

Speaking of Invasion: Narratives over Arabs in Eksi Sozluk, a Virtual Community in Turkey

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Abstract:

Since the day it was founded, Eksi Sozluk (sour dictionary) has been one of the most popular virtual communities in Turkey, fostering cultural and political discussions and acting as a public sphere. This paper examines contested narratives of hostility and hospitality over Arabs in Eksi Sozluk in order to trace the making of subjectivities in Turkey. I illustrate the ways Arab tourists are orientalized through the narratives of Eksi Sozluk authors who mark Arabs as dirty, disgusting, uncivilized, and backward. Next, I show contrary narratives that claim to welcome and embrace Arab tourists in Istanbul. I argue that a supposedly welcoming discourse towards Arabs also functions under the same ontological presuppositions of Orientalist fantasy. Finally, based on the conceptual framework of "Occidentalist fantasy," I argue that the othering of Arabs in contemporary Turkey functions to create the illusion of a unified, sovereign subjectivity under the imagined Western gaze.

Keywords:

public sphere, Turkey, websites, cultural studies, identity

Introduction

What is Eksi Sozluk?

When Sedat Kaplanoglu formed Eksi Sozluk (<http://www.eksisozluk.com/> or <http://sourtimes.org/>) in 1999, it was an open-access online collaborative dictionary to which nicknamed authors contributed. Over the years, Eksi Sozluk evolved from a modest, friend-circle website to an extremely popular virtual community that receives six million visitors per month; functioning as a search engine, a discussion platform, a socialization tool, as well as an archival and memorial site at the same time. Although Eksi Sozluk (meaning "sour dictionary" in English) has no claim of truth, reliability, or being a formal and objective source of knowledge, its popularity has surpassed similar websites, with more than 500 thousand individual page views per day.[1] Even today, its ability to combine dictionary and knowledge-source

formats with the features of online communities and blogs enable Eksi Sozluk to remain as popular as it was before the emergence and prevalence of Wikipedia, Facebook, or Twitter in Turkey. Presently being the 24th most popular website in Turkey according to alexa.com's (Alexa 2012) traffic rank,[2] Eksi Sozluk has been featured on televisions, in newspapers, and on other websites since the day it was founded; numerous entries of its contributors have been cited as commentaries on various cultural, social, and political discussion. Although traditional news sources had introduced the website only as an interesting social phenomenon at first, Eksi Sozluk has then become a socially accepted informal source. In synchronicity with Eksi Sozluk's growing popularity, however, membership to the website came to be dependent on a variety of criteria. Under limited membership periods that are announced sporadically, users can register as newcomers waiting for approval and are expected to enter ten successful entries on the format, legal, and grammatical grounds in order to be promoted to "author" status by Eksi Sozluk moderators.

According to the "Statistics" section of the website that is updated constantly, Eksi Sozluk has more than 492,000 users (which includes authors, registered readers, administrators, informants, newcomers, newcomers awaiting approval, predators, and habitat) and 36.322 writers. While the total number of titles in Eksi Sozluk is nearly two and a half million, the sum of all entries under these titles add up to more than 14 million. In terms of demographics, the statistical data shows that the majority of Eksi Sozluk users (without any author/registered reader differentiation) are college students between the age of 18 and 25, adding up to more than 272,000 users; while the second and third most populated age interval consists of 25-30 and 30-40 year olds, with 87,846 and 55,427 users respectively. Furthermore, statistical data shows that more than 290 thousand users in Eksi Sozluk are male and 129,000 are female, while 122,000 users' sex is unspecified. Compared with the overall Internet population, therefore, Eksi Sozluk is mostly used by middle and high-income males from Turkey in the age range of 18-24, with undergraduate or graduate education.

The loose dictionary format of Eksi Sozluk enables authors to write their entries under the titles they submit in a multiplicity of formats such as anecdotes, essays, description, memories, opinions, observations, links or mere information, although they still have to write a description (not nec-

essarily an objective one) of the title in question in the first sentence in their entries as a requirement of a dictionary format. This flexibility allows authors to write in humorous, sarcastic, informal ways, or use slang and figures of speech. There are no restrictions on the content of entries except legal boundaries concerning hate-speech.

Following the argument that Eksi Sozluk can be regarded as a virtual community which acts as a public sphere (Akca 2005), I aim to examine contested discourses over Arabs in Eksi Sozluk, and elaborate on the question of subjectivity in Turkey as it is manifested in contemporary public culture. Arguing that Eksi Sozluk is a critical indicator of public culture in Turkey, this paper traces the representation of Arabs in Eksi Sozluk in order to discuss how Turkish subjectivity is constructed in opposition or relation to the image of the Arab in contemporary Turkey.

Arabs in Eksi Sozluk

When I search for the word “Arab” through the title search function at the side bar menu of Eksi Sozluk, the first 25 titles (in decreasing order from the title that has most entries to the title that has least) I am given are as follows:

arab (220)

invasion of istanbul by arab tourists (200)

arab revolutions (104)

people have called their dogs with arab names in this country (92)

year 2010 arab tourist invasion (86)

arab league (79)

titles from eksi sozluk arab clone (77)

arab sukru (64)

the effect of mavi marmara on arab revolutions (62)

naming of turkish children with arab names (59)

arab spring (58)

the mentality that thinks that turks are arabs (51)

turkish and arab blood are one (47)

calling a black an arab (47)

united arab emirates (47)

making a fuss when three arab kids die (45)

arab soap (42)

arab girl (36)

when arab has extra oil, he rubs it on his butt (35)

the setting down that the arab league gave to rte[3] (34)

arab alphabet (34)

there is no p letter in arab alphabet (32)

arab adoration (32)

arab kadri (31)

arab invasion in istanbul (30)

