

# The Relationship of the Ottoman society to Western Companies seen through late Ottoman Advertisements

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*“Compatriot! Don’t feel ashamed to visit Muslim department stores, Don’t raise your Childs, brothers and sisters with Nestlé milk, (Don’t) let them go in clothes from Tiring, Stein, don’t visit [...] shops Whose names are written in French!” (Talebe Defteri 1914)*

Recently the broadcasting of commercials for the Turkish soda called Cola Turka showed in an impressive way how powerful effects marketing strategies could have among targeted consumers – in this case the whole Turkish society. For the launching of this drink, which obviously was inspired by the American sodas – Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola – the company Ülker had a simple but nevertheless brilliant idea: by drinking Cola Turka Americans become Turkish. Just as Coca Cola stands for the “American Way of Life”, Cola Turka aims at representing the “Turkish Way of Life”. The launch happened to be set at an opportune moment; just one day after the US-Army in a spectacular operation had arrested parts of a Turkish special operations unit in Northern Iraq. Though Serdat Erener – the responsible for the commercials – denied that any propaganda for Turkey had been intended, these commercials did “hit the bull’s eye”, for in them the growing anti-American sentiments were, nevertheless, somehow humorously reflected. Erdener admitted that the commercials were inspired by the idea of “positive nationalism” (Yılmaz and Şahin 2006).<sup>1</sup> We might assume that the anti-American “flavour” might have partially fostered the sale of Cola Turka. For Ülker it was a sweeping success: within short time it held a considerable share of the fast-growing soft-drink market, currently dominated by Coke with a share of 57%, followed by Pepsi with 27% (Britt 2003, Finkel 2003, Özkan and Foster 2005). This current example points out several aspects which will be discussed in this paper. However, here I will be focussing on an earlier period of time: from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century up to WWI:

- The impact of products/brands

- The importance of patriotic/nationalistic feelings for marketing strategies and their “power” on the decision of the target consumer to buy or not to buy a product<sup>2</sup>
- The (growing) impact and role of companies
- The use of (non-)commercial advertisements as a source for social conditions

This contribution is based on a selection of written sources, varying from commercial advertisements and letters to the editor to editorial articles from newspapers and magazines. At first glance they all plead for the consumption of local goods or for purchase in local shops. They do so by using mostly misleading and comparative advertising. Misleading advertising according the “Consumer Affairs” site of the European Union is “any advertising which, in any way, either in its wording or presentation:

- deceives or is likely to deceive the persons to whom it is addressed or - whom it reaches.
- by reason of its deceptive nature, is likely to affect their economic behaviour.
- or for those reasons, injures are likely to injure a competitor.”

([http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons\\_int/safe\\_shop/mis\\_adv/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_int/safe_shop/mis_adv/index_en.htm))

This definition though contemporary could also be applied to the Ottoman examples deployed here.

First I will discuss the terminology used in these texts, and if and how it has changed in the course of time from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the onset of WWI. It can be shown that the “private/commercial” rhetoric has strong similarities with the ongoing political discourse about the economic fate of the Empire. Over the years the terms/phrases applied show a shift from growing (Muslim/Ottoman) patriotism to a (Turkish/Muslim) nationalistic attitude which shortly before WWI targets not only at the European companies but increasingly at the Ottoman Non-Muslim minorities.

<sup>1</sup> Ironically this idea was translated into a campaign by the Istanbul branch of the most global US marketing agency Young&Rubicon (headquarter in New York). Ammann, Ludwig. 2004. *Cola und Koran. Das Wagnis einer islamischen Renaissance*. Freiburg et. al.: Herder, 21.

<sup>2</sup> For current strategies of multinational companies in Egypt see Kehrer, Michaela. 2005. *Transnationale Konsumgüterunternehmen in Ägypten: Lokale Kultur im globalen Marketing*. In *Wirtschaft im Vorderen Orient. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven*, ed. by Steffen Wippel, 215-235. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz.

Further, I will examine some exemplary advertisements more closely and discuss their content in conjunction with the (advertising) medium and the competing firms. My argument is, that the patriotic/nationalistic rhetoric used in the commercial/editorial examples could possibly be interpreted as some sort of advertising slogan(s) in order to appeal to the most likely existing patriotic sentiments. But it would be misleading to interpret these sorts of pleas as mere expressions of social sentiments of the local advertising customer or the advertising medium. Rather, they are mostly commercially motivated.

Additionally, I will present letters to the editors which seemingly are proof of a rising awareness of the “power” of foreign companies. The companies mentioned here were mostly being equated with “Europe” and its interests, all the same no matter where the company really originated from (let alone the multinational character of some of them). Simultaneously the foreign companies, their products, and their methods of production/advertising were perceived as superior to one’s own possibilities of doing business and marketing. Generally, the Western type of enterprise was not being considered to be inherently bad, however the fact that those enterprises were not in native hands but in “European” ones was.

Given the rising abundance of editorial/commercial advertisements, which campaign for local products, the appeals of the letters to the editor, however, give the impression that the targeted “patriot” was not at all convinced that the local shops/products were the better/preferable ones as it was being implied in the ads. Yet, by considering merely these kinds of sources, more mutual aspects of the relationship between Western companies and the urban Ottoman population would remain unconsidered.

Therefore, in the final section I will discuss briefly Western type businesses and their relation to the Ottoman society from a different angle. The process of “şirketleşme” (business start-ups) within the Ottoman realm seems to affirm the widening economic gap between the Muslims and Non-Muslims in favour of the latter (Toprak 1982). Here two questions are of interest: could this disequilibrium be found within the Western companies itself, or to put different could it be revealed by their hiring policy, and, if, have had this fact consequences for their marketing.

The conclusion will finally sum up the main issues and once again turn to the initial illustration of Cola Turka and other contemporary examples. They will be compared with the advertisements from the late Ottoman period discussed here in order to show their similarities.

**TABLE 1**  
**Advertisement Slogans (1899-1914)**

Ottoman goods	Western goods
Cheap	highly expensive
Quality	Rotten
Healthy	Harmful
honorable behaviour	Bad
honesty and uprightness	Europe's rotten and dirty goods
Service to our nation	Foreigners, Westerners
Ottoman money must stay in the Ottoman state	Don't buy foreigners goods

**Sources: Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete, Kadınlar Dünyası, Tanin, Reklam**

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