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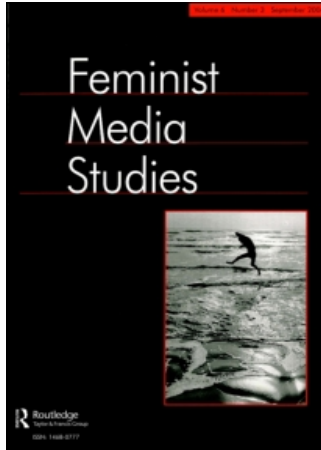
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NEWS COVERAGE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The Turkish case

Zeynep Alat

Introduction

Seventy-year-old Koran study teacher married the girl he raped. Seventy-year-old Rahmi Budak who was arrested for raping a 17-year-old girl whom he taught Koran was released upon marrying to a young girl . . . authorities said he would face jail time if he gets a divorce within a five year period. . . . Rape was proved by the medical examiner's report. (*Milliyet*, February 8, 2003)

The impetus for this study came from the ignorance the Turkish media professionals displayed when it comes to discussing violence against women. It even reached a point that a columnist, Fatih Altaylı, writing for a mainstream daily newspaper, *Hürriyet*, in his weekly radio talk show *Bab-ı*, Ali dared to say that he would rape a female human rights activist if he had the opportunity (Kaya, 2004). The reaction he received was so minimal that he did not even need to apologize. He still keeps his column. In another newspaper that claims to be leftist, *Radikal*, a female writer, Nur Çintay, who secured a daily column, had the brashness to say that she is "antifeminist." I suspect she does not even know what being a feminist is and so her claims to antifeminism are uninformed and perhaps opportunist. It is naive to expect that in male dominated newspapers, female writers, except for a few, would show some sensitivity to domestic violence in their reports. It is apparent that women journalists are expected to write either about "romance" or, if they want to be taken seriously, news about "economy." When I realized these facts, as a Turkish woman—and as a feminist—I felt the responsibility to engage in a critical analysis of media coverage of violence against women with an aim to allow Turkish media professionals to realize how they contribute to the misogyny and maintenance of status quo gender relations despite their hopes for a more equitable society. In this paper, I first present some information regarding the condition of women in Turkey and the nature of the Turkish media. Then, I provide an overview of the common themes that emerged from my tracking of news coverage of violence against women over a four-month period and my analysis of how these were reported.

The Role of the Media in Shaping Common Sense

With an understanding of the role of the media in creating a common sense of the world through its particular language and symbolization, Marian Meyers (1994) notes that the media provides ideological support for hegemonic power structures. Similarly, Bonnie J. Dow (1996) points to the crucial role that media plays in the maintenance and reproduction of dominant culture. These authors claim that dominant ideology disseminated through media is so powerful that any awareness or resistant agency on the part of the loyal audience is almost impossible. John Fiske (1996) refutes this image of passive audience by emphasizing the polysemy of the text and portraying viewers as actively making meaning as they are exposed to media. Fiske advances the position that viewers engage in a process of negotiation of the meanings offered by the media by contrasting these views with their own social situations. Given the strength of the latter poststructuralist arguments, it is important to develop an understanding of the cultural meanings of being a woman in Turkey and the nature of violence against women in the aforementioned country.

Domestic and Sexual Violence Against Turkish Women

The Turkish Republic was founded after the collapse of Ottoman Empire in 1923. Immediately after, the founders instituted secular laws, recognized the equality of both genders, and encouraged women to come out of their traditional roles and participate in endeavors for building a modern nation state (Zehra Arat 1998). Women's role in the westernization of the society was well recognized by the founders of the new republic. Free education was adopted at all levels and primary education was made mandatory for both sexes in 1923. The number of schools increased drastically and their quality improved. Private life also became political with national reforms affecting the structure of the family and family members' rights. In 1926, polygamy was abolished, the minimum age for marriage was increased, and women were given property rights, rights to choose their spouses, rights to initiate divorce, and rights to maintain their maternal status after divorce. These were a part of a new civil law based on, and adapted from, the Swiss Civil Code (Arat 1998). In 1930, women were granted the right to vote and to run for office in elections.

However, as Martha Nussbaum nicely puts it, "Liberty is not just a matter of having rights on paper, it requires being in material position to exercise those rights" (2000, p. 227). Focusing attention on what women really can do in a society, Nussbaum offers a human capabilities approach which provides the philosophical underpinnings of a just society in which individuals pursue a decent human life. The first capacity in Nussbaum's model of central human functional capacities is to be able to live a human life of normal length, not to die prematurely and not to have the quality of life reduced so as to be not worth living. When we contemplate the prevalence of murder of women on account of honor and sexual purity concerns, researchers estimate that at least two hundred girls and women are murdered each year by their families in Turkey. The real numbers, they say, may be far greater. It appears that many Turkish women do not have this first essential capacity, especially in the less developed regions (Molly Moore 2001). Perpetrators of these gendered types of crimes usually are given shorter prison terms, although, according to law, the killing of a family member is supposed to draw the most severe penalty allowable; that is, life in prison.

