifestyles Society, Everyone is Different and Equal, WWF Turkey, Cumhuriyet Vakfi Literacy Campaign, as well as the United Nations Fund for Public Aid (UNFPA) had booths and ongoing activities during the festival. Ankirock Festival in Ankara has used the “Rock for the World” motto since 2006.

<sup>233</sup> [www.barisarock.org](http://www.barisarock.org) (2003, accessed November 3, 2007).

as reflected in their online forum discussions and in the campaigns they organize. Moreover, mainstream fans, like the musicians themselves, simultaneously focus on personal politics and have a comfortable relationship with American culture as well as consumerism. Mainstream rockers thus demonstrate the fluidity of macro- and micro-politics as well as of popular and rock musics in Turkey.

The ambivalence of Ferah, Karaibrahimgil and Tekin toward macro-politics has led some critics to view their music as co-opted and their fans as depoliticized. Columnist Can Dunder has confronted Ferah, for instance, about the seemingly apolitical stance in her and many other Turkish rockers' albums, and questioned the sincerity of rock music associated with big companies. While agreeing that rock musicians need to be among the first to react to inequality, military oppression and suppression of anti-establishment ideas, Ferah noted that she "needed more time to be better-equipped to train herself to reflect social awareness in an aesthetic way."<sup>234</sup> She has related the seeming ambivalence of rock musicians to their short history with production companies: "Making rock albums under contract with production companies is so new in Turkey that everyone is trying to be cautious with their music."<sup>235</sup> Ferah also defended the sincerity of her sponsored music: "I can't take my own stage to remote Anatolian locations by myself."<sup>236</sup> This remark reflects the effects of the lack of state support for Turkish rock music, which has led the musicians to associate themselves with corporate sponsors.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Can Dunder, "Sebo'nun Donusu," *Milliyet*, December 26, 2003, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2003/12/26/yazar/dunder.html>. Ferah later participated in the aforementioned album, *Guldunya Songs* (DMC, November 2008), to protest gender violence.

<sup>235</sup> Dunder, 2003.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> In contrast, other nation-states, particularly in Europe, have implemented cultural policies to stimulate domestic rock. For example, since 1975, the Dutch Rock Federation has obtained grants from the central government in Holland and 15 percent of a levy on blank tapes has been used to fund local music. Paul Rutten, "Popular music policy: a contested area: the Dutch experience," in *Rock and Popular Music*, eds. Tony Bennett et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 37-51, 48, 39.

While Ferah's business associations complicate her rebellious rocker image, they serve as a medium through which she carries her music to those audiences who would otherwise be removed from it. Ferah's view, like that of Tekin and Karaibrahimgil, also shows her difference from the subcultural artists whose influence has often remained minimal.<sup>238</sup>

Nil Karaibrahimgil has also used the mainstream space and festivals to examine the contradictions between her political views and the sponsorship of her concerts. She frequently critiques patriarchal capitalism, and her public performances present a self-parody of her role as a 'not political enough' mediator of such issues. She presented her trademark self-parody during her performance at the first Rock'n Coke Festival by tying several colorful balloons to her waist and wearing a fluffy, feminine tulle skirt. Her costume embodied a playful critique of her own use of her femininity, and possibly revealed her vulnerability among the 'harder rock' musicians and audiences at the festival.<sup>239</sup> Her use of balloons throughout the whole performance represents her acknowledgement of critical views by the more overtly political musicians and audiences and her comfortable presence in the mainstream sphere.

Karaibrahimgil has also rendered a sophisticated analysis of her seemingly apoliticized stance, and revealed its role in reclaiming female empowerment. In her column titled, "The Apolitical girl," she associates politics with a male-centered ideology.<sup>240</sup> While her position seems problematic – she cedes wars, the political sphere and the external world to men, and claims only the domestic, personal world of 'one's

<sup>238</sup> Although the media views Ferah as apolitical, she remains the only musician (among the three) whose fans exhibit multiple political affiliations (unlike Tekin fans who focus on environmental activism and Karaibrahimgil fans who choose not to self-identify), and she is featured positively on the website of the Turkish Socialist Youth Federation: [http://sgdf.biz/sanatci\\_biyografileri/28176-sebnem\\_ferah\\_kimdir.html](http://sgdf.biz/sanatci_biyografileri/28176-sebnem_ferah_kimdir.html).

<sup>239</sup> Indeed, several Sebnem Ferah fans acknowledge Nil Karaibrahimgil's success in her alternative genre. As an online user puts it, "I am a rocker and I love Nil. I haven't yet come across any rocker who doesn't." "organiqcadu," comment posted April 26, 2008, <http://www.seboist.com/nil-karaibrahimgil-t1215-10.html> (Accessed May 12, 2008).

<sup>240</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, "Apolitikiz," Nil FM, *Kelebek* (Hurriyet), June 6, 2005, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=324969&yazarid=113&tarih=2005-06-06>.

own bedroom' to women – Karaibrahimgil also reflects on the political nature of her personal style. Defending her (and her generation's) apolitical stance, the self-proclaimed "Apolitical girl," asserts that she thinks like Virginia Woolf and becomes a political super hero in her own room.<sup>241</sup> As she advises her female readers to "Come together, girls!" she highlights the collective political impetus gained from a personal quest for freedom.<sup>242</sup> Karaibrahimgil also emphasizes her music as an effective political strategy: "If anyone were to inhibit my freedom, I'd then do the only thing I can do, and show them all. I'd write a song, and sing it at the top of my lungs," thus indicating the macropolitical potential of her self-assertive lyrics and performances.<sup>243</sup>

Karaibrahimgil's song, "All of us Girls Came Together," vividly embodies her concept of individual as well as collective female power. As she sings to an imagined group of women, Karaibrahimgil reflects on how easy it is to avoid emotional or physical oppression by men, who she observes are "so easy to control."

No, girls, we don't deserve this  
 Let's not accept this  
 Why did we get hurt like this?  
 Their equations were so simple  
 Their joints so weak  
 To control them was like child's play  
 We used to have them do everything, oh, those good, old days...  
 Sex, money, soccer their only conversation  
 To control all this is like child's play.<sup>244</sup>

In line with her lyrics, Karaibrahimgil claims that "Even those women who have to walk behind their husbands in public secretly control their husbands. Those women are not oppressed, at all. Behind closed doors, they are the ones in power, able to manipulate

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<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, "Bir baskadır benim memleketim," Nil FM, *Kelebek* (Hurriyet), July 7, 2008, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=9370221&yazarid=113>.

<sup>244</sup> "Butun Kizlar Toplandik," Nil FM, © 2004 by Epic Records/Sony, B001V3E4VG, Compact Disc.

their men.”<sup>245</sup> Described as the “young philosopher” by columnist Filiz Akin, Karaibrahimgil continually integrates simple-sounding yet thought-provoking ideas in her lyrics.<sup>246</sup> Indeed, she views herself as “half-philosopher, half singer.”<sup>247</sup> Karaibrahimgil’s seemingly apolitical stance thus reflects her privileging of the personal over the collective, which, in her lyrics and among her audiences, has led to a community of women that unites over their diverse individual choices.

Karaibrahimgil’s anti-establishment style manifests itself in her simultaneous access to the mainstream as well as the alternative spheres. Her song, “Alien”, for instance, humorously critiques the class divide in Turkey: “You are a million light years away from this planet. You’d always be better off, you are Sabanci. My pain you wouldn’t feel, you are just an alien.”<sup>248</sup> Referring to Sabanci, the Donald Trump of Turkey, she borrows from Turkish popular culture to present her critical look at class divisions. Overall, Karaibrahimgil’s playfulness, humor and self-parody contribute to her seemingly apoliticized and personal, yet underlyingly political, stance as reflected in her albums and public personae. Her subtlety also sets her apart from Tekin and Ferah.

