

**THE JUNIOR CHARLES STRONG TRUST LECTURE  
1999**

**Hairy politics:  
hair rituals in Ottoman and Turkish society**

by  
**Susan Aykut**  
**LaTrobe University**

**delivered at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the  
Australian Association for the Study of Religions**

**Sydney  
October 1999**

**CHARLES STRONG (Australian Church) MEMORIAL TRUST  
for the promotion in Australia of the sympathetic study of world religions**

**THE CHARLES STRONG MEMORIAL TRUST**

**Hairy politics:  
hair rituals in Ottoman and Turkish society**

**Junior Charles Strong Trust Lecture  
1999**

**Susan Aykut**

**LaTrobe University**

In May 1999 a furor erupted in the Turkish parliament. A new member of parliament insisted that she be sworn in while ‘covered’—that is, wearing a headscarf covering her hair and shoulders but not her face, conveying her Islamic religious affiliation. The demand was denied. The acting speaker of parliament was instructed by an angry Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit, to ‘Please put this lady in her place’.<sup>1</sup>

There are plenty of political wranglings and interesting scenarios to pursue about the parliamentary debacle just mentioned<sup>2</sup> but the two big questions it raises, which I want to explore in this paper, are: firstly, what is the significance of headdress and of hair for the Turks; and, secondly, where is the place of Islam today in the secularised nation state of Turkey—or, in other words, where does the Prime Minister want to put the ‘covered’ female MP?

The two questions are linked. For the last 600 years at least, the way hair is groomed and what headdress is worn has been significant in defining the allegiances of Turks to the state. Hair is, as one academic puts it, ‘one of our most powerful symbols of individual and group identity—powerful first because it is physical and therefore extremely personal, and second because although personal it is also public, rather than private’.<sup>3</sup>

Who wore what headdress was tightly controlled during the height of Ottoman power. Fixed hair practices were not only perceived as observing Islamic law; they were also rigidly enforced to signify the social stability of the Ottoman state. Headdress and hair symbolically identified and unified a ruling class that did not share a common ethnicity. Other religious groups in Ottoman controlled territories, who were not part of the ruling elite or followers of Islam, were also subject to strict dress codes. A sixteenth century Ottoman decree, for example, prohibited Jews and Christians wearing turbans. They were ordered to wear hats—Jews were to wear red hats and Christians were to wear black hats.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Kinzer 1999a: 12. Merve Kavakci was a member of the pro-Islamic Virtue Party. Two weeks after this report another article appeared in *The Age* saying that Ms Kavakci was to be stripped of her Turkish citizenship. It was discovered she also had US citizenship which she had failed to report to the Turkish government. See Kinzer 1999b: 10.

<sup>2</sup> The Virtue party were taken to task for having no women candidates at the last election. Kavakci was listed in a safe seat the night before this election. Her actions in parliament were manipulated by the party for maximum effect. As the party had no women candidates before, it is reasonable to surmise they put Kavakci in this election to satisfy secularist demands and to exploit an opportunity to test an Islamic emblem in the government.

<sup>3</sup> Synnott 1993: 103.

<sup>4</sup> Refik 1935: 51-2, cited in And 1994: 40.

Under the Turkish Republic, however, the state tried to unify **all** its people under a head of hair and headdress common to all.

Hair and headdress have always been integrally linked to the identity that the state in this region projects at any given time. This paper examines the hair and headdress practices of four periods; two belong to the Islamized Ottoman Empire and two to the secularized Turkish Republic. My observations about hair matters are mostly confined to those at the centres of Ottoman and republican power: people living in Istanbul and Ankara.