Aysan Sev'er and Gökçiçek Yurdakul (2001) observed several patterns in honor crime cases. First, the concept of honor is gender based. A man's honor is highly dependent on gendered and sexual behavior of women in his family. When these codes are broken and a man's honor is threatened, men feel that they have every right to sanction women for their assumed deviant behavior in order to clear their honor. Therefore, victims are mostly females and many of them are young. Sev'er and Yurdakul speculate that potential challenges to patriarchy posed by the emerging sexuality of young women is smashed from the start to set an example to other women. Clearly, men are worried about their control of women's behavior and feel they must take action to retain their dominant status. The message for women is that they are untrustworthy, dispensable, and subject to the conditions set by men.

Second, responding to international coverage of honor crimes that emphasize the role of Islam in honor killings, Sev'er and Yurdakul argue that it is the cultural understanding of honor and patriarchy to be blamed rather than the religion. Third, perpetrators are usually chosen among young male relatives and receive support from other male relatives and the community. Law enforcement officers, lawyers, and judges who are predominantly male join this support system by not prosecuting the crimes, not providing protection to potential victims, or giving reduced sentences to perpetrators.

Finally, perceived threats of social change which is the inevitable result of migration, technological advancements, and globalization, lead to an increase in honor killings in highly patriarchal underdeveloped rural areas where men are anxious about their own social status. As younger generations are exposed to alternative ways of living through media and education, they increasingly rebel against their parents and traditional life style imposed upon them (Moore 2001). The generation gap between young women and their parents has led to an increase in violent crimes within families as well as suicides among women who find themselves rejected by family members.

Meltem Muftuler-Bac (1999) points out that a society that cannot secure its women's survival (capacity for living) cannot secure its women's welfare (capacity for bodily health). It is not far-fetched to claim that if a woman's life is in danger and she does not have the capacity for bodily integrity, she would not have other central human functional capacities, or that these capacities would lose their importance. Nussbaum (2000) asserts that in order to have bodily integrity, a woman should be able to move freely from place to place; be secure against violence, including sexual assault and domestic violence; and have opportunities for sexual satisfaction and choice in matters of reproduction. However, in the Turkish case, 30 to 70 percent of all women are regularly beaten and raped by their husbands and many single women claim to have been beaten by male relatives. These statistics are likely to be underestimated because 30 percent of women believe in privacy of family matters and do not approve seeking legal support in the case of domestic abuse (Ilkkaracan 2002; Muftuler-Bac 1999; Sev'er & Yurdakul 2001). According to the review of the literature by Nuran Hortaçsu, Sibel Kalaycıoğlu, and Helga Rittersberger-Tılıç (2003), a significant proportion of female victims of physical violence believe that their husband's actions are justified. This finding does not seem surprising considering the fact that Turkish women live in a society in which gender stereotypes, patriarchal values, and religious interpretations work together to place women at the bottom of the social hierarchy and create a discourse that honors women as mothers and wives but provides them with no power.

Muftuler-Bac (1999) categorizes the oppression Turkish women encounter as: a) tangible forms that include sexual harassment, assault, insult, battering, rape, virginity tests, torture, and murder; and b) intangible forms that include legal discrimination, economic inequality, and social inequality. She points out that family members, school principals, administrators of dormitories, police, courts, and administrators in public institutions all see themselves as responsible for ensuring women's chastity by maintaining corporal control over female sexuality.

In Turkish society, premarital and extramarital sexual contact is socially forbidden for women but not for men. The high incidence of virginity exams is among the practices that interfere with Turkish women's capacity for bodily integrity. Women suspected of illegal prostitution, or who are charged with immodest behavior; political detainees; and girls in public dormitories, orphanages, hospitals, and high schools may be required to undergo virginity exams although there is no legal basis for that requirement (Ayse Parla 2001). After increasing pressure from feminist and human rights activists, medical doctors are obliged not to examine according to their professional ethic regulations, and women were granted the right to refuse the exam. However, such refusal automatically leads to labeling such women as non-virgins. During this dispute about the legitimacy of virginity exams, the minister in charge of women's affairs, Işlay Saygın in an interview with the journalist Neşe Düzel (1997) defended the practice arguing that these tests were necessary to maintain traditions and customs, and also to protect security forces from allegations of wrongdoing. What was crucial for her was the chastity required by traditional society values, and not the number of girls who commit suicide because of questions about their virginity that result from the virginity exams.

Virginity is a very important factor in the penal system in Turkey although there is no direct reference to it in the Turkish Penal Code (Parla 2001). However, both in the process of defining the crime and determining the punishment, a woman's virginity status plays a crucial role in the outcome of legal actions. For example, the sentence is increased for a rapist if the woman he raped was a virgin. On the other hand, if the rapist agrees to marry his victim whether or not this is desired by the victim, he is released. In cases of abduction of women, the minimum sentence is seven years if the woman is married, otherwise, the sentence can be as short as three years. In 1980s, there were attempts to change the law to allow a one third of the sentence reduction in rape cases if the victim was a prostitute. But the motion was denied thanks to the efforts of women's groups. Virginity exams also are used on political detainees as a strategy of both physical and psychological torture. Sometimes exams are accompanied by rape. Detainees are given no access to medical care, thus, the torture or rape cases are concealed. Reports of sexual torture are usually given no attention by judges or prosecutors (Amnesty International 2002).

Helen Benedict's (1992) observation is that rape in America is not seen as a physical attack that hurts the victim but, rather, as a sexual act. This perception is not peculiar to American society, but is quite prevalent in Turkey as well. One would not be surprised to hear a man smile and say, "If rape is inevitable, just enjoy it." This phrase has become a slang in many men's vocabulary as well as in some women's.