In 2010 and 2011, in line with the abolished visa regulations and the “zero-problem” foreign policy that was pioneered by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) that holds the power, Turkey witnessed a significant rise in the number of tourists from Arab countries; this was accompanied by a simultaneous increase in the public attention towards the so-called “tourism boom in Turkey” and the visibility of Arab tourists walking in the streets of Istanbul, the cultural and economic capital of Turkey, and the former capital of Byzantine and Ottoman empires. As the search results for the word “Arab” illustrate, in *Eksi Sozluk*, this phenomenon has mostly been described through the rhetoric of “invasion.” In the following section, I attempt to illuminate a number of entries written under the entry-populated titles of “Arab,” “Arab Invasion in Istanbul,” “Year 2010 Arab Tourist Invasion,” and “Invasion of Istanbul by Arabs.” In order to study different discourses of hospitality and hostility towards Arabs in Istanbul, I ask the following questions: How are Arabs narrated in *Eksi Sozluk*? How do the *Eksi Sozluk* authors represent Arabs through their anecdotes, descriptions, or observations? How can we interpret different welcoming and unwelcoming discourses towards Arabs through the lens of Orientalism and Occidentalism? Taking my departure from the entries written under those titles, I attempt to demonstrate the prevalent themes within two op-

positional discourses towards Arabs in Eksi Sozluk. The first discourse is the unwelcoming one through which Eksi Sozluk authors express their disapproval of Arabs in general or Arab tourists in contemporary Istanbul in particular. The unwelcoming narratives towards Arabs in Eksi Sozluk owe most of their discursive tools to the modernizationist discourse of Late Ottoman and Kemalist Republican legacies, but they are also reformulated and transformed in different ways in relation to present events and anxieties in politics, culture, and selfhood.

Unwelcoming Arabs

Abjection

In most of the entries under the titles about an Arab the so-called Arab invasion in Istanbul, Eksi Sozluk authors often share their daily experiences and observations about Arab tourists, highlighting the appearance of the Arabs that they have found “distasteful” or “irritating.” For instance, one of the most complained about and disdained attributes of Arab tourists in Eksi Sozluk entries become the large number of Arab families which Eksi Sozluk authors often refer to as “clans,” “hordes,” “grasshopper hordes,” or “plunderers.” Under “Arab Invasion in Istanbul,” an author describes the title in question as such: “The thobe-wearing Arab’s trend who wander around the city with an average of 8 children” (otisabi, 2000), while another author writes, “Place: Eminonu. They are wandering around as a clan” (kucoc, 2009). Referring to the black veil, another author uses the phrase “cockroach” in order to describe Arab women he recently came across to:

The scene I witnessed at a hotel in Istanbul I was staying for a business trip. Wherever you look, there is a cockroach. They’re very mobile, by the way. An argy-bargy at the reception. I asked my Lebanese friend what’s up with them, who are they, why are they arguing and so on. He told me that it was a fight over who’s going to pay the bill, but it’s a friendly one. Turns out that both sides wanted to pay the bill themselves. One would easily assume that one of the cockroaches was raped and this is what the fight was about. (arcadian, 2010)

The invasion of the dumbest race in the world. You’ve turned Taksim into Naruto with your hideous veils. (hullabaloo, 2011)

Makes Istanbul look ugly. In-advance edit: I am a veil racist. (nuwan-da is dead, 2011)

The narratives that represent Arabs' appearance as disturbing or ugly further develop into a discourse of abjection (Kristeva 1982) that marks the Arab body as dirty and disgusting through everyday observations and experiences of the authors. Arab tourists are represented as noisy, dirty, repelling crowds, whose existence annoys the Turkish subject or its habitat, Istanbul:

These people are gruesome. All right, they bring money, boost the economy and so on, but I wish they never came, bro. We can't use the left side of escalators at shopping malls and subway stations... ignorant people! If everyone's standing at the right side, there has to be a reason for that, right? (sortayms, 2011)

The attempt to fuck up a unique city like Istanbul. If this is racism, I'm glad to be one. They're dirty, dude. At the bus stop... How can't a nation not know how to wait for the bus? Make weird noises while eating... Or take their women; they're far away from an aesthetic, they do nothing but scoffing. We haven't witnessed anything else than noise and the garbage food they throw around everywhere. (acilin ben jinekologum, 2011)

The reason I avoid going to the Mecidiyekoy and Sisli district, as you'll come across to them the moment you step your foot there. As if it's quite natural to wander around in Turkey wearing those clothes. Besides, you are damned if you bump into them at public transportation. Should we talk about their raving way of talking, the way they put all the shopping bags they have to the empty seats and obstructing other passengers from having a seat, the mixture of sweat and cheap perfume smell coming from their bodies, or the way they harass Turkish girls? (bilge rusty james, 2011)

Cevahir shopping mall is kind a fucked up nowadays. When they come, 1 man brings 2-3 wives and 5 or 6 brats, anyway. They start flying around and dash into stores, screaming and crying out. Thus, they unavoidably disturb our people. Aren't you Arabs? Go and visit some mosques or something, I don't know, go visit a tomb or Turkish bath. (zapo, 2011)

