



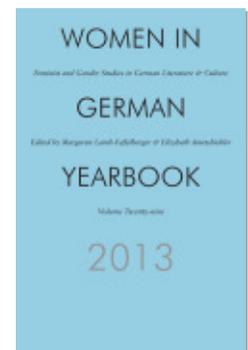
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Kübra Gümüşay's Blog *ein fremdwoerterbuch* :
Re-Presenting the “Silent Muslima” in the Public Sphere

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Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture,
Volume 29, 2013, pp. 1-20 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press



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Kübra Gümüşay's Blog *ein fremdwoerterbuch*: Re-Presenting the "Silent Muslima" in the Public Sphere

CLAUDIA WINKLER

This study examines how the blog *ein fremdwoerterbuch* by Turkish-German and Muslim journalist Kübra Gümüşay represents the image of Muslim women and Islam in Germany. In her posts, Gümüşay complicates the image of Muslim women by denying her own identification with the stereotypical figure of the silent, oppressed Muslima and instead presenting herself as an emancipated female follower of Islam. Moreover, Gümüşay expands the discourse on violence beyond the context of aggression in Islam to include gender and racialized violence. She thus reveals the compatibility of Muslim and feminist identities and creates space for Muslim female activism against violence in the public sphere. Additionally, because of the unique genre of the blog and Gümüşay's move from alternative to mainstream media, this study focuses on the two-way production of representations, the idea of the blog as a counterpublic, and the longitudinal development of the blog as Gümüşay becomes a public figure.

Introduction

Picture this: a fourteen-year-old Muslim girl riding the subway in Germany is approached by a German woman and asked why she wears a headscarf. "Because I want to," she replies. This answer is met with an emphatic "No you don't!" and followed by a barrage of criticism invoking common associations with the headscarf like "violence against women," "oppression," and "honor killings."¹ This specific memory belongs to Turkish-German blogger Kübra Gümüşay, but the experience is shared by many Muslim and/or Turkish women in Germany and, more broadly, in Europe.² As Yasemin Yıldız explains, "Depictions of victimized Muslim women, in particular, have become prominent in many parts of contemporary Europe," and these "abused Muslim women function as facilitating figures in discourse and not as the focal point of concern. [. . .] Turned into reified figures, they are neither the subject nor the object

of these discourses, but rather their vehicles” (76, 80). In other words, while mainstream German (and European) discourse often invokes the image of the Muslim woman and projects notions of abuse and oppression onto her, the voices of real Muslim women are often silenced in the public sphere. These women are trapped in what Beverly Weber dubs the “regime of gender violence,” which is “a discourse [. . .] that insists on the representation of Muslim women as the victims of Muslim violence while obscuring their roles as agents in the public sphere and as victims of racialized forms of violence” (*Violence* 42).

However, Gümüşay is using her blog, *ein fremdwoerterbuch* (this translates as “a dictionary of foreign words”), as a means to break this imposed silence and assert a space for herself in the public sphere as a Muslim woman against violence. Begun in May 2008, *ein fremdwoerterbuch* “is about art, culture, politics, Islam, and media. Also about life, movies (especially short films), and music” (Gümüşay, “woerterautorin—english”). The entries contain the occasional photograph or video clip, but mostly they consist of lengthy texts in—as the title of the blog would suggest—a mixture of languages, namely, German, Turkish, and English. After being noticed as a blogger and junior journalist,³ Gümüşay was offered a position to write the biweekly column “Das Tuch” (The headscarf) for the Society Section of the progressive daily newspaper the *Tageszeitung (taz)* and thus became the first hijabi columnist in Germany in April 2010. Moreover, Gümüşay has since become a public speaker at conferences, universities, and cultural institutes and has been invited as a guest speaker on TV and radio programs in both Germany and the United States.

Because *ein fremdwoerterbuch* has been so central in launching Gümüşay’s career as a journalist and personality in a public space that usually marginalizes people like her, it deserves a closer look. In this article, I analyze Gümüşay’s blog on a number of levels. Following Weber’s argument in her book *Violence and Gender in the “New” Europe*, I study the blog to observe how Gümüşay positions herself in the public sphere as a Muslim woman against both gender and racialized violence. Moreover, I examine how Gümüşay fashions her identity on her blog and how that identity transforms over time, particularly as Gümüşay becomes a more public persona engaging with mainstream media. Throughout my analysis, I also focus on the issue of genre by frequently asking what role the technology of the blog plays in allowing for the two-way production of representations and what type of public sphere this new medium creates.