Parla (2001) sees the roots of this scrutiny of women's sexuality and draconian types of enforcement of public morality as endeavors that are related to the embedded notion of sacred motherhood and sexual submission in a patriarchal state. Women are expected to both infuse into a "degendered" public sphere but retain their essential feminine traits including obligatory sexual submission and motherhood. This juxtaposition of women's

citizenship with motherhood and men's control of their bodies results in constrained female sexuality and the categorization of women as either Madonnas or sluts.

This dominant discourse finds its reflection in the legal system. Dicle Kogacioglu (2004) reports that judges themselves are embedded in the dominant gender discourse and make decisions based on legal convention reproduced in the interactions of legal professionals who are mostly male. Contradicting their self-proclaimed stance opposed to violence against women, judges often question and take into account women's moral status. They also tend to make their decisions based on certain legal texts that work for the benefit of the male perpetrators and disregard other texts that would favor women or lead to a higher level of punishment for men who abuse women.

Turkish Media

There are numerous newspapers for Turkish people to choose from, including at least twenty-one national daily newspapers and 3,500 local daily or weekly newspapers (Christine Ogan 2003). Links between the economic power holders and politicians has led to their increasing monopolization of Turkish media in the last two decades (Andrew Finkel 2000; International Federation of Journalists 2002). Media barons expanded their business to such fields as automotive industries, banking, insurance, finance, and energy using their power to influence the public and government. Media barons' monopoly over the sales distribution network makes it impossible for new entrepreneurs to survive in the media business without the consent of two media monoliths. It is hard to keep track of who owns which paper because of financial instabilities and transactions between media groups (Catalbas 2003). The Dogan group which is reported to have control of about 80 percent of all media in Turkey publishes three major newspapers (*Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, and *Radikal*) in addition to five minor ones and owns two major television companies (Ogan 2003). The second largest group used to be the controversial Uzan group which owned the second highest circulated newspaper, *Star*, and a television channel at the time of this research was conducted. Their rights over their TV channel and *Star* were seized by the government to collect debts. The third largest group is Bilgin, which is the owner of the newspaper *Sabah*. These were the newspapers that I read and analyzed.

These media giants also set ethical codes for journalism in the country and backed the Press Council which formulated the press's code of professional ethics (Finkel 2000). Formally, Turkish media seems to be abiding by the general rules of journalism. However, the dark side of the relationships between the media owners and governments is that these nefarious relations contaminate fair press practice. As in other countries, the Turkish press reflects mainly ruling class's concerns (Finkel 2000) and, the ruling classes continue to be dominated by men with traditional gender moralities.

In the case of gender, it is patriarchy that sets the standards for what carries news value and how certain incidents are reported. Saturating stories with cultural codes around femininity and sexuality occurs before their publication (Saktanber 1995). In order to increase their circulation, the press does not hesitate to exploit women and publish fabricated stories with nude female pictures. Saktanber notes that women's newsworthiness comes from their adherence to or violation of cultural norms. Women appear in news as participants of adultery, infidelity, abduction, love affairs, and domestic violence, as good or bad mothers, or as visual material in criminal cases committed by their male

partners. Whatever the report, salacious pictures are to perk male readers' interest to the norm.

The Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze press coverage of violence against women in Turkey. To pursue this end, from November 2002 to February 2003 I collected data from online versions of four liberal newspapers, *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Akşam*, and *Sabah*. The website of *Hürriyet* attracts on average 200,000 visitors each day. The figures for the other newspapers are currently unavailable. Average circulation numbers of these newspapers are 497,000 for *Hürriyet*, 420,000 for *Sabah*, 240,000 for *Milliyet*, and 204,000 for *Akşam* (IV. Kuvvet 2005).

I engaged in textual analysis to discern underlying meanings of newspaper text. Norman Fairclough (1995) defends the importance of textual analysis for theoretical, methodological, historical, and political reasons. The theoretical reasons points out the ways social structures, ideologies, and identities blend in language and how this dynamic process is usually overlooked because of the presumed transparency of language. Fairclough (1995) sees text as a form of social action which condition people as well as is constituted by social structures. This means that texts are valuable sources for any analysis of ideologies. Because of its potential to reveal ongoing social change, textual analysis is important in historical studies of discourse. Lastly, the political importance of textual analysis comes from its power to unveil how ideologies are disseminated and resisted through texts.

Pointing to the link between sociocultural processes, relations, and change phenomena realized in text, Fairclough (1995) argues that textual analysis is invaluable for its potential to reveal not only what is in a text but also what is absent. This can be accomplished through a systematic analysis of texts. From a sociocultural perspective, implicit meanings deserve as much attention as those made explicit in text. The former reflects taken for granted and common sense assumptions that often are not consciously recognized by readers.

Fairclough points out the strong relation between the form and content and states that any analysis of text will not be complete unless both form and content are simultaneously put under the microscope in a way that teases out the dynamic relationship between those two dimensions. Textual analysis can take two forms: linguistic analysis and intertextual analysis. Linguistic analysis looks into the linguistic characteristics and textual organization, whereas intertextual analysis explores the connections between social context and texts. Drawing upon Mikhail Bakhtin (1983) and Julia Kristeva's (1984) work, Fairclough asserts that intertextual analysis "has an important mediating role in linking text to context" and unveils how social and historical resources (discourses, narratives, and genres) are re-accentuated, transformed by, and mixed in texts (1995, p. 211).