Using rock music as a medium to resist capitalist oppression and military imperialism in the world, Tekin spearheaded an explicitly political rock trend among female musicians with her first album, *Who Cares*.<sup>249</sup> Her song “War for no cause,” in particular, originally a criticism of state militarism, later took on a decidedly transnational anti-war stance as a protest of U.S occupation of Iraq:

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<sup>245</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>246</sup> Filiz Akin, “Arnavutkoy’de Kofte Ismarlamak Istiyorum,” *Sabah*, March 18, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/04/01/cpsabah/yaz1302-20-108-20060318-101.html>.

<sup>247</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>248</sup> “Uzayli,” *Nil Dunyasi* [“Nil’s World”] © 2002, by Epic Records/Sony, B001V5DK0A, Compact Disc.

<sup>249</sup> *Kime Ne?* [“Who Cares?”], ©1996 by Peker Muzik, Compact Disc.

Marks of a war for no cause  
 Bleeding ashes of our friends  
 Their cruel hands did not get to stop this  
 The evil that attracts the kids  
 The words that poison the youth  
 The bullets, you shall have it all, and may all the crying stop  
 Those who steal women's dignity  
 Those who pay a thousand and one for a dead body  
 You keep your brutality, let there be roses.<sup>250</sup>

While also accounting for war crimes, including violence against women and kidnapping of children to train them in terrorist camps, Tekin here criticizes Kurdish terrorist attacks on civilians in southeastern Turkey as well as the government's military response to those attacks. Tekin's decision to perform this song on the state-controlled TV channel, TRT, and later at Rock'n Coke, 2004, during the invasion of Iraq and amidst U.S. demands for the Turkish government to send additional troops, distinguishes her as a dissenting voice within the mainstream.



During her performance in Rock'n Coke, Tekin wore a Native American-inspired headpiece, indicating her alignment with the U.S. subaltern while negotiating audiences' knowledge of her American citizenship.<sup>251</sup>

<sup>250</sup>“Sebeepsiz Savas,” *Kime Ne?* ©1996 by Peker Muzik, Compact Disc.

Tekin's artistic and personal entanglements with the U.S. indicate the complexity of her relationship to American culture, also shared by Ferah and Karaibrahimgil. At times, usually between albums, Tekin and Ferah isolate themselves in the U.S. Tekin emphasizes her U.S. citizenship in interviews, and humorously calls herself, "The Californian Ozlem."<sup>252</sup> Each musician also claims that American performers, such as Tori Amos, have inspired them.<sup>253</sup> Moreover, Karaibrahimgil as well as two former members of Volvox, Buket Doran and Ebru Bank graduated from Bogazici University, formerly an American college in Istanbul. Their middle class background explains these musicians' fluency in American popular culture and use of English words in the media.

In their early careers, each of these musicians wrote, performed and aspired to perform songs in English. As Sebnem Ferah recalls her teenage music-making, "I'd write dark, gloomy English lyrics...It was the rock trend of the time."<sup>254</sup> Years later, when Ferah recorded her first album entirely in Turkish, some blamed her for leaving Volvox and attempting to make rock in Turkish.<sup>255</sup> In regard to the language conflict many rock musicians faced at the time, Ferah notes,

During Volvox days, several people suggested that I perform rock in Turkish if I wanted to share my music with more people, and that felt like they were swearing at me. But this reaction is typical of all [Turkish] musicians with a background in foreign music. It is a phase. Later, it feels funny to make music in English, yet live in Turkey. You need to mature in all aspects of your life to be able to grasp why you make music. If communication and sharing are a big part, at least half of it, then singing in Turkish makes more sense.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Özlem Tekin holds dual citizenship. She was born in California to a Turkish-American family of scholars (1971).

<sup>252</sup> Dilek Dalliag, "Azgin Teke Sendromu," *Hurriyet*, November 15, 2006, <http://kelebek.hurriyet.com.tr/magazin/5434421.asp?gid=90>.

<sup>253</sup> Karaibrahimgil adds that Madonna has been an important influence, as expressed in her autobiographical song, "Madonna Wanna-be." *Nil Dunyasi* ["Nil's World"] © 2002, by Epic Records/Sony, B001V5DK0A, Compact Disc. Ferah also emphasizes the influence of Alanis Morissette and Amy Lee.

<sup>254</sup> Sebnem Ferah, interview by the author, received via e-mail, September 5, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>255</sup> Caglan Ekil *et al*, "Sebnem Ferah'la Roportaj," *NonServiam* (August 1999), <http://www.seboistnet.com/roportaj.php?id=44&foto=r&action=goster> (Accessed November 2, 2008).

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*.

Although she now writes and performs music in Turkish, with the exception of cover songs she performs in concerts, Ferah, along with Tekin, also admits that she does not listen to Turkish music except her friends' albums.<sup>257</sup> Stating that music should have no boundaries and that her own music strives to simultaneously maintain a universal world sound and a unique, personal vibe, Ferah deems it impossible to think of her music apart from rock in the rest of the world.<sup>258</sup> While she highlights that she feels equal in talent and performance to foreign rock musicians, Ferah notes that in order to share her music internationally, it is imperative that she produces her albums in English.<sup>259</sup> As she puts it, "Local/ethnic music or, say, Latin sounds do not have the same English requirement. But, if lyrics are a big part of your music, as in mine, and if you want to reach out to listeners internationally, you must make your albums in English."<sup>260</sup> Indeed, foreign producers that both Ferah and Karaibrahimgil have reportedly contacted found their sounds promising for inclusion in the international music scene, but advised them to record in English, further revealing the limited nature of cultural flows.<sup>261</sup> From this perspective, glocalization through use of the Turkish language and musical styles in the Turkish setting seemed acceptable while transnational success of the Turkish musicians has often required their use of English for marketing purposes.

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<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>257</sup> "Sebnem Ferah Roportaji," *Milliyet*, August 18, 2006. Ferah covers songs by musicians/bands such as The Cranberries, Deep Purple, Evanescence, Heart, Sinead O'Conner, Skin and Skunk Anansie.

<sup>258</sup> Sebnem Atilgan, "Sokaklar Sakin, Konserler Full," *Top Pop* (April, 23-29, 1997), quoted in, <http://www.sebnemferahciyiz.biz/sebnem-atilgan-top-pop-vt2041.html>.

<sup>259</sup> Mefaret Aktas, "Mutsuz Ask Sarkilari," *Milliyet Cumartesi*, October 17, 2001, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2001/10/17/cumartesi/cum01.html>.

<sup>260</sup> "Sebnem Ferah Roportaji," *Kultur Tenefus* (January 2007), quoted in, <http://sebo-roportaj.blogspot.com>.

<sup>261</sup> Tumay Yazici, "Sebnem Ferah Perdeler'i Acti," *Radikal*, October 21, 2001, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=18383>.

Ferah's struggle with the use of 'proper' language appears as a visible feature in Karaibrahimgil's music as well. As she explains, "During college, I was too 'snobbish' [English in original script] to make or listen to any Turkish music, I used to write songs exclusively in English. As I later began making songs in Turkish, English kind of faded away. Once I can find the same irony and word play in English songs, I will make an album."<sup>262</sup> Karaibrahimgil has also noted that, in addition to foreign musicians, she currently follows Tekin's and Ferah's albums, thus reflecting her continued alignment with their popular rock sound.<sup>263</sup> While she currently uses Turkish in all of her albums, Karaibrahimgil frequently uses English words and refers in her songs to U.S. popular culture icons. Indeed, her eccentric style and edgy music have led some critics to view her as "a foreigner who mastered Turkish," making her music appear as a glocalized product, inflected with local flavor for maximum commercial benefit to the global corporations, Sony Turkey in her case.<sup>264</sup>

All three musicians have attempted to resolve their language struggles by using a kind of Turkish that deviates from the rules of standard written and/or spoken Turkish, one which may occasionally include English words as well. Ferah, Karaibrahimgil and Tekin each use colloquial Turkish in their performances. Karaibrahimgil's lyrics and newspaper columns deconstruct written Turkish language rules, namely, through her use of English words and colloquial Turkish. Turkish performers, even when they use colloquial Turkish in their performances, write the lyrics in a specific written Turkish format. Written Turkish allows for the use of certain colloquial phrases and slang but not

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<sup>262</sup> Elif Berkoz, "Kendimi Faks Makinesi Olarak Goruyorum," *Milliyet*, August 8, 2006, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2006/08/08/pazar/apaz.html>.