The Gender Politics of Migrants in Media and the Public Sphere

The image of the Muslim woman as a perpetual, silent victim has emerged as part of a long process of Othering that has been exaggerated during roughly the last decade. In *The Crisis of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age*, Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley explain that the early 2000s, particularly after 9/11, were a time in Europe marked by “anxieties about migration, globalization and the socio-political transformations wrought by neoliberal governance” (3). In an attempt to order and make sense of these growing apprehensions, many European public figures tapped into a narrative of multiculturalism that posited the concept as a well-meaning but naive “failed experiment” that was responsible for the mounting social problems of Europe. This narrative suggested that multiculturalism

valorized difference over commonality, cultural particularity over social cohesion, and an apologetic relativism at the expense of shared values and a commitment to liberty of expression, women’s rights and sexual freedom. Its [. . .] obsessions with self-gratifying practices of respect for cultural difference have been given spatial expression in the parallel societies [. . .], in which alien, repressive and often hostile ways of life are germinated. (13–14)

The narrative continues with the call to “return to the certainties [multiculturalism] relativized and weakened” via the “rehabilitative discipline of integration” of “migrants” into European nation-states (14).

The subtext of this storyline of multiculturalism is that there exist certain cultures that are simply incompatible with and threatening to European values. The “culture” of Islam, in particular, has come to be seen as the antithesis to being European, and the religion has been racialized to the extent that “over the last decade, ‘Muslim’ has replaced ‘Southerner’ as the generic term allowing to police and permanently contain Europe’s internal Others” (El-Tayeb xxx). That is to say, most people who are not “‘white and Christian[,]’ [. . .] the smallest common denominator to which debates of European identity are reduced,” are considered perpetual “migrants,” at a minimum, and are often grouped under the catch-all label “Muslim” (El-Tayeb xiv, xx, xxx). Fatima El-Tayeb goes on to explain that

Islam at times appears as a signifier almost as empty as race, ascribing a combination of naturalized cultural attributes to “Muslims” that

has little to do with religious beliefs or even with being a believer. Instead, the trope of the Muslim as Other offers an apparently easy and unambiguous means to divide Europeans and migrants. (xxx)

What El-Tayeb is describing is a new form of discrimination that exists in the post-Holocaust, postcolonial world, in which racial—that is, biological and genetic—discrimination is taboo and thus perceived as eradicated (Lentin and Titley 49). Instead, discrimination in Europe today occurs along cultural lines, a phenomenon that Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein refer to as a

neoracism [. . .], whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but “only” the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions. (qtd. in Weber, *Violence* 7)

In the context of this neoracism, Islam is no longer seen as a religious faith; instead, it is essentialized as a culture of violence with fixed gender roles that are incompatible with the human rights culture of “enlightened” Europe, especially in regard to the ideal of gender equality. Various discourses of what it means to be a European have constructed the Muslim man “as embodying essentialist positions on gender, sexuality, national and ethnic identity, as presenting a threat both to minority women and to enlightened European masculinity” (El-Tayeb xlv). The Muslim woman, as already mentioned, has subsequently come to be understood as the silent, oppressed victim of Muslim patriarchy.

Germany offers no exception to the prevalent European narrative of multiculturalism or to this view of Islam. In October 2010, Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that “the attempt at multiculturalism has failed, utterly failed,” and the topic of the urgent need for integration has dominated public discourse ever since.⁴ Around the time of Merkel’s statement, for instance, Horst Seehofer, chairman of the Christian Social Union (CSU), proposed his “Seven Point Plan” for integration, designed to combat immigrants’ “unwillingness” to take part in German society.⁵ The language in Seehofer’s presentation left little doubt that Turkish-Germans and/or Muslims were the primary targets of his integration plan. But the German state’s and its politicians’ ideas about Islamic culture make up only a part of what Katherine P. Ewing calls the “hegemonic

national imaginary”: “Popular culture and the media—literature, newspapers, cinema, and television—also play a central role in this discursive process of shaping national and transnational imaginaries and producing identity in the contemporary world” (6).

Certainly, the mainstream German print media have contributed to the existence of the negative, gendered stereotypes of Turkish-Germans and/or Muslims in the national imaginary. One only has to look at the covers of *Der Spiegel* and *Focus*, two well-respected German news magazines, for evidence. A cover of *Focus*, for instance, depicts a man pointing a gun at the reader and has the title “Gefährliche Ausländer?” (Dangerous foreigners?). *Der Spiegel* shows a woman who is yelling and waving a Turkish flag at the center of the cover, girls with headscarves reading obediently on the right side of the image, and young, “foreign”-looking boys carrying weapons on the left; the title of this cover is “Ausländer und Deutsche: Gefährlich fremd: Das Scheitern der multikulturellen Gesellschaft” (Foreigners and Germans: Dangerously foreign: The failure of multicultural society). Given these images, it is little mystery why foreign nationals are viewed with such hostility and why policies such as Seehofer’s plan are being proposed and enacted.