Textual analysis is used in news media studies to understand how social structures gain meanings when they make the headlines (Parameswaran 2004). It reveals the ideologies present at the media landscape that mold discourses related to gender, race, class, ethnicity, and nationality into forms before exposing them to the public eye. Parameswaran's review of literature on journalistic production of knowledge regarding issues around gender in India brought to light the contradictions, or what Fairclough (1995)

calls heterogeneity, embedded in news reports in regard to how gender and gender inequalities are conceptualized and portrayed.

Borrowing conceptual and methodological insights from discourse analyses of news reports of violence against women, the goal of this paper is to explore implicit meanings in Turkish news stories about crimes against women in Turkey. My textual analysis included both linguistic and intertextual analyses to bridge the link between the form, content, and context of these reports. Linguistic analysis process involved teasing out how specific accounts of news are created through employment of certain linguistic forms. Specifically, I explore the structures of the sentences, how things are named, and what information is given and what is absent. This is followed by an emphasis on intertextual analysis to show how patriarchy infuses itself into news reports of violence against women. For this, I elaborate on recurring discourses and patterns to illustrate the ways specific textual practices become an articulation of the dominant gender discourse.

Results

Analyses of the data showed that, in general, the news reports of crimes against women took on a victim blaming attitude. This attitude could easily be detected right from the beginning, in the headlines. Later in the text, victims' adherence to norms, their life styles, and provocative or careless behavior are put under scrutiny. In the case of sex crimes, women are even accused of lying about consensual sex and calling it rape for revenge. The only crime that is routinely condemned is honor killings.

The Linguistics of Blame

The Turkish press's choices of linguistic forms used in headlines are investigated in this section to better understand how the press construes blame. For this purpose I applied naming and transitivity analyses employed by Kate Clark (1992) in her analyses of *The Sun's* coverage of sexual crimes in the UK. Clark points out the importance of naming as an ideological tool and states that naming also reveals the ideology of the namer. In sexual violence cases, Clark observed that media either name the attacker as a subhuman or treat him in terms of social normality. If the media does not approve of the violent act, it employs names such as fiend, monster, beast, or ripper, and so on. But if the media wants to create sympathy for the attacker, it avoids these names, and instead, includes the full name of the attacker and attaches an excuse for his behavior next to his name.

Considering the fact that headlines themselves are a whole area of investigation because of their potential for encapsulating the view of the whole report (Clark 1992), I focused my attention first on the structures of headlines. My analysis of the headlines in Turkish press did not reveal the same trend that appeared in Clark's study. Naming the attacker is avoided both in fiend and non-fiend cases. Usually there is no information regarding the identity of the attacker given in the headlines. Only in the cases of sexual violence on minors is the occupation of the perpetrator reported. In some non-fiend cases, the attackers are identified with their occupation or according to their relation to the victim such as ex-fiancé, crazy lover, or married lover.

Clark's analysis of naming the victim revealed that victims are identified by their names, addresses, ages, appearances, occupation, marital status, and whether or not they are mothers. But, by doing that, the intention of the media is not to individualize the victim

but to label her. Clark found out a linkage between the naming of attackers and the naming of victims. Certain labels are used depending on whether the crime is seen as tolerable.

Looking for the same trend in the Turkish press made it apparent that victims of fiends are girls, wives, or mothers. However, if the press approaches the violent act with sympathy there is no mention of the victims in the headlines at all. In some romanticized cases, victims are identified as young girls or college girls (murdered by their lovers).

Transitivity that is concerned with language at the level of clauses includes the three components: the process, the participants, and the circumstances (Clark 1992). Participants can either be the agent or the target that is affected by the process. Clark talks about the strategies used by media to reduce the responsibility of the attacker. These are the use of a passive voice or transferring the blame to someone else. It appears that the Turkish press employs both of these strategies or does not mention the attacker or the victim or sometimes even the exact nature of the crime.

"Went Out, Sexually Assaulted" (Altuntaş 2003)

"Raped, Accused of Adultery" (*Milliyet* 2003)

"Death by the Cell Phone Message" (Alagöz & Kahraman 2003)

"'Tradition' Committed Again with Two Bullets" (Cebe 2003)

"Double Guns for Forbidden Love" (Alagöz 2002)

"30 Stabs for Forbidden Love at Sahur [pre-dawn meal during Ramadan]" (*Milliyet*, December 3, 2002)

The responsibility of the attacker is reduced by making him invisible. Using passive clauses the attacker is made unknown or made to be a stranger even though later in the text it is reported that he is an ex-boyfriend or ex-husband. This way of reporting—hiding the attacker's identity—undermines the seriousness of male violence in the society and maintains the myth that family is a sanctioned and safe place for women although the reality might be the opposite (McDonald 1999).

"Raid on Dinner" (Kizginyürek 2003)

"Twelve Years for Fantasy Murder" (Tatoğullari 2003)

"Amok for Non-Mutual Love" (Dalgin 2003)

"Terrorized by Love" (Bel 2002)

"Murder at the University" (Turkish Style love 2002)

"Love Frenzy in Elementary School" (Mengüarslan 2003)

"Serial Rape Revealed from the Journal" (Karaka 2002)

In these headlines, there is no mention of the attacker or the victim. The focus is on the crime or the legal consequences, which reduces the crime to a comical story that deserves laughter not punishment. Thus, the victim's story becomes irrelevant and is not given any place. Hence, just as in cartoons or video games, the reader is exposed to a "fictional" victim who never dies or gets hurt in spite of the physical injuries.