To help locate the four periods under examination, a brief overview of the histories of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic is useful. The Ottoman dynasty began at around 1300 CE and although the Ottomans controlled most of Anatolia and large chunks of the Balkans by the late fourteenth century, the Empire did not come of age until the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by Mehmed the Conqueror. Hair practices instituted at this time show how a key aspect of Ottoman society was constructed. In contrast to practices in Western Europe of the time—where hair was pomaded and bewigged to express the whims and fancies of the individual—Ottoman hair customs were tightly controlled by Islamic religious precepts derived from the Orthodox Hanefi school, and by ceremonial practices of the state which incorporated a mixture of Turkish, Persian and Byzantine customs.<sup>5</sup> These remain virtually unchanged until the nineteenth century when the Tanzimat reforms instituted new headdress codes in an attempt to invent a new face for the world as the Empire disintegrated. The Ottoman Empire officially ceased to exist in 1923 when the last sultan was sent into exile and the sultanate was abolished, and a secular Turkish Republic was proclaimed. Changes to headdress and hair practices were among early republican secularising reforms introduced by the new president, Kemal Atatürk. Although these have been evolving ever since, it is the re-emergence of political Islamic hair practices and headdress since the 1980s that we will look at lastly.

## **Theorising hair**

Human hair is commonly believed among anthropologists to have universal symbolic value.<sup>6</sup> A study of the treatment of hair reveals ideas about the nature of the

---

<sup>5</sup> The Hanafite school was dominant in the territories occupied by the Ottoman empire. It was also the dominant practice in Central Asia and Pakistan. The other three schools of Orthodox Islam are Shafii, practiced in Muslim East and South Africa, also Lower Egypt, the Hedjaz, South Arabia and Indonesia; Maliki, practiced in Muslim West Africa including Morocco, Algiers and Tunis; Hanbeli, the smallest and most strictly traditional school. Its adherents are spread in small pockets over wide areas.

<sup>6</sup> Leach 1958: 160.

individual and society and the relations between the two.<sup>7</sup> Much of the following discussion draws from the theoretical approaches of social structural anthropologists, such as Mary Douglas, whose study of the body and analyses of pollution beliefs in various societies seeks to reveal the symbolic systems underlying these beliefs.<sup>8</sup> Using the idea of the body's boundaries as an analogy or metaphor of social systems, Douglas examined pollution beliefs to explain a wide variety of cultural patterns. According to Douglas, purification and pollution rites construct symbolic bodies. What is contained inside the body is ordered and controlled. What is outside the body is disordered and potentially uncontrollable. Studies using this approach consider that whatever cannot be controlled is essentially pollution.<sup>9</sup> Skin is the body's boundary; anything breaking through the skin transgresses boundaries and is in need of control. Order is restored by purification rites.<sup>10</sup>

Hair as a bodily eruption needs controlling. It is a marginal substance occupying an ambiguous position. It may be symbolically dangerous or symbolically sacred, depending on how and where it is worn and by whom. All hair rituals are in some way symbolically linked to the moral order of a community. Interpreting these rituals can help us understand the ideologies that operate in a particular culture. For Foucault, regulation and control over the body (and by extension the population) are two ways in which power is deployed.<sup>11</sup> The body is an important surface; it publicly displays the owner's social status, gender and religious affiliation.

The control of hair was very important in Ottoman society. This is most obviously demonstrated by the fact that the head hair on both sexes was publicly invisible. The covering of hair subsumed the individual into a given role and status defined by the state. As part of an Islamic code of conduct the hair of Ottoman women—which was generally kept long—was covered by the *yashmak*; a head covering that unequivocally denoted the wearer as simply 'woman'. This custom was never absolute; it was most common among the urban upper classes. Ottoman men, as Sunni Muslims of the Hanefi school, wore their head hair shaved or closely cropped, sometimes leaving a tuft of hair at the crown. The head was then covered with either a turban or another elaborate head covering that signified the wearer's rank in the state or occupation in society.

---

<sup>7</sup> Turner 1993: 21.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas 1980.

<sup>9</sup> Hershman 1974: 290.

<sup>10</sup> Ritual purity, however, should not be confused with mere hygiene. 'Ritual washing' combines two distinct ideas. Hygiene removes physical dirt from a physical body. Sacred cleansing aims to remove invisible dirt from a symbolically constructed body. Marcus 1992: 74.

<sup>11</sup> Foucault 1978: 139.