In addition to shaping the national imaginary and even state policies, such media images also define the public sphere. The concept of the public sphere originated with Jürgen Habermas in his 1962 publication *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. According to Habermas, the public sphere is a discursive area that mediates between private individuals and the state—a space in which public opinion forms and ideally translates into political action. The public sphere should be accessible to all citizens but should focus on seeking out the common good for all members of society (Habermas, “An Encyclopedia” 49). In order to achieve this common good, however, a public sphere “transcends and brackets out difference” (Weber paraphrasing Habermas, *Violence* 26)—a matter that Nancy Fraser has critiqued because it results in the exclusion of women and minorities: “Of course, we know [. . .] that the bourgeois public’s claim to full accessibility was not in fact realized. Women of all classes and ethnicities were excluded from official political participation on the basis of gender status [. . .]. Moreover, in many cases women and men of racialized ethnicities of all classes were excluded” (118).⁶

While complete exclusion of minorities from the public sphere has not been the case in Germany in the last few decades, self-representations of Turkish-Germans and Muslims in the media indicate that there are still

clear limitations to media access. In the field of literature, for example, several authors, including Zafer Şenocak, Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Aras Ören, and Feridun Zaimoğlu, have received a great deal of critical acclaim and national attention. In her landmark study *The Turkish Turn in Contemporary German Literature: Toward a New Critical Grammar of Migration*, Leslie A. Adelson analyzes the works of these authors and rejects what she calls the conceptual lens of experiencing life “between two worlds”—one that posits Turkish-Germans as inhabiting an in-between space where two discrete worlds, namely, “a German world embedded in a European world and a Turkish world with its proper place outside Europe,” intersect (4–6). According to Adelson, this lens results in readings that focus only on inclusion and exclusion of migrants in German society. Through the development of “a new critical grammar of migration” (12), Adelson uncovers the multifaceted self-representations of migrant authors who resist racialized and dichotomized images and instead present pictures of “postnational intimacy” and shared and intersecting histories and thus complicate categories of gender and ethnicity (27–29). Nevertheless, it is largely because of readings based on a cultural lens that these authors have become such important figures in the public sphere. Zaimoğlu, for instance, “has gained critical acclaim for writing of violence and its victims, particularly when the violence can be attributed to ‘Muslim’ culture,” and Özdamar “is often read for her relationship to hybrid forms of culture” (Weber, *Violence* 175). While Weber also provides corrective readings of these two authors, her analysis of their public receptions points to the fact that the public sphere does allow room for “difference” (in this case, religious and/or ethnic affiliations) to the extent that these differences are presented in accordance with predominant views of the national imaginary.

This phenomenon becomes even more evident in the realm of best-selling autobiographies such as *Die fremde Braut* (The foreign bride) by Necla Kelek. This book exposes the horrors of forced marriage and Turkish/Muslim patriarchy and has been criticized by Yıldız for being “deeply polemical” and tending “toward stereotypes and generalizations” (87–88). But critical voices like Yıldız’s have been dismissed, and Kelek has been decorated with many awards and offered jobs with the government and as a regular commentator on the subject of Islam (Yıldız 87). Weber explains that the success of Kelek’s book hinges on its participation in two key narratives:

In the first, secularism is constructed as a paradoxical, Christian-influenced, turn away from religion that is necessary to prevent gender violence. In the accompanying public narrative, attention to Islamophobia and racism is discredited as naïve and is itself a contributor to gender violence—in other words, not only Islam but anti-racist and anti-Islamophobic intentions are attributed responsibility for the existence of gender violence today. (*Violence* 139)

Thus, Kelek's book enjoyed great success because it played into what the dominant German public wanted to hear, namely, that Islam is the source of gender violence, that a turn away from Islam is necessary in order to combat this violence, and that a society that is too tolerant simply allows gender violence to continue. At the same time, *Die fremde Braut* served to limit access to the public sphere, especially for Muslim women, because the logic of Kelek's book—an "authentic" account of Turkish Muslim life—reinforced the "regime of gender violence." The text reaffirmed the notion of the inherently violent nature of Islam, thereby making it virtually impossible for women who identify as Muslim to occupy space in the public sphere as activists against violence (*Violence* 138–39).

This, however, does not mean that all self-representations have played into the commonly held stereotypes of Muslims and Turkish-Germans. Weber describes a series of what she terms "Turkish German women's pop autobiographies,"⁷⁷ which "complexly situate themselves among multiple contexts that allow a more fluid conceptualization of relationship to multiple communities" (*Violence* 140). These texts do the important work of "open[ing] up possibilities for conceptualizing relationships between gender and racialized violence," but it is important to note that their authors have been accused of inauthenticity and have not come near the popularity of Kelek, nor have they received comparable acceptance as Turkish-German or Muslim representatives in the public sphere (*Violence* 140). Thus, it appears that full access to the public sphere is predominantly granted to those who reproduce stereotypical images of Muslim men as oppressive, Muslim women as silent, Islam as violent, and Turkish-Germans as trapped between two cultures.

It is, however, essential to note that a lack of recognition on the national stage does not altogether translate to a lack of involvement in the public sphere. As Fraser explains, rather than having or even hoping for one (national) public sphere with equal access for all and in which so-

cial differences are ignored, it is important to have what she terms “subaltern counterpublics”—alternative publics consisting of marginalized social groups (123). Key to the existence of such counterpublics is the new communications infrastructure (e.g., private and open-access television, niche markets, Internet), through which marginalized individuals can produce self-representations at little to no monetary cost and without regard for the expectations of a national audience. Gümüşay’s blog *ein fremdwoerterbuch* offers a particular instance of online alternative media use that functions as a “subaltern counterpublic,” giving her and other marginalized users a public platform from which to break out of what Weber has called the “regime of gender violence.” My analysis demonstrates that Gümüşay uses her blog as a vehicle for embracing her identity as a Turkish-German, headscarf-wearing, practicing Muslim woman and also for refuting the image of being a silent victim by speaking out against gender and racialized violence.