"I Killed Him Because He Slept with my Daughter" (*Milliyet*, January 4, 2003) is a headline that includes both the murderous act of the attacker and the reason that led him to commit this crime. However, the news is not just about a murder, but also about a rape case in which a woman was raped and her boyfriend was killed. Yet, the rape case is relegated into a secondary position and trivialized by mentioning it only in one sentence which is later contradicted by the rapist's testimony. His version of the story is heard throughout the news. There is no endeavor to individualize the victim except her nationality which places her in the category of foreign women who are seen as promiscuous and, thus, exonerates the attacker. But, this sympathy driven report later on contradicts itself by mentioning the attacker's further plans for killing his ex-wife and several other individuals.

Underlying Patterns of News Reporting

Intertextual analysis revealed the dominance of certain patterns in news stories. These patterns included a victim blaming attitude, questioning perpetrators' mental status and women's adherence to gender norms, scrutinizing the victim's intention for reporting the crime, and turning sexual assault reports into pornographic stories. All of these strategies work to exonerate male perpetrators. Yet, one exception to this endeavor to strip men of the responsibility occurs in reports of honor crimes.

Blaming the victim. Meyers (1994) points out that newspapers that have an intention of keeping objectivity and balance try to provide both sides of a story. However, during this process, perpetrators' voices are played at a stereo quality while the victim's story is not given equal weight. In fact, in murder cases, victims who have no way of telling their stories receive the blame for the crime that ended their lives.

It does not seem absurd to state that the Turkish press works as a defense attorney for the offenders in news coverage of violence against women. This becomes obvious right in the beginning of the coverage, in the headlines. As mentioned earlier, headlines always contain the reason for the crime and, thus, bring to the forefront the reason rather than the other elements of the crime. Hence, loyal readers who are exposed over and over to this notion that reason leads to crime probably come to believe that "men's action must have been provoked by women" and "women deserve punishment" so that male violence is justified.

"She Wanted to Go Back to Germany, I Shot" (Bel & Takin 2003)

"Beaten by Lover Because She had made Love" (*Hürriyet*, February 10, 2003)

Tatyana who played the Russian bride in the movie was beaten by Nuri Kosem, her lover. Enraged by his lover's love scenes with Metin Akpınar . . . (*Hürriyet*, February 10, 2003)

In Maras, Huseyin Baydag, who killed Guldane Karadol with whom he had a sexual relationship after taking a Viagra but then broke up with her because of the shame he felt and then killed her since she kept asking for money, was sentenced to spend 15 years 10 months in prison. He defended himself by saying, "It was a consensual sex. She even had me take Viagra because I had impotence. Afterwards, I wanted to break up but she started

sucking my blood like a tick. She started to ask me to give her money. And recently she was threatening me. On the day of the incident, I shot her just to scare her" (*Arslan* 2002).

The next case is a perfect example of how the press attributes the guilt to another woman and makes the man only a victim caught in the middle of a clash between two jealous women who both want to take advantage of a man's wealth. The reporter speaks for the perpetrator and lets him off the hook, while he portrays the real victim as a nagging woman who drives the man crazy.

"Basak was the Reason for the Battery"

It came out that the reason Ozan Dogulu beat Ayse Hatun Önal was his interest in Basak Sahin. (Çakamak 2003)

"Claims Little White Hands"

Questioning her lover, Önal wanted to know if Basak's number was recorded in his cell phone's memory. Irritated by Önal's making a big deal out of it he slapped his lover in his jeep [a sign of wealth]. And Önal broke up with him. Basak Sahin said "I do not know anything about that. I am not dating Ozan" (Çakmak 2003).

In domestic violence cases, the legitimacy of the relationship is always mentioned. In spite of the more frequent use of the words "boyfriend" and "girlfriend" among the youth, the word "lovers" is more frequently preferred in news. Considering the still prevalent taboos around dating, it seems highly likely that this sort of word choice not only sexualizes the news reporting but also turns the attention from the crime to the morality of the relationship by raising questions about the purity of the female victim.

In Eskisehir, a young man got mad and shot his lover right in the middle of the college campus when she wanted to break up with him. (Dalgin 2003a)

"Shot His Wife Who Did Not Come to Bed"

In Adana, Celal Dalasir (51) had an argument with his wife who had separated their beds for two months. When his wife Nezahat Dalasir (40) hit him on his head with a bat he shot her with a rifle. . . . Celal Dalasir, who was taken under custody, said in his statement: "I told her 'let's sleep together.' When she refused, I got angry. I do not remember what I did afterwards in all that rage. Family discord." (Karadağ 2003)

In the case above, the victim was not only a woman but also a wife. She failed to fulfill her ultimate responsibility of providing unconditional sex to her husband. In Turkish society, domestic rape is not considered a crime by the law. The case is closed by the press using the husband's statement, "family discord" that very well summarizes the law makers' and officers' reluctance to intervene in family matters.