The degree of importance the turban, or other headgear, held in a man's life can be measured by the fact that it continued to represent him even in death.<sup>12</sup> The visitor to an Ottoman cemetery is greeted by rows of headstones carved with the appropriate headgear of the deceased individual. A woman's headstone, if not marked with a cap 'such as the women wear', was usually marked with a carved lotus leaf or flowers, each bloom signifying a child.<sup>13</sup> For both sexes their 'crowning glories' were covered by social indicators of their place in society.<sup>14</sup> The control of hair was one of the ways the individual submitted and conformed to a social identity constructed by religion and state.

### **Defining gender and sexuality**

Many psychologists consider that hair stands for sexuality.<sup>15</sup> Psychoanalyst Charles Berg argues that 'nature has biologically or physically established a close connection between libidinal or sexual energy and a growth of hair'.<sup>16</sup> The onset of sexual maturity also brings about the growth of pubic, underarm, and—in the case of men—facial hair. Psychologists make a connection between the hair on one's head and genitalia. The cutting or shaving of head hair in psychological terms sometimes represents castration, or sexual restraint.

The hair of the head thus focuses the dynamic and unstable quality of the frontier between the 'natural' bio-libidinous forces of the inner body and the external sphere of social relations. In this context, hair offers itself as a symbol of the libidinal energies of the self and the never-ending struggle to constrain within acceptable forms their eruption into social space.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that men shave their head hair, or keep it short, is often seen as demonstrating a control over their sexuality and their social selves. In an Ottoman context, sexual restraint in men appears to be more symbolically linked with facial

---

<sup>12</sup> Priests and wardens who tended the *türbes* (mausoleums) of the Turkish sultans in the sixteenth century were required 'to place a freshly-wound turban on the head end of the coffin everyday'. Hans Dernschwam, *Tagebuch einer Reise nach der Konstantinopel und Kleinasien (1553-1555) nach der Urschrift in Fugger-Archiv*, ed. by Franz Babinger, München-Leipzig, 1923.1923: 112, cited in And 1994: 53.

<sup>13</sup> Bon 1996: 143; Cudden 1986: 23; Ayliffe et al, 1997: 150.

<sup>14</sup> The male pilgrim making the Hadj to Mecca is an exception. He goes bareheaded and barefooted while taking his vows. He puts on the *Ihrâm*, consisting of two lengths of white cloth draped around the waist and over the shoulders, to disguise his status in life (the same white cloth may be used as his shroud when he dies). Women are dressed in long white robes with double veils over the head. Antoniou 1981: 99.

<sup>15</sup> Leach 1958: 150.

<sup>16</sup> Berg 1951: 31.

<sup>17</sup> Turner 1993: 18.

hair—for the governing Ottoman elite reproductive rights occurred simultaneously with the right to grow a beard.

Women, on the other hand, generally kept their hair long.<sup>18</sup> One anthropologist suggests that long hair is ‘a symbol of being someway outside of society, or having less to do with it’.<sup>19</sup> A woman’s sexuality, like her hair, is considered to be located within a body potentially beyond social control. This is often interpreted in many cultures as signifying women’s dangerous natures and wanton ways.<sup>20</sup> In the two biblical stories of Judith and Holofernes, and Salome and John the Baptist, we have two women—the ‘good’ woman, Judith, and the ‘bad’ woman Salome—both employing their sexuality to destroy men; both Holofernes and John the Baptist literally lose their heads.<sup>21</sup>

A woman’s long hair can signify her animality. In cultures where a man considers himself endangered by contact with woman, patterns of sexual danger can be seen to express gender hierarchy.<sup>22</sup> Gender differentiation can rest on a culture–nature, mind–body dichotomy. These distinctions are allocated in Christian and Islamic societies according to levels of body control. Sexual differences are evaluated by patriarchal constructions of corporeality. Men’s bodies are regarded as determinate, ‘solid’, bounded and controllable. Male flows, such as seminal fluids, are ‘solidified’ by virtue of their congealing properties of impregnating a woman’s body and producing a child.<sup>23</sup> Women’s bodies are seen as indeterminate. ‘Women’s genitals and breasts

---

<sup>18</sup> While there is not much information available on Ottoman women’s hair during the period of this study, the little there is invariably describes them as having long tresses. Menavino, writing in 1515 says, ‘Turkish women usually have long, beautiful hair worn in braids’. Giovantonio Menavino, *I cinque libri della legge, religione, et vita de’ Turchi et della corte, d’alcune guerre del Gran Turco*, Florence, 1548, p. 86, cited in Kafadar 1993: 257. Two centuries later, Lady Montagu writes: ‘the hair of [Turkish women] hangs at its full length behind, divided into tresses braided with pearl or ribbon, which is always in great quantity’. Montagu 1965: 114-15. cf, Craven 1789: 225.