***ein fremdwoerterbuch*: From Counterpublic to the National Sphere**

Already in her very first post, “Die Sonne ist Schuld” (It’s the sun’s fault), Gümüşay sets the tone for the future of her blog. Opening with two instances of silence—a moment of speechlessness as a German woman stopped her bicycle next to Gümüşay just to call her a barn owl or, literally, veil owl (*Schleiereule*); and a failed attempt to speak to neo-Nazis at a political rally—Gümüşay signals to the reader an awareness of how she is perceived in German society. In the first instance, she is forced into the role of the submissive victim of oppression; in the latter, she becomes the embodiment of threatened Germany; and in neither case is she expected to speak. In the post, however, Gümüşay immediately subverts her societal function as a pure surface for projections in a twofold manner. First, the very act of speaking out on the blog and inserting herself into a public, discursive space counters the common European perception of Muslim women as trapped in a state of silent victimhood. More importantly, the nature of her response to these encounters denies readers the possibility of engaging in a discourse that continues to posit the Muslim woman as a cultural Other in need of justification. Rather than commenting on the German woman’s misperceptions of the headscarf in the first encounter or the neo-Nazi’s implicit and unjust expectation that Gümüşay should keep quiet in the second, Gümüşay simply and matter-of-factly recounts the

events of these two days. In doing so, she refuses to put herself in the position of someone who needs to defend her practices. In fact, her straight telling of the events and expression of shock create a situation in which the people Gümüşay encountered are the ones whose actions require justification. Moreover, as Gümüşay expresses her astonishment—“I was really so flabbergasted that the words failed me (!)”⁸—she uses the exclamation point to underscore her outspoken nature, thus simultaneously highlighting her lack of identification with the image of the silent Muslim woman and emphasizing the disgust that *any* self-confident individual would feel in her position.

To conclude this post, Gümüşay makes the playful but pointed comment that “[t]he sun was present at both events. Ergo: The sun is responsible for the tan/brownness.”⁹ The clever statement indicates that Gümüşay, while shocked by these encounters, can maintain a sense of humor and remains unshaken and confident in her identity as an outspoken Muslim woman in Germany. At the same time, the wordplay very directly critiques the existence of (neo)racism or, in these two cases, neo-Nazism. Moreover, the way in which Gümüşay writes off the existence of neo-Nazism—coincidentally, the sun was shining at both events—shows that in Germany new forms of discrimination are not taken seriously. To sum up, this first post resists stereotypes of Muslim women and engagement with the discourse on Muslim violence and instead opens up a discourse on racialized violence in Germany.

Gümüşay’s playful yet unapologetic tone continues throughout her early blog. In a post from June 2008 called “Identitätskrise” (Identity crisis), Gümüşay writes about the European Cup in order to address the issue of expected loyalties in Germany:

Angie, I’m sorry—my dearest wish is that Turkey will win [. . .]. I write, “Angie, I’m sorry.” and have the feeling that I need to justify myself. Why? Am I poorly integrated if I’m not for Germany? After all, there are also native Germans who are for Turkey, so why not me? Why do people of immigrant descent have to be “more German” than “native Germans” to be considered German?¹⁰

In directing her conversation at “Angie,” Gümüşay linguistically puts herself on equal (and familiar) footing with the most powerful person in Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel. Symbolically, she is putting herself into a dialogue with the German nation and its governmental institutions and is thereby forcing herself into the public sphere from which she is

ordinarily excluded. In asking why she must justify her loyalties to Turkey, Gümüşay directly confronts the idea that dual loyalties to Turkey and Germany cannot exist and points out the higher standard that immigrants are held to concerning their Germanness. She thus problematizes the implicit requirement of people with ethnic or non-Christian religious affiliations to either justify or deny—or even reject—these parts of their identities in order to be accepted as part of the German public. But insofar as Gümüşay *does* justify her multifaceted identity, her choice to do so via the vehicle of a shared German and Turkish pastime, namely, soccer, is wise, as sports are a near-universal feature of all cultures and, as Gümüşay herself points out, many people experience moments of dual or split loyalties during sporting events. Moreover, the surge of patriotism she feels for Turkey is a mirror image of the bouts of soccer patriotism experienced by Germans during tournaments. Thus, Gümüşay cleverly packages her ongoing affiliation to Turkey in a palatable and comprehensible way for German readers.