The following news coverage builds implicit connections with societal norms without an inconsiderable effort and in some sense portrays the victims as immoral and the murderer as a hero whose only intention was to save family honor:

"Killed His Mother and Her Lover"

Faysal Altsoy (27) came home at dawn and met a stranger, Baki Altun (49). Learning that he was his mother's lover, Faysal Altsoy went mad and attacked him with his hunter knife. After stabbing Baki Altun seven times and killing him, he stabbed his mother Saliha Altsoy (45) five times, stabbed his brother . . . and surrendered to police (*Arslan*, 2003)

"Big Sister's Honor Killing"

A big sister grabbed the gun after learning that her two sisters living in a separate house had fallen [the word "fall" means the woman is not chaste anymore] in a bad track. She killed one of her sisters and wounded the other. The big sister who had been a father figure for her sister for many years bloodied her hands when she learned that they were prostitutes. (Öztürk 2002)

For years Turkish society has witnessed the brutality of a celebrity figure, singer Ibrahim Tatlis, toward the women in his life. Without a moment of hesitation, he mercilessly beats his girlfriends in public (apparently pursuing a polygamist life) right in front of cameras and police officers who never take action against him. Therefore, it was no surprise for the public to hear on the news that his long-term live-in girlfriend, Derya Tuna, who was the mother of his son, was shot after she left him. Shortly, another of his girlfriends, famous belly dancer Asena, who once fled to Germany to get away from him thinking that she would be safe there because of an existing arrest warrant for Tatlis in that country, was shot in the same way. Both shooters denying any connection with Tatlis, but, announced that their actions were out of respect to him. Words of these perpetrators made the headlines:

"Mrs. Derya should Go and Be a Mother to Her Son"

I [the perpetrator] like her like a mother. I was very angry with her for wearing transparent clothes. That's the reason I shot her. (Aksoyer, Özdebak & Akkoç 2002)

Sabah's coverage of the capture of the Derya Tuna's assassin included a picture of Derya Tuna in her stage outfit with a big smile on her face. Under the picture it was written, "Tatlis had been outraged by Derya Tuna's transparent stage outfits" (*Sabah*, November 11, 2002). The voice of the shooter in Asena's case made the headline:

"She Exposed Her Skin Too Much"

I [the perpetrator] like Ibrahim Tatlis very much. Asena was exposing too much of her skin. I wanted to teach her a lesson. Ibrahim Tatlis's marriages to Derya Tuna ended because of this woman. I shot her because of that. (Aksoyer & Akkoç 2003)

Insanity plea. In addition to providing reasons for the crime, news reports expand their contribution to the defense case by focusing on the mental state of the perpetrators. Below are some examples of reported crimes:

"College Girl Shot by Crazy Lover Died"

Young girl shot by a student for unrequited love died. (*Milliyet*, January 18, 2003)

"Unrequited Love Frenzy"

A young college student went crazy after hearing her lover's "let's break up" proposal and shot her and himself in the middle of the college campus. (Dalgın 2003b)

"Three Dead Four Wounded for Her"

In Antalya, Nazmi Dalka after learning that his ex-wife with whom he had lived together for a while without being married was married to somebody else, ran amok. In this incident three people died, four were wounded. (Tosun & Kunar 2003)

“Bullet to Nina From the Lover”

The couple . . . had a quarrel for an unknown reason. During the quarrel Hasan Cakmak lost his temper and shot Nina on her forehead with his unregistered gun. As a victim of his temper . . . (Saat 2003)

“Turkish Style Love”

Crazy lover committed suicide after killing his girlfriend who wanted to break up with him. . . . A note was found in his pocket, ‘I am taking this such pure person with me instead of leaving her behind in this dirty world. I want to be with her in heaven.’ . . . Aslihan [victim] said she wanted to break up. Orhan snapped . . . (*Sabah*, November 30, 2002)

“Love to Death Ended Bitter”

A young man in Denizli turned the site into a bloodbath when his request to marry a girl was rejected by her family. Crazy young man . . . said, ‘I killed my love . . .’ (Demircan 2002)

“Separation Frenzy”

Turan Yakupoğlu who could not persuade his wife to come back home fired a shower of bullets at his in-laws. Economic crisis came between Turan and Suna Yakupoğlu who were in love and married five years ago. (Şenvarıdar 2002)

“Love Frenzy in Elementary School”

An elementary school boy shot to death his lover who wanted to break up. While saying ‘you are either mine or the ground’s’ he fired his gun over and over . . . (Mengüarslan 2003)

Such phrases as “murder out of love” or “ran amok” are frequently used in news coverage without any mention of the victims’ feelings or sufferings. Detecting a similar pattern in the American press, Meyers (1994) draws several implications from this sort of reporting. First of all, the use of a very common phrase, “something snapped” ignores the fact for most of the cases that the crime was premeditated and gives the impression that the crime was a “spontaneous reaction” and “uncontrollable response” even though the evidence points the other way.

A man’s obsession with a woman in the name of love is given as an excuse for his actions. The victim’s feelings for the perpetrator become irrelevant in this portrayal. Hence, love is claimed to be the reason behind the tragedy causing a temporary insanity in an otherwise respectable man. Acting upon his love, the man turns into a victim, too. There is little room designated to the accounts of relatives or friends of the victim which reveal that the perpetrator had been stalking the victim for a while and there was no mutual love or any kind of close relationship between the victim and perpetrator. Despite those accounts, it turns into a story of two lovers who were consumed by their love. The headline, “Three dead four wounded for her,” takes it to the extreme and blames the woman for her demise and the massacre of her relatives. It was she who enjoyed her life and had remarried another man while her ex-boyfriend was devastated by the loss of her love and her leaving him.