<sup>263</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>264</sup> Filiz Akin, "Filiz Akin İlk Kez Roportaj Yapti," *Sabah*, March 26, 2006, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2006/03/28/cp/rop108-20060326-102.html>.

phonetic or grammatical contractions common in spoken Turkish. Karaibrahimgil's songs as well as columns, however, disrupt the written form by dropping certain letters, and using spoken Turkish contractions as well as some English words.<sup>265</sup>

Deviation from standard Turkish is a common feature in Tekin's albums and performances as well. Her use of street slang and swearwords – both in songs and in interviews – serves as an implicit signifier of her rebellious persona. It is not uncommon for Tekin to say in interviews, for instance, “It was my dumbassness to not work with this team before;” or, referring to a fan, “This ‘herif’ [‘guy’ in slang] had flowers spread on my keyboard, I went mad!”<sup>266</sup> This undiplomatic attitude distinguishes Tekin from Karaibrahimgil and Ferah, who, despite the colloquial language they use in their albums, speak refined, standard Turkish on the stage (in-between songs) and in media interviews.

Like their favorite musicians, some fans attempt to subvert language rules, especially in their posted comments on rock-affiliated websites. However, those online users who do not follow posting etiquette, such as writing in proper Turkish, often receive public warnings such as “The swearword deleted,” or “User removed due to deliberate misuse of Turkish” (referring to wrong grammar or use of foreign letters) by forum administrators.<sup>267</sup> Fan websites and online forums for Turkish rock music thus reflect an ambivalent take on the use of proper Turkish, one that does not identify or question musicians' subversions of the language, but one which monitors and attempts to control audience members' (online users') ‘misuse’ of Turkish. Deleted postings thus

<sup>265</sup> Some examples include, her song “Akbaba” (use of “N’olur” instead of “Ne olur”) and her weekly columns with her use of English words in the title and column as well as contractions such as “olamiycam” instead of the formal “olamayacagim.” See, “Nil FM,” <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=7030379&yazarid=113>, *Kelebek* (Hurriyet), August 6, 2007; “Akbaba,” *Nil FM*, © 2004 by Epic Records/Sony, B001V3E4VG, Compact Disc.

<sup>266</sup> Bora Ciftci, “Mahserin 4 Rock’cisi” *Rock!* (1994), quoted in Turgay Suat Tarcan, <http://www11.brinkster.com/turgay/rockvolvox.htm>.

<sup>267</sup> See, for example, <http://www.turkrock.com/ftopic59420.html>, for a list of grammar guidelines, and a warning received by user, “black moon,” February 7, 2005, <http://www.turkrock.com/ftopic1339-0-asc-520.html>.

reflect more of a tension among audience members in their negotiations of the language than an unquestionable emulation of musician behavior.

In addition to their subversion of the Turkish language, musicians' and their fans' refusal to limit themselves to one music category (rock/pop) illuminates the local ramifications of an imported culture. The fluidity among musical genres further manifests itself as Ferah, Tekin and Karaibrahimgil incorporate a diverse range of instruments and rhythms, from rap, jazz, and tango to classical music and traditional Turkish styles into their works. This blending of genres and the inclusion of symbols of popular culture in their music exhibits a 'transnational intertextuality,' one that liberates their creativity from one Turkish or American genre and opens the audiences' imagination to a diverse range of meanings. Musical intertextuality is characterized by the co-existence of multiple genres in the same song or album, including concert performances, recordings, music videos and album covers.

Nil Karaibrahimgil's album covers vividly exemplify such intertextuality. She wanted the cover of her debut album, *Nil's World*, as a *Cosmopolitan*-type magazine cover.<sup>268</sup> An announcement on the cover read, "The Free-Spirited Girl's Album is out," indicating Karaibrahimgil's comfortable use of her constructed public persona from her then-famous TV commercial. Each of her songs appeared as feature stories on the cover. The cover of her second album *Nil FM* borrowed from another popular genre, radio. The album included her ad jingles, titled "Commercials," as if replicating an actual radio broadcasting with commercial breaks, and alluding to the inseparable nature of commercialization, mass media and music today. The album cover also included a borrowed statement from Herman Melville, a parodic use of 'high art,' and referencing

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<sup>268</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

her western-oriented educational and social background.<sup>269</sup> Her songs, “Madonna Wanna-Be,” “Fairy” (referring to ‘Hollywood girls’), and “Organized Crime” (referring to Superman), as well as her weekly newspaper columns with frequent references to the *New York Times* also illustrate Karaibrahimgil’s fluency in American popular culture.<sup>270</sup> Her often-parodic albums and writing, which caricature society in a highly intertextual way, allow Karaibrahimgil to promote freedom, without being intimidating—she acts as “the nutcase who loves to do whatever she likes” and invites her fans to do the same.<sup>271</sup>

Karaibrahimgil considers her synthesis of American and Turkish styles as a necessity in the current age of transnational cultural flow. As she points out, “There is not any pure music left anywhere in the world. They [foreign musicians] get new melodies and inspiration from us, and we borrow some from them.”<sup>272</sup> While, in theory, the cultural exchange between American and Turkish culture seems mutual, the lack of Turkish rock music albums in the international music market, the absence of Turkish musicians in American media (except on the sharing websites on the Internet), the scarcity of American rock musicians’ borrowing from Turkish musical styles and instruments and the market necessity for producing albums in English, indeed, indicate that the exchange remains predominantly one-way.<sup>273</sup> This limited relationship has, in turn, reinforced a diverse range of localized music productions by female musicians, while disrupting genre boundaries, particularly that between popular music and rock.

<sup>269</sup> Also indicating her background are references in her newspaper columns to Greek mythology and Western artists.

<sup>270</sup> ““Madonna Olacakmıs,” *Nil Dunyasi* © 2002, by Epic Records/Sony, B001V5DK0A, Compact Disc; “Peri,” and “Organize Isler Bunlar,” *Tek Tasimi Kendim Aldim*, © 2006 by Sony BMG, B0024L2P88, MP3.

<sup>271</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>273</sup> Australian rock band *Eskimo Joe*’s commercially successful use of the Turkish musical instrument “zurna” in their single “Foreign Land” remains an exception for non-Turkish rock musicians’ borrowing from Turkish music. For a brief discussion of the band’s musical choices, see Lars Brandle, *Billboard* 121: 29 (July 25, 2009): 42-43.

The re-articulating of the pop/rock binarism and the questioning of “pop rock” as a self-contradicting concept, particularly by underground media and audiences, dates back to Volvox days. In response to an interview question about whether the popularity of Turkish rock bothers orthodox rockers, then group member and drummer, Gul Agirci, asserted, “That rock is becoming popular is a better thing. There’s no sense in forcing what people enjoy to be kept underground.”<sup>274</sup> Spearheaded by Volvox, Sebnem Ferah, Ozlem Tekin and Nil Karaibrahimgil have each challenged the rigid pop and rock categories and widened the appeal of hard and alternative rock, among Turkish youth.