In addition to the narratives that abject the Arab tourist through the representation of a “dirty, noisy clan” whose sight, smell, and touch is described as annoying or repulsive, many authors in *Eksi Sozluk* complain about Arab tourists’ “lack of interest” in cultural artifacts of Istanbul. According to them, Arab tourists don’t care about cultural tourism (which is “profound”), but shopping (which is “superficial”). As an author comments:

Those are neither hanging around Hagia Sofia nor Topkapi Palace. They don’t care about anything but shopping malls and Taksim; they just visit stores at Istiklal Street. Last night, a Persian couple (yes, I know they are not Arabs, no need to be a pedant) told me that they were in Istanbul for three days and they hadn’t been to Sultanahmet - even haven’t heard of it -, so I asked them: where did you visit, then? Their answer was: Olivium, Taksim, and we’re going to Cevahir tomorrow.” Interesting. (the way i are, 2010)

As Kristeva (1982:4) puts it, it is “not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.” The abject both establishes and undermines the border between inside and outside: “It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of ‘one’s own and clean self’” (Kristeva 1982:53). The abject threatens to undermine the integrity of the subject by passing between inside and outside. Furthermore, the constitution of the abject is precisely what enables an inside and an outside to be marked. The constitution of the Arab guest as uncivilized, dirty, and Oriental, functions to construct the Turkish host as civilized, clean, and Western. Under the title “Invasion of Istanbul by Arab Tourists,” for instance, authors often complain about the ill-mannered behavior of Arabs due to their ignorant and uncivilized nature:

The invasion that causes major problems due to Arab’s lack of knowledge at modern city life. (yer mantari, 2011)

Now everybody has to answer this question before all else: If our economy didn’t benefit from them, which one of us would like to see those ill-mannered people in our country? (sortayms, 2011)

The invasion of an ignoramus community that I rip out an oath whenever I see them. My ‘brothers’ who haven’t experienced civilization:

they're everywhere, they're coming to our country because Europe doesn't let them in, their wives do shopping, men stare at our short skirted girls, their empty-headed children wander around dumbly, wearing headphones and sandals in the street. (sortayms, 2011)

The reason for making me a racist . . . Enough, get the fuck out of here! I don't care if you are Arabs of Persians; whatever you are, only attempt to visit the Occident after you fix your own country. (the stallion, 2011)

As Homi Bhabha (1994) has observed in his discussion of the stereotype, contemporary stereotypes about Arabs that circulate in the public culture of Turkey are also several and contradictory. Old and new Turkish films reflect these multifarious and persisting stereotypes as the image of the Arab appears as a "traitor" figure dating back to the "Great Arab Revolt" and the defeat of the Ottomans against the British during WWI; or as the lustful, fraudulent, unmannered oil-rich arms trader and tycoon. The Arab character is sometimes depicted as the Arap Bacı (Sister) in traditional settings as a warm tutor, loyal servant, trustworthy eunuch, or an obedient slave. In line with the citational nature of Orientalist discourse Said (1995) has observed that stereotypes about Arabs are told, referred to, restored, modified, and retold over and over again in daily conversations in Turkey. From Turkish proverbs such as "When an Arab has extra oil, he rubs it on his butt," "I'll be an Arab if I've understood anything at all;" or idioms such as "Arab hair" which is used to refer to a situation that is messy and tangled, and "Looking like an Arab's ball" which is said about a person who is excessively suntanned; to everyday stories about filth and dirt such as Eksi Sozluk author's entries illustrate, the otherness of the Arab is repeatedly produced in mundane language. As Bhabha (1994) underlines, the buttoning-down of this otherness, a normalization of difference is a vital component within the ideological construction of otherness. In his discussion of "fixity" (1994:94) Bhabha argues that the racist stereotype always needs reiteration and reaffirmation, as the identity and authority of the colonizer is never fixed but destabilized and fractured with anxiety. In Bart Moore-Gilbert's (1997:117) words,

For Bhabha, there is a curiously contradictory effect in the economy of stereotype, insofar as what is supposedly already known must be endlessly reconfirmed through repetition. For Bhabha, this suggests

that the 'already known' is not as securely established as the currency and rhetorical power of the stereotype might imply.

The boundaries between the colonizer and the colonized, the self and other, as well as what is inside and outside are never completely fixed or secure. The "processes of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse," which Bhabha (1994:95) points out, detects this instability in the colonizer subject, and shows that racism operates under a "narcissistic schema." (Hook 2005:737) Arabs are repeatedly abjected, stereotyped, and Orientalized through daily conversations, jokes, stories, gossip and rumors in Istanbul; as it is so in *Eksi Sozluk*. The Arab other, as the fantasmatic object of racial stereotyping and abjection constantly threatens the Turkish subject whose sovereignty is dependent on Arabs' repetitive, fixed othering.[4] However, Turkish subject's narcissistic relation to its Arab other does not operate in a simply dual relationship. In this attempt to claim sovereignty, there is a third, often imagined player upon which I will be dwelling in the third section of this paper.

History in the Present

In *Eksi Sozluk*, stereotypical imaginations of Arabs such as "traitors" or "backstabbers" are constantly secured through references to history. Examining Turkish history textbooks is one method to trace the ways in which Arabs are portrayed in Turkish historiography. Arabs first enter the scene of history in textbooks when it is time to talk about the history of Islam. In a chapter called "The Condition of Arabs before Islam," for example, in a currently used mandatory "Religion and Ethics" (MEB 2010) course textbook published by the Ministry of Education for ninth-grade students, "the people in Arabia" are described as such:

Women who did not give birth to male children were worthless. Fathers who have daughters were regarding this as a situation to be ashamed of. Some female babies were even buried alive once they were born. . . . Before Islam, bad habits such as drinking, gambling, theft, usury and fortune telling were common in the Arab Peninsula. This is why this period is called the Jahiliyyah era. In addition to all these negativities, there were some people among Arabs who practiced good behaviors such as generosity, hospitality, bravery, abiding by a promise, protecting the ones who take refuge with themselves even through they were their enemy.