Meyers (1994) also suggests that the prevalent notion in the media that violence against women is rare and caused by individual pathology masks the real socially dominant nature of battering and perpetuates the patriarchy that causes such violence (see also Carter 1998). In fact, one third of murders of women were committed by the men they know (Carll 2003). Reflecting on public view of acquaintance violence against women Carll calls these crimes as “misdemeanor murders and rapes” because they are

not taken seriously. Drawing examples from the American judicial system, a Cincinnati judge's order for an abusive boyfriend to marry his victim or ridiculous jail time given to the husband who killed his wife in Maryland, Carll illustrates very well how media stereotypes of women and myths about violence against women are welcomed in the justice system.

Adherence to femininity norms. The myths widely accepted in American media are that women are victimized because of their careless behavior and that nothing would happen to innocent women (Benedict 1992) also appear in Turkish press news reports. Grounding on these myths, men are conceptualized as having no control over their sexual desires or their irrational attraction to women. This leads to the idea that women should take the necessary precautions for their safety.

"Strangled the Woman Living Separately from Her Husband"

In Antalya, Selma Isleyen, living separate from her second husband Bekir Isleyen (51) was found murdered in her home last Saturday. (Tosun, 2003)

Deborah Jermyn (2001) points out that violence against women is routinely legitimized by the media by concentrating on the positions of victims in terms of familial relationships, domesticity, and gender norms. By overly focusing on the victim's living separate from her husband, the news coverage above questions Selma's life style and gives the hints that this woman was, in fact, a loose one. She got married not once but twice, and that marriage failed again. It was her husband who found her body. If she had stayed with him she would have benefited from the protection of the institution of marriage and would have been alive today. Selma's being divorced was enough to label her as a slut and to raise questions about her responsibility for the crime against her in this patriarchal society where divorced women who live alone are perceived as sexually promiscuous (Carol Delaney 1994) and subjected to constant harassments.

Another headline, "Went out for fun, sexually assaulted" (Altuntaş 2003) (given in magazine pages) places emphasis on the consequences of a woman's actions. The reader is exposed to the causal relationship between being out and sexual assault as if it is natural and inevitable. Depicting taking part in entertainment in public places, especially at night, as dangerous and inappropriate for women, the report implies that public space is in fact a male territory and women's access to it should be limited to certain time periods and places. As long as women stay home or are accompanied by a man they are safe.

Women invent rape for revenge. Reports of rape cases are developed around possible motives of accusers. Objectivity is put away in its box and sympathy for the perpetrator is warranted. "Is it a conspiracy?" (Aydingöz 2003). "Is Reyhan retaliating?" (Aydingöz 2003).

"First Said 'I Was Raped' Later 'I Slandered'"

She [a prostitute] denied her previous statement that they took her to a deserted area, raped her in the car, mugged her, and stole her cell phone, and said that she slandered at that time and would not press charges. (*Milliyet*, November 25, 2002)

"No Rape, It was Consensual"

Çilingiroğlu *noted* that the aim of Reyhan Gökdeniz was publicity. . . . Reyhan Gökdeniz *alleged* that . . . Çilingiroğlu raped her. (Dağlar & Koç 2003)

In the newspaper *Akşam*, this news that included celebrities was given in magazine pages illustrated by sexually provocative pictures of the victim:

"It is a Game of Publicity"

Çilingiroğlu, "I did not sleep with Reyhan Gökdeniz, nor raped her. This woman is making up all these for publicity." (İzel, Uçar, Dağ & Camçi November 24, 2002)

"Lied to Punish"

The reason Yanardag filed a complaint against Tardu Flordun for biting her nose has been revealed: Caprice. (Altuntaş 2003)

In sexual harassment and assault cases, victims are usually the only witnesses and until recently they were the only ones who could file charges (Sev'er & Yurdakul 2001). Therefore, there is a lot of pressure on victims to stay silent and not to make charges against perpetrators. This fact was not brought into the news story about a judge's order to bring charges against these two girls who recanted their sexual abuse stories against school administrators and a janitor. In its coverage of this news, *Sabah* included the pictures of the female teacher who reported the abuse to the authorities and one of the victims as well as the perpetrators. The story introduced only the judge's decision and what the story was about, but there was no mention of the victims and their relatives or other teachers' reactions to the decision. The students dropped their sexual harassment and assault complaints against the principal, assistant principal, and the janitor. Upon this, the case was dismissed, but a court order was made to bring charges against these students, because of whom the accused were on trial in the criminal court (Erdem 2002).

The roots of the idea that women invent rape claims for revenge or to get attention go back to Biblical times (Benedict 1992). The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife is still used as a reference point to speculate about sex crime accusations. Despite the fact that only 1 or 2 percent of reports of rape are false, victims of sex crimes find themselves harshly questioned for their motives by defense lawyers, media, and public. Witnessing the ferocious treatment of those who report the crime, a majority of women prefer to keep it a secret.

Sex crimes become titillating stories. Traces of the myth that rape is a sexual act which women can enjoy (Benedict 1992) can easily be found in sensational and titillating coverage of rape crimes. Without any concern for the victims' well being, the reports delve too much into the details of the crime. Especially in the cases where celebrities are involved, the reports are illustrated by sexually provocative pictures of the victims. The work is completed by placing the report in the magazine pages. With no intention to condemn the crime at all, the press, thus, curtails the suffering on the victim's part, trivializes the crime, and turns it into a pornographic story.