Musicians’ extramusical appearances, their relative ease at switching between different genres as well as incorporating traditional Turkish instruments and experimenting with fusion also contribute to their genre subversion and intertextuality. Examples of fusion include the use of classical music and rock by Sebnem Ferah and Ozlem Tekin; and Nil Karaibrahimgil’s collaboration with Wax Poetic, a NY based electronic music/rock band.<sup>275</sup> Other examples include “Yemen Ballad,” and “May the Dawn Arrive,” by Ferah, and “Murder” performed by Tekin, both of which re-interpret the Turkish folk song; Ferah’s song, “Curtains”—a collaboration with the Finnish cello rock group Apocalyptica; “Dream Over,” an electronic, rap and rock fusion by Tekin;

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<sup>274</sup> Bora Ciftci, “Mahserin 4 Rock’cisi” *Rock!* (1994), quoted in Turgay Suat Tarcan, <http://www11.brinkster.com/turgay/rockvolvox.htm>.

<sup>275</sup> Sebnem Ferah performed with her own band and İstanbul Symphonic Project on August 15, 2006 in İstanbul’s Harbiye Open-Air Theatre, and in Bostanci Showcenter on March 10th, 2007. All of the songs performed in this concert were selected from her five studio albums. A DVD-Video album was released later in 2007, and it consisted of video clips recorded in the March 10, 2007 concert. In May 2007, Ozlem Tekin began to collaborate with the Symphonic Project on her concert tours and performances. Nil Karaibrahimgil performed the fifth track, Hoppala, in Wax Poetic’s recent album *Istanbul* © 2007, by Nublu Records, B000MCH536, Compact Disc. Wax Poetic is a NY based band founded by Turkish Ilhan Ersahin.

and the rap version of “Fairy,” performed by Karaibrahimgil with female rapper Ayben.<sup>276</sup>

Each musician also incorporates traditional Turkish dance styles to further appeal to Turkish audiences.<sup>277</sup> For example, Karaibrahimgil and Tekin both include belly dancing in their live performances. As Karaibrahimgil observes,

However modern we may all think we are –and I see myself in that minority because I went to an American college and was raised with that kind of thinking– none of us can help belly dancing to the sound of the *doumbek* at a wedding party, after all. That’s because it’s in our veins.<sup>278</sup>

This remark, while essentializing, reveals Karaibrahimgil’s strategic use of Turkish styles, to convey her messages to Turkish audiences without resistance.<sup>279</sup> The same style of belly dancing takes parodic connotations in Tekin’s live performances. Similar to her visual and verbal appropriation of the traditional symbols of femininity and masculinity, Tekin’s belly dancing on the stage serves as a powerful strategy to re-define femininities and assert her space in the masculine realm of rock music.<sup>280</sup>

Tekin as well as Ferah and Karaibrahimgil have each challenged gender norms and contributed to the normalization of rock as a mixed-gender and localized music

<sup>276</sup> Ozlem Tekin, “Cinayet,” 109876543210, © 2005 by Istanbul Plak, B000VHFR1E, Compact Disc. Sebnem Ferah included “Yemen Turkusu,” [“Yemen Ballad”]–a cover of a folk ballad– as a hidden/bonus track in *Perdeler*, © 2001 by Universal Muzik, MU960279NA390, Compact Disc. “Gel Ey Seher,” [“May the Dawn Arrive”] is a non-album duet that Sebnem Ferah performed in Azeri, with Polad Bulbuloglu, famed Azerbaijani singer and diplomat. Sebnem Ferah, indeed, remains the least intertextual of all. Except her collaborations and interpretations of the said folk songs, and her experimental use of classical music and cello rock, she has progressively exhibited a dominant hard rock feel in her albums and performances. She has appeared only in two extramusical roles. She took part (as herself) in the TV promotion of a youth/music festival with fellow musician Teoman, and, during Volvox years, she did the voice-over of the character Ariel in the dubbed Turkish version of the film, *The Little Mermaid* (Dir.s. Ron Clements and John Musker; Prod. Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1989).

<sup>277</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, for example, has incorporated the classic Turkish instruments oud, duduk (ancient double-reed instrument) and reed flute (“ney”) in her *Nil FM* album, and the traditional drum ‘davul’ along with the electric guitar in *Tek Tasimi Kendim Aldim*. *Nil FM*, © 2004 by Epic Records/Sony, B001V3E4VG, Compact Disc; *Tek Tasimi Kendim Aldim*, © 2006 by Sony BMG, B0024L2P88, MP3.

<sup>278</sup> Nil Karaibrahimgil, interview by the author, August 7, 2006, Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> See, for example, this video from a college campus concert, in Bolu İzzet Baysal University, May 16, 2006, Bolu, Turkey. Shared by online user, “gudubetim,” December 24, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKuiNAr7LoE>.

culture in Turkey. While rock once had male-only and American connotations, starting in the late 1990s, rock music and female rockers became a natural part of the urban music scene. Musicians' strategies of localization have included deconstructing and re-claiming Turkish and American musical and dance styles, destabilizing traditional understandings of politics as defined by macro-political activism, employing a transnational intertextuality, subverting the Turkish language and pop/rock culture binarisms, as well as re-articulating femininities and masculinities. Through their lyrics, performances and public personas, each of these female musicians has contributed to a Turkified rock culture, one that is glocalized and re-appropriated.

## **Conclusion**

Through individual interviews with musicians, observation of audience behavior at concerts and rock bars, an extensive review of online fan sites as well as historical, production and textual analyses, I demonstrated in this chapter the multiple means by which the Turkish musicians, fans, and texts interact to form competing configurations of national, gendered and artistic identities. By actively partaking in all aspects of Turkish rock culture, audience members, young women in particular, exhibit their agency and rocker/alternative listener identity, practices that reveal the aesthetic and cultural possibilities of an imported genre that has often been marked as masculine. Rock culture in Turkey has led young girls to question traditional norms about girls' pastimes and acceptable behavior. Audience members demonstrate their active meaning-making, through engaging with rock culture as aspiring musicians, sharing their interpretations about lyrics, performances and music videos, through re-producing their own texts such as print magazines, illustrations, photo collages, video recordings of live performances

that they have attended, through campaigns and get-togethers that they organize, and through editing songs and music videos of their favorite musicians. Finally, they post online comments or send letters to musicians about how they apply in daily life what they take from their songs, thus indicating the musicians' influence as well their diverse interpretations of rock culture. Critical postings by Ozlem Tekin fans also demonstrate that audience members take the initiative to express their discontent with the musicians with whom they disagree about the meanings of rock culture and alternative music.

Turkish rock music embodies multiple voices and styles -- as many and as diverse as there are different demographics and personalities of Turkish women. Turkish rock culture, including songs, music videos, concert performances and the celebrity personae of the musicians as well as the settings through which audiences experience this culture and re-appropriate varying modes of womanhood, all make up a fully localized -- 'Turkified' -- cultural sphere for young Turkish people.

Turkified rock, when compared to dubbed soap operas and the semi-local *Cosmopolitan* magazine, shares an ambivalent stance toward micro- and macro-politics. Yet rock signifies the highest degree of localization and macro-political potentiality. Operating within mainstream culture, women rockers in Turkey defy the nation-state's normative vision of proper womanhood and challenge the state's regulation of national and gendered identities as well as static notions of rock culture and Western-style music. Rockers' strategies of localization have allowed for a counterspace in which women are no longer outsiders or exceptions. This is true for both musicians and their fans.