The portrayal of Arabs as backward, primitive, archaic and corrupt in the pre-Islamic era is prevalent especially in earlier textbooks. In early Kemalist textbooks for example, tribal life is shown as the only social organization mode and the single binding tie among Arab communities who, according to the textbooks, always quarrel among themselves. Moreover, in contrast with the Turks, Arabs are portrayed as disorderly and therefore unsuccessful at establishing states. Turk Tarihinin Ana Hatları (Main Lines of Turkish History) (1930) expresses this “fact” by juxtaposing the Turks with the Arabs and Persians: “The Turks do not like anarchy; they have always wanted order and stability wherever they lived . . . The Arabs and Persians, however, liked to live in endless quarrels within the Islamic world.”

In his discussion about the portrayal of Arabs and Islam in Turkish school textbooks between 1931 and 1993, Etienne Copeaux (2006) argues that Arabs only appear in two historical periods as “Arabs” in Turkish school textbooks. Arabs show up in history textbooks for the first time in the chapters that narrate the period between the pre-Islam period, the birth of Islam until the moment when Turks adopt the religion. Arabs appear in textbooks for the second time when the fall of the Ottoman Empire (when its subjects were declaring their independence) and World War One are narrated. In the interval between these two periods, however, “Arabs” as a category is absent. As Copeaux indicates, they are usually called “Muslims,” and therefore united with other Muslim populations such as Turks, Kurds, Persians; or they are referred to as the “indigenous population” in a particular land belonging to the Ottoman Empire. As Copeaux indicates, these times are connotative of a sense of unity and peace. But when the word “Arabs” is used, the otherness of the Arab is implied. For Turkish historiography, Arabs become “the other” in the pre-Islamic era, and also the period before Turks adopt Islam, as well as the time when they begin to depart from the dominance of the Ottoman Empire. This is when “Arabs” appear in history books once more, as rebels, traitors or “backstabbers” this time.

As Copeaux underlines, the 1916 Arab Revolt has been called a “betrayal” in Turkish school textbooks for a long time. There, Arabs are described as “traitors who have collaborated with the enemy” (the English), followed by similar keywords such as “agitate,” “infidelity,” “treason,” “comprador” (2006:319). Copeaux adds that the portrayal of Arabs in school textbooks has begun to lose its harshness over the last ten years—for example, the word

“betrayal” has not been used in textbooks since the 1980s, although it has sometimes been replaced by another term: “backstabbing.” Recent textbooks have managed to erase most of the pejorative portrayals of Arabs and point rather to the English as the only enemy in the 1916 event. The conflict between Arabs and Ottomans/Turks, however, is generally ignored. This silence, however, as Copeaux argues, does not help to erase prejudices. Under the title “Arab” for instance, Eksi Sozluk authors often mention the 1916 Arab revolt in order to justify their case about the “backstabbing nature” of Arabs:

The back-stabbing stinky people who are infamous for their filthiness, who own the best of liqueur in their countries although they are ruled with shariah; who used to live under Ottoman rule without paying taxes or serving in the military and who, despite all, allied with the English and cut our soldiers’ throats. (noble man, 2008)

a community of ignorance and betrayal. (heraklion, 2011)

Historical Background of the Arab Image

As I have attempted to illustrate, a number of entries written under the title “Arab” in Eksi Sozluk deal with a common theme: they mark a fixed and homogeneous nature upon the Arab identity and represent Arabs as a stagnant and ahistorical community of people who have not managed to catch the train of progress and modernization:

the people who are now living the same way they used to live 500 years ago, nothing has changed. Their rich had been shitting in a golden toilet back then, he still does. They were lynching, massacring people 5000 years ago, and they still continue to do so. (trakyali gulyabani, 2011)

A race that has not yet completed its evolution for revolutions and a modern world order. This is not racism, it is just a thought that comes into mind when one sees how they ruin themselves in a moment when you think that they have finally got what they deserve in the geography they live in. (geridonusumkutusundavizildayansinek, 2011)

the community whose members haven't got their share from humanity, the community I'm ashamed to be sharing the same religion. (urbekli, 2011)

The present representation of Arabs through an Orientalist discourse (and its relationship with Islam) in contemporary Turkey is closely related to an unfinished history: the beginning of a period that may be called the Westernization or modernization of the Ottoman Empire. Although a radical distancing from Islam was not prevalent in the Ottoman Empire, a certain dose of Orientalism was to be found, beginning from the nineteenth century, in which Ottomans had started to develop a curiosity about Western images of the East as well as a need to compare themselves with the West. This interest in comparison and the ways the West represented the East coincided with the emerging cultural and economic colonization of Ottoman Empire by Western powers. As Orhan Kocak remarks, "the leap of modernization is wounded from the start: The Ottoman elite begins to compare himself with the West only when he is being defeated in the game" (Kocak 1995:99). Therefore, the passage from a once "self-confident isolation to an increasingly self-conscious concern for what others may have had to say about them" (Eldem 2007:217), coincided with the change in power relations between the Ottoman Empire and the West—a change in favor of the latter. "Resting on the implicit admission of failure, inadequacy, and inferiority" (Eldem 2007:219) and the acceptance of Western superiority, the Ottomans took the constructs of the Orient and the Occident for granted, and decided to rid themselves of their self-acknowledged "Oriental nature."