"After Each Rape I was Excited About the Next One"

Özçelik asserted that after becoming famous as a pervert his desire to rape increased. He said, "After each rape, I could not wait for the next one. I was a little scared in the first case, but received incredible amount of pleasure." (Oktay & Berber 2002)

Zero tolerance to honor crimes. Inconsistent with its general standing towards violence against women, the Turkish press takes sides with victims when it comes to honor crimes. The following headlines and stories below reveal the sympathy felt for the victims.

"Forbidden Love Ended with Customs and Blood"

Learning that the wife of their son who was in prison gave birth, the family did not show any mercy for the mother and the baby. . . . Another brutal honor crime was committed in Southeast Turkey. (Arslan 2003)

"Death for the Mother and Her Baby by Family Decision"

Investigating the alleged suicide of Sabiha Uyanik, district attorney . . . revealed the murder. . . . The body of only three-day old baby was found buried two kilometers away from the village. (Arslan 2003)

According to the annual report of the Human Rights Association (Amnesty International 2004), forty women were killed by their family members in 2003 in the name of cleansing their tainted honor. However, it is quite difficult to estimate the actual number because many women are forced to commit suicide or murders are made to look like suicides. Exacerbating this is the authorities' reluctance to open a thorough investigation into these suspected deaths.

To understand the Turkish press's open stance against honor crimes I argue that one needs to look at the history of the Turkish Republic and the locations of these crimes. As previously mentioned from the beginning the founders of the republic turned their faces to the West, cutting its historical roots with the East, with an intention to create a nation state that was comprised of Turks only. This struggle necessitated the denial of an ethnic minority status to minorities, except for those who are Christians. The official portrayal of a favorable feature that can only be found in the West calls for the denunciation of anything that is considered peculiar to the East but condemned in the western world. Thus, honor crimes that is said to occur mostly in southeast Turkey, where Kurdish people predominate, cannot be a part of modern Turkish Republic that wants to be a member of the European Union in the near future. Lack of official data on honor crimes, the state does not collect statistical information regarding this issue, leads to the "ethnicization" of the crime (Kogacioglu 2004). Thus, honor crimes become a Kurdish phenomenon that is contained in a poverty stricken region and will disappear as the region is modernized and becomes much like the other parts of Turkey.

Dicle Kogacioglu (2004) introduces a different perspective to the issue of how honor crimes are conceptualized by various institutions including the government, media, state institutions, and international organizations. Kogacioglu focuses on influence of multiple social and political dynamics on permanence of honor killings. In Turkey, in spite of the fact that honor crimes are seen by the general public as crimes to clean the tainted honor, aforementioned institutions choose to call it "crimes of tradition." Kogacioglu argues that "to frame such practices as tradition is to ignore the structures of power and inequality at play" (2004, p. 119) and undermine the role many institutional practices play in invocation of tradition in a way that, in fact, prepares the ground for and justifies these crimes. Therefore, elimination of honor crimes will be possible only when efforts are made to deconstruct institutional discourses and policies and how they contribute to reproduction of honor crimes and alternative discourses and agendas are offered.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify issues embedded in the Turkish press coverage of violence against women in that country. Analysis of the data collected from four different mainstream newspapers revealed that Turkish media pointed the finger at women holding them responsible for the violence exerted upon them. This victim blaming position draws its argument from the pillars of patriarchy. By concentrating much emphasis on victims' morality, their adherence to gender norms, their careless or provocative behavior, and even accusing them of inventing the crime, press reports seem to be oriented towards the exoneration of perpetrators. The stories are developed in a paradoxical frame where the narrative that males are only the victims of their passion and their obsession for women is juxtaposed with contentions hinted in the stories which signal male dominance in the society. As McDonald (1999) argues the incidents and prevalence of domestic violence and sex crimes are the indicators of how men exert power over females by controlling women's bodies.

According to Suzanne Pharr (1997), violence is one of the means that maintains sexism and ensures women's subordinate position in patriarchal society along with economic factors that work to the disadvantage of women and homophobia. Pointing to the link between the condition of women in the society and violence against women, Pharr states that "Men physically and emotionally abuse women because they *can*, because they live in a world that gives them permission. Male violence is fed by their sense of their *right* to dominate and control, and their sense of superiority over a group of people, who, because of gender, they consider inferior to them" (1997, p. 14).

The attitude of blame towards victims displayed by the media finds its reflections in the medical and judicial system. This attitude does not allow for transformation in the society, on the contrary, it maintains the patriarchal structures. Not only does this attitude legitimize the violent acts, it also leads to secondary victimization of women (Tang, Wong & Cheung 2002).

Recognizing the influence of the media in our lives, Trish Williams (2000) calls for a more gender sensitive media. Through training, Williams believes, the misconceptions and gender stereotyping in the stories can be replaced by a balanced and more accurate portrayal of women. As the Platform for Action at the United Nation's Fourth World Conference recommended (Williams 2000), there is an urgent need for increasing the involvement of women in the media decision-making processes. Taking advantage of its infusion in lives far away from its towers located in urban settings, the media might potentially sow the seeds of equality in the society. To reach this potential, feminist groups should continue to provide constant feedback and disentangling the hegemonic gender discourse in the media.

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