The freedom that the open-access technology of the blog granted Gümüşay early on is evident in her choice of topics and tone, and resulted in her identity as a Muslim activist against violence and discrimination. While Gümüşay probably would have had a hard time finding a voice in the national public sphere because of the dominant “regime of gender violence” (Weber, *Violence*), which denies the possibility of antiviolence activism on the part of Muslim women, the blog provides her with a smaller but still relevant platform to voice her experiences and concerns. Of course, Gümüşay’s being heard in any public sphere requires a public audience or, more specifically in this case, public readership. While exact figures are not available, Gümüşay’s current (i.e., 2013) numbers are higher than those of her early years: she has 4,446 “likes” on Facebook (20 June 2013) and 6,065 followers on Twitter (20 June 2013). Reportedly, she receives up to thirteen thousand hits on her blog website per month (Kuhlmann). Additionally, according to Facebook statistics, Gümüşay is most popular with the age group ranging from twenty-five to thirty-four, and based on the languages of respondents’ postings and the salutations they use on both Facebook and the blog (“*selam alaikum*,” “*Verehrte Schwester*” [honored sister]), a majority appear to be Muslim and/or of Turkish or Arabic descent. Extrapolating from this information, it appears that Gümüşay is addressing a young, sizable, and transnational audience of traditionally marginalized citizens (in the European context).

Additionally, the unique design of a blog—a discussion site that theo-

retically allows anyone who has web access to go to the website and post responses to the entries—ensures that Gümüşay’s is not the only voice heard. A July 2009 post titled “Seit dem Mord reden wir offener” (Since the murder we speak more openly) contains excerpts of an interview that the *taz* conducted with Gümüşay—one of several precolumn collaborations with this newspaper—in the wake of the murder of Mawra El-Sherbini.¹¹ In the interview, Gümüşay explains a newfound awareness of and willingness to talk about discrimination against Muslim women and expresses the need for Muslims to be taken more seriously in public discussions. She also states that the lack of public outrage regarding the El-Sherbini murder points to the centrality of Islamophobia in German society. An array of voices responds to this entry, and a discussion emerges. Some take offense at the accusation of being Islamophobic just because of a lack of public outcry. Others use the opportunity to ask Gümüşay why she wears a headscarf, while still others use the comments section as a chance to attack Islamic nations for their discriminatory policies against non-Muslims. Some commentators come to Gümüşay’s defense, while others attack her with stereotypes and generalizations.

Important is that what emerges here is a mini-sphere of the public or an example of what Fraser calls “subaltern counterpublics,” which “[o]n the one hand [. . .] function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand [. . .] also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics” (Fraser 124). On Gümüşay’s blog, people who are excluded from the public sphere can find each other and reinforce their beliefs, which are often rejected in broader society. These otherwise marginalized citizens are put on equal footing with their discussion partners and can directly respond to stereotypical prejudice prevalent in mainstream society. Armed with a newfound confidence derived from the online community and the awareness of what prejudices people really harbor against them—a result of the fact that Internet discourse allows for anonymity—the members of this counterpublic are, hopefully, in fact, becoming prepared to voice and defend their views in wider society, as Fraser suggests.

It is, however, not just the content of Gümüşay’s blog entries and the subsequent discussions, but her blog as a whole, that combats stereotypes and challenges mainstream representations of Muslims and Turkish-Germans. Paraphrasing Richard Dyer, Stuart Hall explains that stereotypes “*reduce* everything about the person to [simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics], *exaggerate and*

simplify them, and *fix* them without change or development to eternity” (258). The stereotype of the Turkish-German Muslim is that he or she is loyal to Turkey and Islam at the expense of allegiance to Germany and Western values; is violent and patriarchal or, in the case of women, is completely oppressed by male family members; cannot speak German; and has no interest in taking part in wider society. But Gümüşay does not allow herself to be essentialized and reduced to a few characteristics. Especially in the first year of her blog, all of her entries work together to create a cosmopolitan identity. She uses a mixture of flawless German, Turkish, and English to reveal her multiple affiliations—breaking down the idea that she is somehow unpracticed or uninterested in German (and other languages). Additionally, she speaks to a variety of interests that include, but also go far beyond, her experiences as a Muslim and a person of migrant descent. She offers book and movie reviews, gives travel advice for people visiting London, weighs in on US politics, talks about her life as a student, and makes frequent references to pop culture. In presenting these many interests and multiple facets of her identity, Gümüşay reveals herself to be anything but reducible to a stereotype and pushes readers toward “demotic” cosmopolitanism “[in which] everyone has to locate himself in the same global space and is confronted with similar challenges, and [in which] strangeness is replaced by the amazement at the similarities” (Ulrich Beck qtd. in Mandel 322).

Just as Gümüşay’s identity remains fluid and resists oversimplification, so do the characteristics of her blog. Looking at the blog longitudinally, there are perceptible changes in Gümüşay’s tone and the range of topics she writes about over time. Before 2010, the year that Gümüşay settled into her new life in London and started writing her biweekly column “Das Tuch” for the *taz* back in Germany, her blogs in their totality present her as a cosmopolitan citizen with local, national, and transnational allegiances and multiple interests—issues facing Muslims and Turkish-Germans being just one of many topics about which she writes. To be more specific, of the eighty-three 2008 blog posts, only about two dozen are directly concerned with migrant issues. In 2012, however, roughly half of the posts (about twenty-four of the forty-eight)¹² speak to these themes, and it is of note that many of these entries are repostings of articles that Gümüşay wrote for the *taz*. Moreover, her approach to presenting issues regarding Islam and racism changes perceptibly in later posts. Whereas in early blog entries she rarely speaks on behalf of Turkish-Germans or Muslims, instead using her highly personal experiences to shed light on

what she sees as societal problems, post-2010 entries shift to telling the stories of other members who are excluded from society. She thus appears to have embraced her role as a public figure and mouthpiece for Muslims and Turkish-Germans in the national public sphere.