The rise of an Ottoman Orientalism (Makdisi 2002) projected internalized inferiority and the Oriental fantasy at the Bedouin and the Arab in most cases, through a racist and colonial discourse on a "civilizing mission" (Deringil 2003). Selim Deringil elaborates on this process as a "borrowed colonialism" in which the Ottomans had "rejected the subaltern role that the West seemed intent on making them adopt, but they could only do this by inviting (to put it euphemistically) 'their own' subalterns into history" (2003:342). However, the common religion of Islam between the pro-Western Ottoman elite and Arabs and other selected populations within the empire that were marked as "backward" or "savage" made it somehow complicated and "difficult to overtly otherize these subjects" as there was a "risk of seeing Orientalist notions turned against Ottomans themselves" (Eldem

2007:219). Through the Kemalist discourse of the newly found Turkish republic which claimed a more explicit break from the Orient through its othering of Islam, however, this problem was mostly solved.

The republican period that started with Mustafa Kemal signaled a radical attempt to break away from the Ottoman past and replace it with an alternative one. One other aspect of this period of “modernization” was the new republic’s radical distancing of itself from Islam, which was regarded as the biggest gap between Turkey and its desire for Westernization. As Bobby Sayyid argues, there is an antagonism within Kemalism between the West and Islam, which leads to the “rejection of any possibility of a marriage between an Islamic (that is ‘native’) culture and western technology” (1997:60). Islam, one of the crucial reasons for the ambivalence towards Turkish identity (Ahiska 2010) has been historically regarded as contradictory to Westernization, incompatible with modernity and thereby labeled as Oriental (Sayyid 1997:69).

Kemalist reforms (such as the abolition of the Caliphate and Islam as a state religion, and the introduction of the Latin alphabet instead of Arabic) all functioned to “distance Islam and its cognates from the ‘new Turkey’” (Sayyid 1997:64), while “Islam was represented in Kemalist discourse as the epitome of the Orient” (Sayyid 1997:68). Kemalists had found themselves in a paradoxical situation: to be Western, one had to reject the Orient (Sayyid 1997:69), and therefore, Islam became the constitutive outside of the Kemalist-nationalist discourse in Turkey that was modeled on the project of the Enlightenment (Yegenoglu 1998:135). Sayyid (1997:69) describes the process through which Islam was equated with the Orient, and therefore constituted outside the boundaries of the self, as follows:

The only way to manage this paradox of westernizing and orientalizing was for the Kemalists to fix upon Islam as the representation of orientalness; it was through Islam that the Orient was given shape. Islam then became a marker of oriental identity. Thus the Kemalists could see that in order to westernize they had to de-Islamize—that is, they had to remove the influence of Islam from their societies. It was only by removing Islam that they could cease to be part of the Orient and become truly western.

Welcoming Arabs

“Western” versus “Eastern” Tourists

In contrast to the entries marking the Arab tourist as dirty, ignorant, uncivilized, and repellant, a considerable amount of authors welcome the “Arab invasion” in Turkey. Most of the authors highlight the economic aspect of the phenomenon, stressing that the increased number of Arab tourists will boost the economy and “tourism has no religion or nation,” and that racial discrimination or other hostile attitudes have no place in this purely pragmatic, economic relationship. However, what intrigues me among those entries is the prevalent theme of comparison between the European/Western tourist versus the Arab/Eastern tourist. According to the authors, Arab tourists must be welcomed because they spend more money; they especially spend more money than their Western counterparts:

Let them come, let more of them come. Arab tourists who spend in the way their heart desire are far better than bottom-layer European tourists that spend bit by bit. (anoktale, 2010)

Europeans who really have money don't come to Turkey, and the ones who come do not have any money. (kunta kinte, 2010)

The best invasion of all times. Instead of the lousy English tourist whose hand trembles even when pays for a two-liras sandwich, let the Arab tourist who's going to leave tens of thousands of dollars cash in a single shopping. As they have come, so they will go anyway. (ksanthos, 2010)

It's certain that their invasion is a favorable one than the poor English tourists' invasion. These guys know how to spend money. (astro-not8, 2010)

The kind of invasion that I prefer to the absent invasion of Russian & German apaches who never get out of their hotels and drink beer at breakfast. (thelowest, 2010)

In addition to the emphasis on difference between Western and Arab tourists in terms of spending, one other feature that the authors stress is con-

cerned with a historical and political relationship of power: Western tourists look down upon Turks, but Arab tourists do not:

The invasion I witnessed in Taksim subway yesterday. Let me tell this way, it was an extended Arab family of 11 people. And let me tell this way, each member of this family was carrying at least four (4) huge shopping bags. Again, let me tell this way, they had left at least ten thousand (10.000) dollars to our country in that single shopping. Having seen those lousy English, German, Russian tourists who come to our country through cheap package tours and never spend more than five hundred (500) dollars and despite this, look down on us; I am crazy about this invasion. (burg, 2010)

It's a good thing that they come. Because while Arabs come to spend, Westerners come to exploit. (penaltiyi taca atan centilmen futbolcu, 2010)

Here, I may return to the discussion about the narcissistic relation of the Turkish subject and its Arab other. In this relationship, the "third party" I have previously mentioned becomes the Western gaze - real and imagined. As the Eksi Sozluk entries I have quoted so far suggest, a complicated affective economy operates among the narratives about the so-called West: the West desired because it is civilized; it is envied because "the self" is perceived to be not-that-civilized-yet; and it is resented because it is judgmental, exploitative, and unwilling to satisfy the self's desires of inclusion. Subjected to the gaze (Urry 2002) of the Western tourist who does not accept the object of his gaze as one of his own, the Turkish subject's desire turns into envy, and envy turns into resentment. Therefore, a certain kind of sympathy is formed towards Arab tourists—who are already marked as inferior or Oriental—through the affirmation that "at least, they are spending much more money here" and most importantly, "at least, they are not looking down on us."