## EPILOGUE



The above image illustrates the side-by-side existence of multiple female subjectivities in contemporary Turkey, an image that connotes the specificity of Turkish experiences of media and consumer culture in the twenty-first century. A Turkish woman, who seems to be a working class immigrant to the big city, in modest Islamic attire, walks by a swimwear advertisement that exposes the body of a (possibly foreign) female model, who looks directly at the audience. The woman seems to be in a rush and have much on her mind, the least of which would be studying the billboard or the model who resembles a *Cosmo* Girl or a self-objectifying rock performer.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I should note, in this context, that swimwear advertisements (and the use of the female body in mass media) signify not just the presence of multiple female subjectivities, global consumerism and capitalist patriarchy in Turkey, but also the tension between secularism and Islamism and their multiple appropriations. As the swimwear advertisements are controlled and increasingly censored by the Islamist government, the swimwear companies find creative ways to challenge the government's control. For example, when the Municipality of Istanbul rejected a major Turkish swimwear company's permit application to have photo shoots in the city in 1997, the company advertised their brand on city billboards by using an image of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the nation's founding father, wearing a swimsuit. The image was accompanied by the caption, "We miss the sun," thus indicating a protest of Islamist control and a longing for secularism, which, according to the advertisers, was linked, subtextually, to free choice and consumerism. More recently, in 2003, the same swimwear company had to cover its advertisements (using a foreign bikini model) at Istanbul's Atatürk International Airport, and they were later replaced by another company's advertisements with images of a Turkish model wearing the Islamic headscarf. "Zeki Triko Manken Yasagini Bu Afisle Asmisti," *Hurriyet*, May 17, 2007, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/6525682.asp>.

The Turkish public and private spheres are full of seeming contradictions, those created by the co-existing images of diverse femininities and feminisms – both transnational and Turkish – constructions that relate to the spread of global media and consumerism, capitalist patriarchy, Westernization, Islamism and processes of localization. Female subjectivities in the Turkish public sphere are never univocal. Age, class, ethnicity, gender, geographical region and religiosity serve as interconnected markers of difference and oppression as well as sources of multiple feminisms. Rural, working class and immigrant women of all ages living with harsh patriarchal rules as well as sexually and financially liberated women, musicians, activists, artists, scholars and politicians constantly re-articulate their vision of Turkish womanhood and localized cultures.

In contemporary Turkey, gender politics and Turkish women's redefinitions of gender norms can often be best seen in popular culture, which, as I argued in this study, has allowed women, since the late 1980s in particular, an alternative space to negotiate the tensions between transnational American culture and local identities, between modernity and Islamism, between feminisms and patriarchies. Turkish cultural producers' and audiences' media experiences of constructing, re-constructing, and resisting counterpatriarchal texts and social spaces illuminate the fluidity of categories such as "American," "Turkish," "modern," "Western," "backward," "Muslim," "feminist," and "patriarchal."

An integrative and self-reflexive perspective helps undo fixed notions of active, feminist Subject (as researcher, cultural producer, feminist, Western) and passive, feminine object (as consumer, study participant, non-Western, subservient Muslim

Turkish or ordinary women in need of feminist rescuing) in the Turkish setting. Such a critical perspective demonstrates the interrelatedness of gender oppression, cultural and economic hegemony and resistance. Through this antidualistic approach, I illustrated that both resistance and power take diverse forms in Turkey. “Resistance,” in the Turkish setting, connotes diverse modes of negotiation and addresses. It may take counter-patriarchal, anti-American, anti-capitalist or counter-textual qualities, while it may, at other times, align Turkish women with normative gender roles and with global capitalism. From this perspective, accounting for the specificity of the multi-vocal national setting is crucial to fully explore the seemingly contradictory modes of resistance in Turkey. Power, in particular, should be seen “as a fluid shaper of domination” rather than a “fixed authority.”<sup>2</sup> By attending to the historically specific nuances, varying modes and voices of female resistance and oppression, I have attempted, in this study, to avoid running “the risk of speaking past power or shouting at it.”<sup>3</sup>

Through an interdisciplinary and historicized perspective that combines audience and production ethnographies, textual and contextual analyses and feminist theory, I illustrated that popular cultural texts and genres currently remain one of the few spaces that can house counterhegemonic ‘pockets’ in Turkey. These alternative spaces allow for the creation of an empowering female forum for free speech, practice, creativity and criticism, each of which connotes multiple meanings for different women. In these female-dominated spheres, women cultural producers and audiences continually re-envision their gendered identities and their relationship to globalization, Turkish patriarchy and, at times, to feminism.

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Bogues, “Working Outside Criticism: Thinking Beyond Limits,” *boundary 2* 32: 1 (2005): 71-93, 91.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

The media experiences of rural, Muslim-identified soap opera viewers and of urban, middle-class women such as the *Cosmo* Girls or female rockers, for whom religion often remains peripheral, if not disregarded, help deconstruct rigid categories of feminist and feminine identification. The following exchange, for example, between two upper middle class women in a Turkish comic strip, humorously alludes to the seeming struggle of urban women in their negotiations of modern womanhood, as prescribed by state discourses and by the post-1990s' Turkish revisions of feminism and media consumption.

Woman 1: "I am both a successful career woman  
And a wonderful housewife  
No one can beat my cooking

I never miss a classical music or jazz concert

But I am great at belly dancing, too.

You've probably noticed that I can be both serious and flirtatious, as well."

Woman 2: "So, does all of that make you postmodern?"<sup>4</sup>

This exchange presents an ironic look at the multiple positions most modern-identified and well-educated Turkish women feel forced to inhabit. At the same time, it reveals the subtextual connotations of contemporary Turkish womanhood that is informed simultaneously by traditional, state and transnational femininities as well as feminisms. Most importantly, it offers a critique of the need to label women's experiences into rigid categories as feminist, anti-feminist or postmodernist, an endless practice in most Turkish

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<sup>4</sup> This comic strip is by a Turkish female illustrator. Piyale Madra, "Ademler ve Havvalar" ["Adams and Eves"], *Radikal*, November 28, 2009, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=CizgilerGaleri&Date=08.12.2009&CaricatureID=10&PAGE=24>.

feminism and culture, one that is challenged by Turkish women's mediated experiences of popular culture.<sup>5</sup>

American culture in Turkey – whether a dubbed soap opera, a semi-local *Cosmopolitan* magazine or rock music in Turkish – is encoded and decoded in multiple ways. This study shows how cultural imports can be glocalized, and artistically and culturally re-appropriated in ways that parallel the unresolved processes of national and gendered configurations and of politics in Turkey itself. Turkish women's negotiations of localized American genres and texts reproduce and destabilize historically shifting discourses of womanhood, modernity and citizenship that are constantly re-constructed. Turkish women's diverse experiences of re-coding and decoding American cultural imports reveal a complex process, one that relates to the co-existence in contemporary Turkey of Westernization and tradition as well as Americanization and local resistance.

Through case studies of different demographics of Turkish women consumers and cultural producers, this study demonstrates that oppositional agency and female empowerment cannot be limited to active reception and production. The resistive potentiality of Turkish women's media experiences do not depend simply on accepting or rejecting a text's mode of address or on producing texts that challenge Turkish gender mores. Turkish women's oppositional positions also relate to the specific context in which the texts exist, and what sort of active negotiations might be made between and among various different texts and discourses, including those between conventional femininities and feminisms. From this perspective, Turkish women's media experiences

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<sup>5</sup> I should note that there are recent studies that attempt to deconstruct such binarisms by attending to various aspects of Turkish women's experiences in the private and public spheres, from fashion practices in the Ottoman Empire, carpet-weaving and Kurdish tribal experiences in Anatolian villages, to women's magazines and political participation. These studies, however, often lack interdisciplinarity and accounts of transnational media culture. See, for example, a collection of essays edited by Sirin Tekeli, *Women in Modern Turkish Society* (London: Zed, 1995).

challenge theories of cultural imperialism as well as romanticized notions of female agency and active reception.