Perhaps most interesting is that, while Gümüŝay still regularly writes many columns/blog posts on gender and racial (cultural) discrimination in Germany and elsewhere in the world, she also often writes pieces criticizing Islam. The entry “Stille.” (Silence.) from August 2012, for instance, tells of a gay Muslim’s struggles in his religious community. It details the conversations that this man, Yunus, had with a number of imams about how homosexuality is a “sickness” (*Krankheit*) and a “test” (*Prüfung*) of faith. Nothing is resolved in this piece, and, for that matter, nothing is directly critiqued. Instead, Gümüŝay allows questions such as “But what happens, when ‘someone like that’ believes? When ‘someone like that’ believes deep in his heart and wants to continue to believe?”¹³ to be answered only by silence. In fact, the words “gay” or “homosexual” are never mentioned in the piece, but all of the silence surrounding this issue poignantly illustrates the painful and torturous tension that arises around the taboo subject of homosexuality in the Islamic community.

This specific entry/column is particularly illustrative of the direction of Gümüŝay’s later postings in several respects. First, it demonstrates an intensified critical engagement with Islam, perhaps in part because of Gümüŝay’s new public role as the columnist of “Das Tuch”—a role that may, to an extent, demand criticism of Islam from Gümüŝay. Nonetheless, it is important to note that in her criticisms, Gümüŝay does not fall into the popular narrative of Islam as the locus of gender violence like Kelek and other public figures have before her. Instead, she widens the understanding of violence from domestic violence against women to emotional violence against and oppression of homosexual males. Furthermore, she accomplishes this by depicting a vulnerable Muslim man, which flies in the face of the popular image of the Muslim male as oppressive and violent. Additionally, Gümüŝay’s piece resists the outright rejection of Islam as a solution to the violence and, instead, poses the question of how to fight violence from within, without sacrificing an important part of one’s identity. Finally, her text gives very little indication that the context of the story is about the Muslim community. Aside from one mention of imams and the fact that she met Yunus, the main figure of the piece, at an Islamic event, Gümüŝay leaves the story relatively open,

so that it can be read as a text about any homosexual individual struggling with a faith that disapproves of his or her sexual orientation.

In addition to its broad message about violence, the writing style in “Stille.” demonstrates the new, reserved, and reflective tone that Gümüşay developed in her more recent blogs—one that is far from the tongue-in-cheek writing style of earlier texts. Although Gümüşay’s more recent pieces do not refrain entirely from pointed criticisms, many of them—particularly those that present other people’s experiences—resist a direct interpretation or critique of the situation being described. Instead, they raise more questions than they answer, leaving it up to readers to interpret the significance of the story. Given the fact that many of these more reflective entries are repostings of columns, this does raise the question of whether Gümüşay has softened her tone so that her criticisms become more palatable for a national audience. I ask this particularly because she still uses the blog to post addenda to controversial pieces and often answers the responses of blog commentators with pointed commentary. In the column/blog entry “Machtspiel” (Power game) from February 2012, for example, Gümüşay writes a story about a young migrant man who was taken in and questioned by police and subsequently subjected to police brutality, all because of an illegal ride on the Hamburg subway. In this entry, Gümüşay never directly links this extreme situation to the fact that the young man was a migrant, but when a blog commentator suggests that the boy got himself into trouble by not following police orders, Gümüşay finally comes out and asks the question: “Would the situation have escalated like this if someone else had been involved? If it had been the son of a German doctor who was blond and wore glasses, a button-up shirt, and trousers?”¹⁴ Judging by her response, Gümüşay clearly intended her entry to address racial profiling and discrimination, but saw the space of the blog and *not* that of the column as an appropriate venue to elaborate in an overt manner. Even though the *taz* may have been willing to print a more pointed version of the story, I would argue that Gümüşay made a deliberate choice not to ask this question directly in her article out of a kind of self-censorship that is caused by her concerns about the reception of her work in the national public sphere.