The Modernization Discourse: Turkish Soap Operas and "Turkey as a Model"

Turkish soap operas have been exported to countries in North Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans since 2007. Official reports of the Ministry of

Culture and Tourism stated that in 2010, more than seventy Turkish soap operas were exported to more than twenty countries, resulting in an export record of 50 million dollars. Through the acknowledged “success” of these series, businesspeople and state officials in Turkey tend to view soap operas as new export items as well as touristic goldmines; the discourse of national progress and the “neutral” language of capitalist entrepreneurship intersect through the national actors’ attempts to increase numbers of tourists, economic growth, and to export revenue. One strategy, for instance, has been to use actors and actresses from the soap operas in promotional campaigns for the products aimed at the countries where they are popular. Indeed, the leading actor of *Gumus* and *Ask-i Memnu*, Kivanc Tatlitug appeared in various commercials and advertisements that targeted Arab countries, including the advertorial video Turkish Airlines broadcasted to be featured in several Middle Eastern countries in the beginning of 2011. Kivanc Tatlitug also took part in the Istanbul Shopping Festival 2011’s promotion campaign, organized in Dubai. His appearance in the campaign and also a TV show called “Good Morning Arabs” immediately captured the attention of the Turkish media all of which quoted Tatlitug’s statement “I want to learn Arabic” (*Radikal* 2011). In line with these events, many authors in *Eksi Sozluk* link the increase in the number of Arab tourists in Istanbul to the perceived success of Turkish soap operas:

“The result of the Turkish television series” (bruceandwayne, 2010)

Half of them have arrived to look for kivanc tatlitug, we read it from the newspaper. How can one look for Kivanc in a 20-million city, coming from Egypt? (t0mmy, 2010)

I think the biggest reason for this is the sensational success that turkish series gained in arab world. I don’t understand why this is seen as a bad thing, though. The woman/man is going to come here, stay for two weeks, buy bihter’s this, fatmagul’s that and leave. Live the happiness of experiencing the places she/he watches at the series. She/he’s going to be happy. Hey, why are you an enemy of happiness? Probably, you’re an ideal person in the eyes of him but pray that he won’t notice your racist attitude and assume that you’re an ideal person. No, you won’t cry saying that “they belittle us in Europe” then.

Please don't demonstrate your hypocrisy to the whole world . . . Istanbul seems like a kind of a dream city to them after they see it on the television. (teletabi, 2011)

More than 300 thousand tourists have visited the waterside house where the soap opera *Gümüüş* is shot, according to the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, who stated, "these series have huge potential" (*Hurriyet Daily News* 2011). Indeed, the Ministry has decided to create special funds for the production and promotion of such series (Gokturk et al. 2010). The national press has been quite interested in the impact of these programs in Arab countries. The positive contribution of the TV series to tourism in Turkey-especially Istanbul-is frequently addressed in news reports about how much Turkish soap operas are popularized in Arab countries. However, what occupied the center of heated debates on the popularity of Turkish soap operas has been the question of "why." What was the reason for this popularity? Why did Arabs fall in love with Turkish television dramas? In *Eksi Sozluk*, many authors argue that Arabs visit Turkey in order to experience the freedom and modernity that is absent in their home countries:

The so-called invasion by the Arabs who are dreaming of our country. Actually it's about the abolishment of visa regulations. It's going to have positive effects on the economy. As a matter of fact, Turkey is a relatively cheap place with good food. It might have negative effects on culture, though. But it's a fact that its going to have a positive effect on the their culture. In fact, when these people who are coming from countries with monarchy and repressive systems based on Islamic law taste freedom and observe it outside the example of Bahrain, they are going to take our country as a model for the future. There's no need to be scared; they're human like everyone. They're from a different culture, that's all. (kuzen, 2010)

They come here, bring their beautiful cars, arab beauty daughters... Enjoy the taste freedom for a while... Smoke water pipe under the fresh weather, hang out... Spend the money and then go back to their rich but boring and captive lives. (outsider1978, 2010)

As the entries in *Eksi Sozluk* illustrate, Arab tourists are imagined to be admirers of Turkish culture, Istanbul, and everything those supposedly rep-

resent: urban life, freedom, and modernity... The possibility of “influencing” Arab culture is what is at stake: the potential of being a dream-place, becoming a model for Arab countries. In this context, the comparison that is formed between the Arab tourist and the European one becomes more complicated: The Arab tourist who “doesn’t look down upon Turks as Western tourists do,” and therefore is “more preferable” and welcomed, is now transformed into the Arab tourist who “looks up” to Turks. In this way, Turkey and its inhabitants are portrayed as desire objects, potential leaders and centers of influence.

Theoretical Approaches

The East and West Problem

A thousand-times better situation than the crappy tourists who come to the country with all-in-one package tours and never get out of holiday camps—for they (*Arabs*) spend money madly.