<sup>19</sup> Hallpike 1969: 261.

<sup>20</sup> There is a conflation of women’s long hair with sexual and life-threatening danger. This is particularly prevalent in the nineteenth century with the revival of the femme fatale. Goethe’s story of Lileth [aka Lilith], who according to Jewish folklore was Adam’s first wife, strangles her mate with her long hair.

<sup>21</sup> The Book of Judith is located in the Book of the Apocrypha in the Old Testament. Judith, a Jewish widow, is described as beautiful, wise and of great faith. In order to save the city of Bethulia from siege by the Assyrians, she enters the enemy camp and pretends to allow herself to be seduced by the Assyrian commander, Holofernes. On retiring to his tent Judith encourages Holofernes to drink himself into a drunken stupor, at which point she beheads him with his own sword. Assisted by her maid, Judith takes the severed head home in a sack and becomes a heroine to her people. Salome also used her sexuality to trick King Herod in to giving her what she wanted: the head of John the Baptist.

<sup>22</sup> Douglas 1980: 3.

<sup>23</sup> Grosz 1994: 199.

are the loci of flows...that are resistant to various cultural overlays.<sup>24</sup> They are ‘fluid’—constantly seeping, bleeding, lactating and absorbing, therefore regarded as uncontrollable. The indeterminacy of the female body is ‘not a fact of nature but a function of the modes of representation that privilege the solid and the determinate over the fluid’.<sup>25</sup>

Long hair is symbolic of this ‘fluid’ state. In its unconfined state hair is considered uncontrollable. In public, conventions dictate that a woman’s hair be covered to control her danger and seductiveness. Concealment is often regarded as ‘a substitute for cutting off the hair’.<sup>26</sup> While the upper-class Ottoman woman veiled her hair, her European sister wore her hair up and confined it in elaborate hairstyles. Only in private could their hair be released to reaffirm their sexuality. Thus the action of a woman letting down her hair is often perceived as a sexual invitation or, alternatively, an act of liberation or defiance. As anthropologist Julie Marcus observes, women’s ‘uncontrolled’ hair ‘represents both their power and their danger and their welcomed and valued sexuality becomes the more firmly woven into their subordination’.<sup>27</sup>

### **Women and the veil**

In the West there is perhaps no symbol more evocative of Islam and of the ‘other’ than the veiled woman. Yet, like many Islamic customs, veiling dates back to a pre-Islamic Near East. The first known reference to its practice is an Assyrian legal text of the thirteenth century BCE where it was restricted to respectable women and prohibited for prostitutes.<sup>28</sup> As well as a sign of control over women’s sexuality the veil became a sign of status. The practice has a chequered history amongst the three monotheistic religions. The Jews adopted it as a symbol of modesty, possibly from the Assyrians when they settled in Babylon. The Christian Scriptures vacillate in their interpretation of it as a symbol of purity or impurity. ‘Witness Genesis 38:15, where in speaking of Tamar, it is said “And when Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot, because she had covered her face”’.<sup>29</sup> Corinthians 11, on the other hand, praises veiling as a virtue.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Grosz 1994: 207.

<sup>25</sup> Grosz 1994: 205.

<sup>26</sup> Cooper 1971: 67.

<sup>27</sup> Marcus 1992: 85.

<sup>28</sup> Keddie 1991: 3.

<sup>29</sup> White 1844: 312-13.

<sup>30</sup> Corinthians 11:2.