In addition to avoiding public backlash, Gümüşay’s reflective style prevents her from presenting an image of a homogeneous Turkish-German or Muslim community and speaking on its behalf, even though she is now telling the stories of others rather than *just* her own. As the description above of the entry “Stille.” reveals, Gümüşay’s newfound style

avoids polemics and invites all readers to interpret the situation for themselves. To further underscore the complexities of the Muslim community, Gümüşay often explicitly mentions the diversity of the group for whom she is speaking. In her April 2010 blog (and first *taz* column) “Mein Kopf gehört mir” (My head belongs to me), Gümüşay explains: “Every Muslim woman comes to the point when she has to answer this question for herself—and must opt for or reject the [head]scarf. [. . .] For me the headscarf is a religious duty. [. . .] For other Muslim women the headscarf can naturally be worn for other reasons.”¹⁵ And in a column/blog entry from April 2012, “Wenn Frauen das Kopftuch ablegen” (When women shed the headscarf), she sheds light on the many diverse reasons for the opposite phenomenon, namely, *not* wearing the headscarf. Here again, the discussion-board feature of the blog plays an important role, this time not in creating a sense of unity among the Muslim readership but rather in underscoring Gümüşay’s point about the diversity within the Muslim community regarding the significance of the headscarf. One (presumably Muslim) commentator posts: “I read your article regarding the headscarf and unfortunately have to tell you that you may have motivated dozens of women [. . .] to shed [. . .] their headscarves.”¹⁶ Clearly, this blog continues to function as a “subaltern counterpublic” (Fraser), although, interestingly, it is being used to debate issues that are internal to the Muslim community and not just between the Muslim or migrant community and wider society. In this sense, the blog almost appears to encapsulate a whole network of counterpublics.

These critical responses indicate that Gümüşay not only views herself, but is also viewed by others, as a spokesperson for the Turkish-German and/or Muslim community. While Gümüşay’s acceptance as a headscarf-wearing Muslim woman, not only in the “subaltern counterpublics” of the blogosphere but also in the national public sphere via her position at a mainstream media outlet, is significant for the German migrant community and is an important step toward Germany’s becoming a truly inclusive nation, some questions remain about the cost of this success to Gümüşay’s identity and interests. As discussed above, her writing style has shifted to some degree, as she has come into her public role of *taz* columnist (as well as a frequent guest on TV and radio programs). There is no doubt that much of this change is due to the natural development and maturation of Gümüşay’s writing and that all of the change is a matter of her own choice. However, her choices are likely being made with an awareness of her precarious position as a Muslim woman in the na-

tional public sphere. Additionally, Gümüŝay's progressive shift to more pieces about "migrant" issues may also be indicative of a certain outside pressure to act as an expert on all things Muslim or Turkish. The name of her column, "Das Tuch," certainly points to such expectations, and at a 2012 lecture at the Washington DC Goethe Institute, Gümüŝay recalled a television producer stating that he was "not ready to have a hijabi on TV if she's not talking about her hijab" ("The Influence"). It seems that while Gümüŝay has been accepted on the national stage as a Muslim female activist against violence—and not just Muslim violence—she still has to accept the relatively narrow role that the German public is willing to let her have: the token Muslim who comments on "migrant" issues.

Nevertheless, Gümüŝay's own role in marketing her ethnicity (or, in her case, religious/cultural affiliation) should not be ignored. In *Ethnicity, Inc.*, John L. and Jean Comaroff discuss the intricate workings of the commodification of ethnicity, primarily by looking at instances of ethno-tourism. While they do not praise the practice of commodifying culture, they do present a nuanced view of the practice. Comaroff and Comaroff explain that people who commodify their identity are not dupes of the market who are unwittingly turning their ethnicities into mere transactional goods. Instead, they suggest that individuals who market their culture do so "with a good measure of critical and tactical consciousness" (27). Moreover, Comaroff and Comaroff insist that "[e]ven if the transaction of cultural products and practices were entirely reducible to cash, it does not necessarily mean that they would be denuded of all auratic, affective, or social worth" (27). In fact, this exchange of money for cultural goods and practices could ultimately *add* substance to ethnic identities (27), as well as "open up unprecedented opportunities for creating value of various kinds [. . .]. [A]ny number of minority populations, north and south, have enhanced their autonomy, their political presence, and their material circumstances by adroitly managing their tourist potential" (24). This last observation could be extended to Gümüŝay's experience as a *taz* columnist, because it would be wrong to see her entirely as a victim of the forces and expectations of the German mainstream media. She is certainly defined and restricted by her minority status, but she has also been able to turn this into capital gain, political activism, and, hopefully, a positive migrant identity. Gümüŝay also seems to be quite aware of this situation: "My headscarf has so often worked to my disadvantage. Why not let it work to my advantage for once?" ("The Influence").

Moreover, it is imperative to highlight once more that Gümüşay's commodification of her ethnicity and religion is very different from that of figures like Kelek. Kelek primarily uses her ethnic and (former) religious identity for her own benefit, namely, to grant her work authenticity. Because of her "insider" status, Kelek has been able to assume the role of public speaker on behalf of all Turkish-German and Muslim women, and she has subsequently earned fame, power, and money. Unfortunately, she has done so at the expense of the public image of Muslims and Turkish-Germans. While Kelek's personal experiences of violence were very real, are shared by many other Muslim women, and need to be discussed in a public forum, she presents her story as representative of the circumstances in the Turkish-German and/or Islamic community in general. In so doing, she "replicate[s] a discourse of victimhood that greatly limits the terrain on which Turkish-German or Muslim women are able to negotiate a presence in the public sphere" (Weber, *Violence* 143). Ultimately, Kelek "sells out," in a sense, by reproducing for the German public a preexisting image of Islam as an inherently violent culture that can only be combated with a rejection of the religion. She paradoxically uses her ethnic and religious affiliation in order to deny others the legitimacy of such affiliations in an "enlightened" European context.