Edit: However, I have to admit that, I’m afraid that other tourists will confuse Arabs tourists with Turks and talk about life in Turkey as “all of them were dressed up in black veils, friend; I swear to God that they were traveling in a way that there was a man followed by three women and a horde of children. (see: Turkish Image Abroad). (ardilla, 2011)

This entry, written under the title “Invasion of Istanbul by Arab Tourists,” welcomes Arabs to Istanbul while comparing them to other “crappy tourists.” However, the author of the entry, ardilla, also admits her reservations about the phenomenon, mentioning her fear that other tourists will confuse Arab tourists with Turks. By referring to “other tourists,” she clearly means “Western” tourists. In this sense, the former “crappy tourists” are transformed into subjects who threaten the author with their sovereign judgmental power and gaze. The author is quite anxious about the possibility that “they,” Western tourists, are going to assume that Turkish people “also” walk around in “black veils” with crowded families (“followed by three women and a horde of children”) as Arab tourists supposedly do. The reference link at the end of the entry crystallizes the author’s uneasiness about

how Turks are seen by foreigners-or in other words, how the subject is seen by its others.

The topic of this paper stems from my interest in the nearly two centuries old East-West problem that has been producing discontents about selfhood in Turkey. As ardilla's entry illustrates, the subjects' anxiety over the questions "Who am I? Who are we? Am I Eastern? Am I Western?" which the East-West problem of selfhood produces are translated into "How am I seen?" or "How does the West see me?" The desire to know how the other sees the self operates under an imagined Western gaze. In this "reflexive structure in which the gaze is redoubled" in Zizek's (Zizek et al. 2000:116-117) words, or "double reflection," as Meltem Ahiska (2003) calls it, "the viewpoint of the Western representation, that is, how the non-Western imagines that the West sees itself, is incorporated in the reflection on its own identity" (2003:365).

But what could be the possible explanation for this search of a sovereign subjectivity? What might be the reason behind ardilla and other Eksi Sozluk authors' deep interest in the way they are seen by an imagined West, and their orientalizing representations of Arabs that function to render Turkishness Occidental? I argue that the East-West problem regarding the question of selfhood in Turkey is mostly grounded in the theme of "loss"-one of the most pervasive constitutive elements of modern Turkish subjectivity (Ahiska 2008:144). The rise of Western political, economic and cultural colonialism and the decline of the Ottoman Empire in nineteenth century marked the beginnings of the period in which loss became a prevalent feeling in Turkish subjectivity. Starting with the Tanzimat period, it was realized that the Orient had lost its glory, and the magnificent empire had turned into "the sick man of Europe"-a metaphor that was used for the Ottoman Empire by Westerners at the end of nineteenth century in the wake of its territorial loss and economic domination by European powers.

Feelings of a narcissistic injury (Gurbilek 2004:14) on the part of the subject who experienced a sense of a lost glory and decentered subjectivity characterized the late Ottoman and Republican intellectual milieu in Turkey. An unending mourning, a loss of "virility" (Gurbilek 2004:82) and "dignity" (Gurbilek 2004:54), a feeling of deficiency and inferiority caused by the encounter with the West, followed by the rapture of modernization and

Westernization, framed the path to the creation of an ego-ideal, in which a lack or loss does not exist, and the subject is unified and complete.

On Orientalism and Occidentalism

Edward Said defines Orientalism as “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” and “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (1995:3). Orientalism, according to Said, is a set of discursive practices employed to represent and know the Orient; and thereby produces an “epistemological and ontological distinction between ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident’” (Said 1995:2) through which the West as an imaginary construct gains its strength and identity in opposition to this “Orient.” This imaginary binary opposition reflects the West’s desire to “set boundaries for itself as a self-sustaining, autonomous and sovereign subject” (Yegenoglu 1998:15) through marking “the Orient” which it created in essentializing terms, as timeless, irrational, backward or mystical.

While the Western subject represents the Orient through the discourse of Orientalism, “a historically simultaneous representation of the Other has been produced by the Other itself aspiring to fill in the subject position” (Ahiska 2008:140). In Meltem Ahiska’s words, “Occidentalism may be the answer to what happens when the externalized and supposedly silent Other, placed outside of history and doomed to chase Western values and targets without success, speaks and answers back” (Ahiska 2010:18). However, it must not be forgotten Occidentalism is not only a victim’s discourse, since Occidentalism utilizes the status of the victim to build a certain regime of power and to constitute itself as a hegemonic discourse and a sovereign subject. Ahiska (2010) underlines that the most manifest function of Occidentalism in Turkey has been and continues to be boundary management between East and West—and between self and other, I ought to add. As in the case of Arabs, which is the focus of this article, for instance, it produces Orientalisms within itself.

Managing the boundaries that separate self from the other (the Arab tourist), Occidentalism in Turkey functions to provide answers to the questions of identity (Who am I? Who are we?) I brought up earlier in this paper.

These questions are further translated into “How do others see me? How do Western tourists see us?” and bring us to the notion of fantasy in its Lacanian sense, answered as “I am what I think the others see me as” in the Turkish case. But as there is no way to know how others see us; knowledge here is a fundamental impossibility (Zizek 1989:125). This void, the space of non-knowledge, which is filled by fantasy, becomes constitutive of the subject and the coordinator of his desires or fears (*What if other tourists confuse us with Arabs? What if I am seen as an Oriental?*). Occidental fantasy in Turkey, which has been produced in relation to the hegemony of the West, functions as a discourse of power. It manages boundaries and creates its internal and external others. Arabs are no exception. On the contrary, the marking of Arabs as Oriental (and therefore backward, ignorant, stagnant) as well as objects (dirty and disgusting) functions to create the fantasy of a unified and sovereign Turkish subjectivity.