By simultaneously considering texts, their female audiences and producers, broader historical and economic structures, strategies of localization and the impact of patriarchal gender divisions, this dissertation also helps bring to center female voices of resistance that have thus far been disregarded in scholarship. I wanted to bring to light the limitations of existing theoretical and methodological paradigms in exploring Turkish experiences of transnational cultures and the complexity of Turkish women's media experiences. I agree with Anthony Bogues who notes:

a critical practice that grapples with the historical moments, that seeks to wrestle with theory in efforts to expose not the hypocrisy of power but its assumptions and its language—games of naming, constructs a set of knowledges that might be useful in any emancipatory project.<sup>6</sup>

I have envisioned this dissertation as such an emancipatory project, one that attempts to detach critical work and transnational American and Feminist Studies, in particular, from binary labels such as imperialist, capitalist, First World, Third World, patriarchal, feminist, and feminine; one that allows for a multifaceted methodological intervention without which a study of the specificity of Turkish experiences of American popular culture would remain incomplete; and one that liberates the transnational feminist critic, who studies her own culture, from the Western expectations of being an authentic insider and representing the “true” story of all women. I have viewed this project as a critical medium through which to deconstruct most Western feminist understandings of the ‘ever-oppressed Turkish women,’ and as one that attempts to interrogate static notions of resistance and oppression. Finally, if the present account of

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony Bogues, “Working Outside Criticism: Thinking Beyond Limits,” *boundary 2* 32: 1 (2005): 71-93, 91.

the previously-unexplored female experiences of media culture has allowed my readers to *hear* just some of those countless female voices that seek power in Turkey, those from the villages, the big cities, and rock gatherings, my project is complete.

## APPENDIX A

### I. Selected Traits of Soap Opera Viewers (Total number of respondents: 40)

#### Age

15-20: 2  
21-26: 12  
27-32: 0  
33-38: 6  
39-44: 5  
45-50: 9  
51-56: 2  
57-62: 0  
63-68: 1  
68-73: 1  
74+: 2

#### Education

Illiterate: 3  
Some Elementary School: 2  
Elementary School: 21  
Some Junior High: 3  
Junior High School: 1  
Some Senior High: ---  
Senior High: 7  
College: 1  
Currently Attending Senior High School: 2

#### Marital Status

Married: 32  
Single: 7  
Widow: 1

#### Place of birth

Adiyaman: 1  
Bolu: 1  
Bursa: 1  
Kars: 2  
Adapazari: 34  
Gumushane: 1

#### Current residence:

Adapazari: 37  
Istanbul: 2  
Switzerland: 1

Primary Language

Turkish 39

Kurdish 1

Viewers who

Regularly watch (or used to watch until cancellation) two or more soap operas 21

Regularly watch (or used to watch until cancellation) American soap operas *and*  
Telenovelas with no preference 16

Regularly watch (or used to watch until cancellation) telenovelas only 1

Never watch (or watched) soap operas *or* telenovelas 2

Respondents' Viewing Preferences

*The Young and the Restless* (Yalan Ruzgari) 21

*The Bold and the Beautiful* (Cesur ve Guzel) 21

*Generations* (Hayat Agaci) 21

*Dallas* 17

Telenovelas 2

Viewers who

Watch (or used to watch until cancellation) when aired 39

Watch (or used to watch until cancellation) by videotape 1

Prefer to watch (or used to watch until cancellation) alone or with female  
company 39

Occasionally watch (or used to watch until cancellation) with male company or as  
a family 8

Viewers who

Talk with others on a regular basis

Face to face: 39

Telephone: 0

## II. Informed Consent Form

Since the data collection phase of the ethnography required interaction with individuals (“human subject research”), each aspect of the study, including the focus group and interview questions, methodology and informed consent forms, was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Brown University. I, as researcher also completed a required course on “Human Subjects Research,” to be equipped with the necessary background to prevent any direct or indirect damage to the study participants (respondents).

The informed consent form read and signed by the respondents prior to each focus group and interview was in Turkish. In the rare case when a respondent had difficulty in comprehending the specifics of the consent form or if they were illiterate, I first asked another respondent to read it out, and then reviewed each point to ensure that each respondent was well-informed. Below is a copy of the informed consent form in English:

My name is Aslihan Tokgoz, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Brown University’s Department of American Civilization in Providence, RI, USA. I am currently writing my dissertation. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting a focus group study on the viewing habits and experiences of female Turkish viewers of the American soap opera, *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The focus group study that I am conducting is part of various primary and secondary sources that I will be using in my dissertation. The purpose of the research is to obtain my Ph.D. degree.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation project and for permitting me to digitally audio record your comments during the focus group.

This will confirm your understanding and agreement with respect to your participation in this study.

You agree that Aslihan Tokgoz may:

1. digitally audio record and transcribe the focus group. The expected duration of the focus group is between two and six hours. You may participate in one focus group only. I do not foresee any risks or discomforts for you by participating in this study.
2. use the transcript contents, that is the information you provide, or parts of it, in combination with other research materials, in her dissertation and in related conference papers and/or published articles/essays.
3. use your biographical data in connection with the focus group study and the dissertation. Your identity will be kept anonymous, and I will be using your initials only or a pseudonym in my written work in order to protect your confidentiality.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may leave this focus group at any time. You may not benefit from participation in this interview. However, even though there is no direct benefit for your participation in this study, I hope that I can contribute with my project to a better understanding of the empowering experiences of Turkish women via encounters with American popular culture, and to making their important story accessible to a broader audience. I will be using the information that you provide during the focus group. If you do not wish certain information to be used in my dissertation, you may indicate so before answering any of my questions. The digital audio recording and its contents will be used only in connection with this dissertation, related conference papers and/or published articles/essays. The transcript will remain in Aslihan Tokgoz's possession and will not be made available to any other person. Aslihan Tokgoz will store the recording and transcript in her private office, where she is the only person who has access to them.

If you have any further questions at this time or later, please contact me at:

Department of American Civilization

Brown University, Box 1892, Providence, RI 02912

Tel.: (401) 863-2896 FAX: (401) 863-1385, E-mail: Aslihan\_Tokgoz@brown.edu

You may also contact my advisor for further questions:

Professor Susan Smulyan, Department of American Civilization

Brown University, Box 1892, Providence, RI 02912

If you have any questions/complaints regarding the conduct of the study, please contact IRB Manager, Office of Research Administration, Brown University, Box 1929, Providence, RI 02912 Tel. (401) 863-2777

This agreement contains my entire and complete understanding.

Signed:

Name (please print):

Address:

Date:

### III. Focus Group Questions

1. Why do you/did you use to watch this soap? If you no longer watch it, what are the main reasons?
2. Did/do you watch telenovelas as well? Did/do you have a favorite telenovela or American soap opera that you regularly follow/ed? If you preferred American soap operas, what made them more appealing?
3. [Post-viewing] If you were to tell a friend who has not seen this excerpt/episode about what happened, how would you summarize the story?
4. Who is your favorite female character in this soap? Why? What kind of a woman is she? Is she liberated or dependent? What do you know about her? (family, relationships, career) Does she act/talk like anyone you know in real life?
5. Which female character do you dislike the most? Why? What do you know about her?
6. Who, do you think, is the most important (female or male) character? Who is she/he? Do you like him/her? Why? Why not?
7. If you were to be one of the characters in this soap, which one would you be? Why? How would your life be similar to/different from your current life?
8. If you were to pick one of the male characters to marry in real life or as your son-in-law, who would that be? Why?
9. What does this program say about American men? How are they similar to/different from Turkish men? Do these American characters treat women differently? If yes, how? Would you like to be treated like that? Why/why not?

10. What does this program say about American women? How are their lives different?
11. What kind of problems do these female characters have? Are their problems similar to yours? How do they deal with their problems? How would *you* handle the same problem/s?
12. If one of these women experiences domestic abuse, how do their friends and families treat them? How's this different from what would happen here?
13. If your favorite female character was forced to go through an arranged marriage, what would she do? Would she accept it or not? Why or why not?
14. Is there anything in this soap that is against the moral norms of Turkish society? Do you see anything against your own values? For example, in terms of the relations between the sexes, do you find this soap traditional or revolutionary?
15. What is the traditional role for women in Turkey and/or in your family? Describe good/bad women according your family's values. Do you agree with them? Why? Why not? Have you ever admired a female character who sometimes seemed like a 'bad woman'? If so, what about her was so appealing?
16. What do you think about dating? Should women have the right to choose and *leave* their husbands/partners as in this soap opera? Why? Why not?
17. In this episode, Eric and his ex-wife re-marry despite his past affair with his daughter-in-law. If you were Eric's ex-wife, would you forgive him? Why/why not?
18. Have these soap stories influenced your thinking of your own relationship with your husband/future husband and with men in general? Do you think any

differently about your own potential and agency? Or, do you feel more strongly about traditional Turkish roles for women?