Gümüşay, on the other hand, embraces her ethnic and religious identity and uses her "insider" status to create a new, empowered Muslim subjectivity rather than to reinforce Islam's inferior status in the German discourse. She uses her *one* voice to highlight the *many* voices of the Muslim community, which paradoxically undermines her own role as a spokesperson, while simultaneously highlighting the need for a greater and more diverse presence of ethnic and religious minorities in the public sphere. Moreover, the diverse stories of violence that Gümüşay tells on her blog and in her column "recontextualize violence" (Weber, *Violence* 142) as a global phenomenon located both inside *and* outside of Islam and expand the concept of violence to encompass both gendered and racialized forms. Thus, Gümüşay is broadening—not merely maintaining or even narrowing—the still limited and conditional space for Muslim women in the German public sphere.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my fellow students for peer-reviewing early drafts of this article. I am especially grateful to Katrin Sieg for her support and

to the editors and anonymous reviewers at the *Women in German Yearbook* for their helpful feedback and suggestions.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. “Ich war vierzehn Jahre alt, als mich eine Frau in der U-Bahn fragte: ‘Warum trägst du das Kopftuch?’ Weil ich will,” antwortete ich, woraufhin sie ‘Willst du nicht!’ zurückschrie. Und ich hörte nur noch die Worte: Afghanistan, Gewalt an Frauen, Unterdrückung, Zwangsehen, Ehrenmorde—das volle Programm eben” (Gümüşay, “Mein Kopf gehört mir”).

2. Many scholars have noted the conflation of Turks (and other immigrants) and Muslims and the subsequent elimination of heterogeneity among these groups. See Weber, “Beyond” 20; Yıldız 74–78.

3. Gümüşay served as a member on the editorial board of the youth magazine *Freihafen Hamburg* when she began her blog in 2008.

4. “Der Ansatz für Multikulti ist gescheitert, absolut gescheitert!” (“Integration: Merkel”).

5. This plan demands that in addition to possessing work qualifications, new immigrants must show the willingness and ability to integrate and insists that those who hinder the integration of family members be sanctioned (“Integration: Seehofer”).

6. See Weber for a more thorough discussion of critiques regarding the exclusion of difference in the public sphere (*Violence* 26–32).

7. Referred to as “chick lit alla turca” in an earlier study by Yeşilada.

8. “Ich war wirklich so baff, dass mir (!) die Worte fehlten” (Gümüşay, “Die Sonne ist Schuld”).

9. “Bei beiden Ereignissen war die Sonne dabei. Ergo: Die Sonne ist Schuld an der Bräune” (Gümüşay, “Die Sonne ist Schuld”).

10. “Angie, es tut mir Leid—Ich wünsche mir innigst, dass die Türkei gewinnt. [. . .] Ich schreibe ‘Angie, es tut mir Leid.’ und habe das Gefühl, mich rechtfertigen zu müssen. Warum? Bin ich schlecht integriert, wenn ich nicht für Deutschland bin? Es gibt schließlich auch Urdeutsche, die für die Türkei sind, warum nicht also auch ich? Warum müssen Migrationshintergrundbesitzer ‘deutscher’ sein als Urdeutsche um ‘Deutsche/r’ zu sein?”

11. Mawra El-Sherbini was a Muslim Egyptian doctoral student living in Germany. She filed a defamation suit against Alex Wiens for harassment. On 1 July 2009, at Wiens’s appeal hearing, Wiens stabbed El-Sherbini to death. This incident became a rallying point for Muslims in Germany and abroad, as there was minimal press coverage or public outrage.

12. Of these forty-eight posts (as of 20 December 2012), eight are photo series. Although one could argue that several of these photos also construct an ethnic identity, I did not count them as concerning “migrant” issues.

13. “Aber was ist, wenn ‘so ein Mensch’ glaubt? Wenn ‘so ein Mensch’ tief im Herzen glaubt und weiter glauben will?”

14. “Wäre die Situation auch so eskaliert hätte es sich um jemand anderen gehandelt? Wenn es der Brillenträger blonde Hemd- und Stoffhosen-Sohn eines deutschen Arztes gewesen wäre?”

15. “Jede Muslimin kommt an den Punkt, an dem sie diese Frage für sich klärt— und sich für oder gegen das Tuch entscheidet. [. . .] Für mich ist das Kopftuch eine religiöse Pflicht. [. . .] Für andere Musliminnen kann das Kopftuchtragen natürlich andere Gründe haben.”

16. “[Ich] habe deinen Artikel bezgl. Kopftuch gelesen und muß Dir leider sagen, daß Du vielleicht mehrere dutzend Frauen motiviert haben könntest [. . .] ihren [*sic*] Kopftuch [. . .] ab[zu]legen.”

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