Conclusion

In this paper, following the argument that Occidental fantasy is not just a counter-response to Western Orientalism and the speaking-of-the-supposedly-silent-other but a discursive practice of power and a claim of sovereignty, I have attempted to illustrate how Arabs are represented among the narratives of the Eksi Sozluk authors. I have shown that orientalizing of Arabs in Turkey is heavily grounded in the modernizationist assumptions of late Ottoman “borrowed colonialism” and Kemalist secular nationalism, which took the essentialized construction of an East and a West for granted; and further intended to distance themselves from Islam and the “Orient” in order to become “Western.” Thereby, the Arab is marked as backward, uncivilized, and unintelligent in essence. Arab tourists in Istanbul are stigmatized through the entries of Eksi Sozluk’s authors: Arabs wander around the city in black veils and with crowded families that represent backwardness; they are alien to the rules of urban life; they are loud and disturbing; and therefore, uncivilized: They look bad, and what is worse, they make “us” look bad. I have also shown that abjection plays an important role in this Orientalist discourse. Evoking feelings of disgust, the Arab’s body is associated with uncleanness and dirt, as themes of bodily fluids, excretion, waste, and food circulate in the everyday language of abjection. Eksi Sozluk authors often mention how messy and dirty Arab tourists are: they throw

garbage everywhere, leave the waste of the food they eat, or misuse their hotel rooms.

The marking of the Arab as an abject and Oriental helps to render the Turkish subject Western. However, although the Orientalization and abjection of the Arab functions to produce the fantasy of a sovereign Western self, it also contains an anxiety-or surfaces an anxiety that is already present, and which is the very cause of the need to draw boundaries between self and other-a fear of contamination. What if I become (or already am) like them-dirty, filthy, and backward? This question is very much dependent on the imagined gaze of the West because it rests on the desire to know what the West thinks of “me.”

Since the rise and nine-year rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) with its Islamist background and neoliberal market advocacy, the political and social transformation in Turkey has accelerated through rapid integration into global markets, massive gentrification projects in Istanbul, a neoliberal political economy, and a booming tourism industry. Circulating discourses of tolerance, hospitality, multiculturalism and “alliance of civilizations” in public culture are coupled with this transformation, while the hegemony of Kemalist nationalism and secularism has been gradually weakening. In this context, the improving relationships between Arab countries and the increase in the number of Arab tourists in Turkey are enthusiastically applauded. The tourism industry is becoming increasingly oriented towards its potential Arab guests, while numerous television series and goods from Turkey are being exported to Arab countries. Arabs are welcomed as “fellow Muslims” or “historic neighbors.” In *Eksi Sozluk* too, authors favor the increased number of Arab tourists in Istanbul, arguing that they spend more money than their European or American counterparts. This widespread comparison between Eastern and Western tourists in terms of economic benefits is often transformed into another contrast: while Westerners look down upon Turks, Arabs do not. Moreover, as many entries suggest, Arab tourists even look up to Turkey: “they admire us.”

Contrary to the unwelcoming discourse of secular nationalism which excludes Arabs, the welcoming discourse includes Arabs; yet, it does so under an “imperial dream” (Acikel 1996:165). I argue that the subtext of the welcoming discourse towards Arabs is also Orientalizing. From Turkish cit-

ies and soap operas, which are imagined to be charming, influencing, and “modernizing” for Arab countries, to Turkish brands and goods that are expected to be purchased in a wild scramble, to the desire to be a “model” for and soft power among Arab countries, this “welcoming” imperial discourse too, functions under the same Occidentalism fantasy as does the unwelcoming one. Whether it is manifested in the form of a discourse that claims to be a model for the Arab countries—a model that is facing the West, Muslim and democracy at the same time, a leader of the Arab world that represents, protects or defends it against the West, or a bridge between two different civilizations of the Orient and the Occident, the binary oppositions of East and West as essentially different categories are always taken for granted in the welcoming liberal and Islamist discourses.

The desire to influence and become a model for the Arab world in terms of modernity does not “provincialize” (Chakrabarty 2000) the idea of the West either; it is rooted in an acceptance of the allegedly universal norms of liberalism and the Enlightenment, all of which have produced the legitimacy and epistemological grounds for colonialism and Orientalism. Therefore, I argue that the welcoming discourses of Eksi Sozluk writers I have illustrated in this article are also grounded in a claim of sovereignty to be achieved under Occidentalism fantasy. Furthermore, the desired power (being a model for, having an influence over Arabs) is a power only when it is legitimate in the eyes of the imagined Western gaze. The subject, decentered and wounded under Western hegemony desires to regain its sovereign subject status through the eyes of the West—in the end only through essentializing East/West categories and the very Orientalization of the Arabs it seems to be against.

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Notes

[1] Based on the following data: <http://www.freewebsitereport.org/www.eksisozluk.com>.

[2] The three most popular websites are Facebook, Google, and YouTube.

[3] "rte" is often used as a pejorative abbreviation for the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

[4] I should underline that the repetitive othering of Arabs is precisely what allows the "I" and the "we" to emerge. In Sara Ahmed's (2006:118) words, "it is not that

nations have simply directed their wishes and longings toward the Orient but rather that the nation ‘coheres’ an affect of the repetition of this direction,” and as a result, “the collective” becomes an “effect of the repetition of this direction over time.”