19. In one of the scenes we saw, a man and a woman (Macy) kiss and the woman asks the man to leave because she is in a relationship with someone else, and the man promptly leaves. Yet her boyfriend (Thorne) sees them kiss and leaves without saying anything. He later gets drunk and has sex with another woman, thinking she is Macy, only to find out her identity in the morning and then clarify that it was a mistake since he is still in love with his girlfriend. What do you think about Macy's behavior? Can women in this village or in Turkey similarly say 'No' to a man's sexual advances? How would Turkish men respond to a woman's refusal to have sex? How would they react to seeing their wife/partner kiss someone else? Would you say Macy cheated on Thorne? How should she have acted?
20. Do you (or did you use to) usually watch by yourself or with other people? If you watch(-ed) with others, are/were they always the same people? Did you talk to each other while watching the soaps?
21. What do you do if you miss an episode? Did you ever tape an episode or call your friends to talk about the episode that you missed?
22. Do you routinely talk to your friends about these soaps? What do you usually talk about?
23. Do your families (husbands/children...) approve of your watching this soap? If not, why not? Did you attempt to watch it despite your husbands' 'bans'? Have any male family members ever watched with you? How did that affect your viewing?

**24.** Have you ever refused to do your house chores or other work to watch your soap?

How did that make you feel?

**25.** Let's say that the American producers came to Turkey and asked you to write an end to this soap opera, how would you end this story?

## APPENDIX B

### I. Informed Consent Form (for Turkish *Cosmopolitan* Editors and Readers)

The informed consent form read and signed by the respondents prior to each interview was in Turkish. Below is a copy of the informed consent form in English:

My name is Aslihan Tokgoz, and I am a Ph.D candidate at Brown University's Department of American Civilization in Providence, RI, USA. I am currently writing my dissertation. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting interviews with the Turkish readers and editors of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine published in Turkish for Turkish readers in Turkey. The interview that I am conducting is part of various primary and secondary sources that I will be using in my dissertation. The purpose of the research is to obtain my Ph.D degree.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation project and for permitting me to digitally audio record your interview.

This will confirm your understanding and agreement with respect to your participation in this study.

You agree that Aslihan Tokgoz may:

1. digitally audio record and transcribe the interview. The expected duration of the interview is between 1 and four hours. I do not foresee any risks or discomforts for you by participating in this study.
2. use the transcript contents, that is the information you provide, or parts of it, in combination with other research materials, in her dissertation and in related conference papers and/or published articles
3. use your biographical data in connection with the interview and the dissertation. For readers only: Your identity will be kept anonymous, and I will be using your initials only or a pseudonym in my written work in order to protect your confidentiality.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may terminate the interview at any time. You may not benefit from participation in this interview. However, even though there is no direct benefit for your participation in this study, I hope that I can contribute with my project to a better understanding of the empowering experiences of Turkish women via encounters with American popular culture, and to making their important story accessible to a broader audience. I will be using the information that you provide during the interview. If you do not wish certain information to be used in my dissertation, you may indicate so before answering any of my questions. The digital audio recording and its contents will be used only in connection with this dissertation, related conference papers and/or published articles/essays. The transcript will remain in Aslihan Tokgoz's possession and will not be made available

to any other person. Aslihan Tokgoz will store the recording and transcript in her private office, where she is the only person who has access to them.

If you have any further questions at this time or later, please contact me at:

Department of American Civilization

Brown University, Box 1892, Providence, RI 02912

Tel.: (401) 863-2896 FAX: (401) 863-1385, E-mail: Aslihan\_Tokgoz@brown.edu

You may also contact my advisor for further questions:

Professor Susan Smulyan, Department of American Civilization

Brown University, Box 1892, Providence, RI 02912

If you have any questions/complaints regarding the conduct of the study, please contact IRB Manager, Office of Research Administration, Brown University, Box 1929, Providence, RI 02912 Tel. (401) 863-2777

This agreement contains my entire and complete understanding.

Signed:

Name (please print):

Address:

Date:

## II. Interview Questions (Editors)

1. *Cosmopolitan* is originally an American women's magazine. To what extent has Turkish *Cosmo* retained its connections to American *Cosmo* and to its Americanness? How American is Turkish *Cosmo*?
2. What is the relationship of Turkish editors to the American *Cosmo* publishers and/or the editorial board?
3. What are the similarities and differences between American *Cosmo* and Turkish *Cosmo* in terms of content, format, target audience, editorial responsibilities, and advertising policies?
4. In what ways, is Turkish *Cosmo* Turkish? What aspects of the magazine make it appealing to Turkish women readers?
5. Who is your typical *Cosmopolitan* reader?
6. Do you do lifestyle market research for your advertisers? Do the results agree with your target audience image?
7. What are the circulation figures? Has there been an increase or decrease in your circulation recently?
8. What are the main qualifications you look for when choosing your editorial staff? Do you look for any similarities, in terms of lifestyle and worldview, to the 'ideal *Cosmo* reader'?
9. You have some regular male contributors to Turkish *Cosmo*. It is quite uncommon for a Turkish women's magazine to have male writers. What is your rationale behind your decision to include male voices and choose those particular writers?

10. What is *Cosmo*'s take on women's rights? To what extent, do you find that perspective relevant and/or radical in the Turkish context?
11. What is your personal opinion on the status of Turkish women and their rights?
12. Do you ever incorporate your own views of women's rights in the magazine content? In what ways? How does your voice add to or deviate from the magazine's overall approach toward female empowerment?
13. Have there been any articles, cover pages or images that received negative feedback from your readers, other media, or from the government? Which ones? Why?
14. Who gives the ultimate decision to accept or reject the content of an article?
15. Who are your major advertisers? How much advertising is sold locally? Why do they advertise in *Cosmo*?
16. Do you think Turkish *Cosmo* challenges traditional gender norms and women's pre-given roles in Turkey? In what ways? Can you think of a specific feature story/article that directly questioned traditional 'Turkish womanhood'?
17. Turkish *Cosmo*, like its American version, contains eroticized images of semi-nude men for the pleasure of its women audience. What are the main reasons behind your choice to include such pictures? Do your readers like it? How do you know? Did you receive any audience feedback?
18. What's *Cosmo*'s take on marriage (age, necessity), cohabitation, and virginity (importance)? Has this image changed over time? If so, how and why? To what extent do you think your readers agree with the magazine's depictions and actively follow *Cosmo*'s lead in their personal lives? How do you know this?

19. How would you describe the “Turkish *Cosmo* Girl”? How is this image different from that of the American *Cosmo* Girl?

20. How would you define feminism? Is the Turkish *Cosmo* Girl feminist? Why/not?

### III. Interview Questions (Readers)

The following questions were included in a personal interview with the sender of the only critical reader’s letter in the research sample:

1. How did you first begin to read *Cosmopolitan*?
2. How long have you been a *Cosmopolitan* reader?
3. Do you buy the magazine every month? Do you have any favorite sections in the magazine? Do you read every article?
4. Do you ever share your magazine with friends and/or family members? If so, who do you share it with?
5. What features of the magazine have made it appealing it to you?
6. Do you sometimes discuss some issues raised in the magazine content with other people? If so, how? What do you usually talk about? For example, do you ever criticize an article, share any of the sex, relationship and career advice offered in the magazine with a friend, talk about consumer products promoted in the magazine, or comment on eroticized images?
7. Do you think *Cosmo* takes on a guiding, consciousness-raising role? Have you personally experienced *Cosmo*’s influence in the way you think about your own potential and agency?

8. Has the magazine content ‘taught’ you anything about women’s health, birth control, sexuality, relationships and career?
9. Do you or someone you know use the magazine as a how-to guidebook? How?
10. What do you see as Cosmo’s take on marriage, cohabitation, virginity, and homosexuality? To what extent do you agree or disagree with Cosmo?
11. Do you notice the advertisements? Have you ever been to the Cosmo Show Consumer Fair? Have you ever bought a product after having seen it promoted in the magazine (in an advertisement or article) or at the Cosmo Show?
12. *Cosmopolitan* is originally an American magazine. Did you know about this when you first started reading the magazine? How American, do you think, is Turkish Cosmo?
13. What aspects of the Turkish *Cosmopolitan* magazine are specific to Turkish women? How Turkish is Turkish *Cosmo*?
14. How would you describe the image of a Turkish *Cosmo* Girl? Do you consider yourself a *Cosmo* Girl? If so, in what ways?
15. How do you envision the magazine editors and contributors? Do you think of them as *Cosmo* girls?
16. According to the magazine content, what rights should women have? To what extent do you find the magazine radical or normative within the Turkish setting?
17. Have there been times when you did not like some articles or cover pages before? Why?

18. Do you think *Cosmopolitan* challenges norms about female sexuality and womanhood in Turkey? If so, in what ways? Do you remember an article that specifically questioned traditional values?
19. Turkish *Cosmopolitan*, like its American counterpart, includes many eroticized male images. What do you think about these images?
20. How would you define feminism? Do you see yourself as a feminist? Do you think Turkish *Cosmo* Girl is a feminist? Why/why not?

## APPENDIX C

### I. Informed Consent Form (Turkish musicians)

My name is Aslihan Tokgoz, and I am a Ph.D candidate at Brown University's Department of American Civilization in Providence, RI, USA. I am currently writing my dissertation. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting interviews with Turkish female musicians in Turkey. This interview is part of various primary and secondary sources that I will be using in my dissertation. The purpose of the research is to obtain my Ph.D degree.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation project and for permitting me to digitally audio record your response.

This will confirm your understanding and agreement with respect to your participation in this study.

You agree that Aslihan Tokgoz may:

1. digitally audio record and transcribe the interview. The expected duration of the interview is between 1 and four hours. I do not foresee any risks or discomforts for you by participating in this study.
2. use the transcript contents, that is the information you provide, or parts of it, in combination with other research materials, in her dissertation and in related conference papers and/or published articles
3. use your biographical data in connection with the interview and the dissertation.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. The alternative to participating in this project is not to participate. You may terminate the interview at any time. You may not benefit from participation in this interview. However, even though there is no direct benefit for your participation in this study, I hope that I can contribute with my project to a better understanding of the empowering experiences of Turkish women via encounters with localized American popular culture, and to making their important story accessible to a broader audience. I will be using the information that you provide during the interview. If you do not wish certain information to be used in my dissertation, you may indicate so before answering any of my questions. The digital audio recording and its contents will be used only in connection with this dissertation, related conference papers and/or published articles/essays. The transcript will remain in Aslihan Tokgoz's possession and will not be made available to any other person. Aslihan Tokgoz will store the recording and transcript in her private office, where she is the only person with access to them.

If you have any further questions at this time or later, please contact me at:

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Brown University, Box 1892, Providence, RI 02912

Tel.: (401) 863-2896 FAX: (401) 863-1385, E-mail: Aslihan\_Tokgoz@brown.edu

You may also contact my advisor for further questions:  
Professor Susan Smulyan, Department of American Civilization  
Brown University, Box 1892, Providence, RI 02912

If you have any questions/complaints regarding the conduct of the study, please contact IRB Manager, Office of Research Administration, Brown University, Box 1929, Providence, RI 02912 Tel. (401) 863-2777

This agreement contains my entire and complete understanding.

Signed:  
Name (please print):  
Address:  
Date:

## **II. Interview Questions (Sebnem Ferah, Nil Karaibrahimgil and Ozlem Tekin)**

1. Considering your albums, music videos, lyrics, stage costumes and your performances, what aspects of your music do you associate with Turkish, American and/or transnational genres and cultures?
2. To what extent does your musical style reflect an alignment with American rock and alternative musics?
3. If applicable, which American rock, alternative and/or pop performers/bands influenced or inspired your music? In what ways?
4. If you were to categorize your music, which one of these labels would you prefer: pop, rock, pop-rock, alternative? Why? How else would you describe your music?
5. Regarding your album sales, have the sales figures always been what you expected? Have you ever had sudden changes in the sales? If so, why?
6. When we look at the Turkish music industry today, we find that there are many female performers, composers and song-writers but very few of them have significant roles in the production or promotion of their albums. Regardless of whether a record label is owned by a locally based transnational company such as Sony Turkey or by Turkish producers, typically, men have higher administrative positions and decision making power in the production, promotion and distribution stages. How do you view your role in important decisions regarding your music?
7. What are some of the challenges facing female musicians in Turkey?

8. Do you find that women rock and alternative music performers experience more resistance from the music industry and the audiences? Has that changed over time? Do you find that the presence of female rock and alternative performers has been fully naturalized in the Turkish music industry?
9. (Sebnem Ferah and Ozlem Tekin only) The first female Turkish rock group, Volvox, drew a lot of attention when it was formed in 1988. How did the group members come together and was that your original intention to have a female-only band?
10. (Sebnem Ferah and Ozlem Tekin only) Why did you choose the name, Volvox? What does it mean?
11. (Sebnem Ferah and Ozlem Tekin only) During Volvox years (1988-1994), you experienced a conflict with the Turkish Police Department because they would not allow you to continue to perform in rock bars. Why did the police attempt to control your performances? How did you respond and how was this conflict resolved?
12. (Sebnem Ferah and Ozlem Tekin only) Why was Volvox disbanded?
13. What are some of the issues that motivate you when you write your lyrics? Why do you choose those themes?
14. Have you ever received any criticism from your production company regarding your lyrics, performances or musical choices? Did you ever have to modify any of your songs, albums, music videos or stage costumes?
15. As you write your songs about relationships and women's empowerment, do you intend to question traditional Turkish understandings of gender and power roles?

Would it be accurate to take it that your musical career, public image and performance style help destabilize traditional gender mores in Turkey?

16. Who is your typical listener? Has there been any audience research on your audience profile?
17. How do you view your relationship with your fans? Do you use the Internet and interact with your fans online? Do you follow your fans' comments and activity on fan websites? Have you ever posted a message on any of those websites?
18. Do you think your image and music influence the thinking of your female fans about their pre-given roles in traditional society and family?
19. Do you receive any feedback (letters, emails) from college students or young women and girls who view you as a role model? Have you heard from or met any young fans who were inspired to become instrumentalists and form bands, or those who emulated your look, musical style, outfits as well as your ideas (which they may perceive through your lyrics and media interviews) in their daily lives? If so, how do you feel about this influence?
20. Your lyrics, music videos, live performances, public appearances and media interviews as well as extramusical productions convey an image of you as the independent, rebellious woman. Is this a conscious strategy? Do you think that is an accurate interpretation?
21. Have any of your songs or your music videos ever received negative feedback from your fans and/or music critics, both artistically and ideologically? Which ones?

22. What are your thoughts about the popularization of Turkish rock/alternative music in general? How would you respond to those critics who may find your close relationship with popular and consumer cultures problematic?
23. My final question is about women's rights in Turkey, feminism and its relationship to rock and alternative music. How would you personally define feminism? Do you view yourself as a feminist? If so, in what ways do your personality, musical style and public persona reflect a feminist perspective?