Controversy exists as to whether or not veiling of Muslim women was instituted in Mohammed's time. While a chapter in the Koran describes Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a virtuous woman who veiled herself, the Koran does not stipulate that women cover their heads but that 'believing women...should draw their veils over their bosoms'.<sup>31</sup> It would appear that veiling was a custom borrowed from the Byzantines and Persians, and instituted by the Arab Caliphate of Baghdad between the eighth and ninth centuries—the Baghdad of 1001 Arabian Nights.<sup>32</sup>

The Ottoman Turks did not adopt veiling from the outset either. In the mid-fourteenth century the Arab travel writer, Ibn Battuta, recorded that the Turks of Anatolia, although Islamic, did not segregate their women or conceal their faces.<sup>33</sup> Precisely when the Ottomans covered their women is unclear but it would appear to date after the conquest of Constantinople. The Ottomans sought probably to emulate the Byzantines they had defeated and invoke the Golden Age of the Arab caliphate in Baghdad.

Turkish and foreign pictorial works, such as *A woman petitioning for the retrial of her case* (Turkish) and *A public bath and women and children going to the public bath* (Viennese), show that urban Turkish women were veiled in public at least from the sixteenth century, and certainly by the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>34</sup> In the Viennese illustration each woman wears a white scarf tightly wound around her head. Concealing each woman's face is a black *peçe* (veil). The concealment factor of this sort of veil, which has been worn in recent times in Egypt, has, incidentally, been a political issue in Egypt for the last five years. Wearing a veil was recently banned in Egyptian universities on the grounds that male terrorists were able to masquerade as women displaying *hijab* (religious modesty) and not be detected. It was also thought that the *peçe* allowed women to cheat in exams because they could easily get a substitute, a better scholar, to sit an exam in their place.<sup>35</sup> Some traditions do not transfer easily to the lived realities of a modern world!

---

<sup>31</sup> *The Koran Interpreted*, trans. Arthur J. Arberry, London, Oxford University Press, 1964, XIX, p. 303; XXIV, p. 355.

<sup>32</sup> Minai 1981: 27.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn Battuta 1963: 147.

<sup>34</sup> Dengler 1978: 229; Jean Thevenot talks about the variety of coercive measures that enforced the veil in Thevenot 1687: 57. Purity rules as instruments of coercion are discussed by Mary Douglas, in 'Critique and commentary', in Neusner 1977: 140. See also Kafadar 1993: 256; The Turkish miniature is from the *Hünername* (The book of accomplishments) vol 2, 1588, Topkapi Saray Museum (now referred to as TSM) H 1524, illustrated in Kafadar 1993: 195. The Viennese work is from a book on Ottoman history executed by the historian Johannes Lewenklaw, held in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Codex Vindobonensis 8615 Vienna circa 1586, illustrated in And 1994: 243.

<sup>35</sup> *Hürriyet*, 25 July 1999.

Numerous types of head-coverings were worn throughout the centuries by Ottoman women. Nevertheless, '[e]dicts were issued periodically well into the nineteenth century, specifying the type of veil and garment to be worn by women outside their homes'.<sup>36</sup> Attire that contravened the edicts, such as the transparent face veils which appeared in the eighteenth century, were officially condemned. A decree issued in 1751-2 CE (H 1165) 'threatened to hang dressmakers who continued making the forbidden garments'.<sup>37</sup> The implication of these edicts is that women were not easily controlled and sought ways to resist the attempts of the patriarchal societies in which they lived to control their behaviour.

By the middle of the nineteenth century—in Istanbul at least, as paintings by Ottoman and European artists show—the transparent veil finally replaced the all-concealing veil. *Door of the Great Mosque, Bursa*, (n.d.), by the Ottoman artist Osman Hamdi Bey, depicts women with transparent veils (*yashmaks*) and French fashion accessories such as parasols, fans and gloves. A European example, by Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann: *A Turkish Beauty with Her Nurse and Child* 1880, shows the same. The veil was now regarded as a fashion item: a nineteenth-century English traveler, Annie Harvey, extolled the charms of the transparent Stamboulian veil, saying 'no head-dress is so becoming to the female face as the Turkish veil, worn as it is arranged at Constantinople'.<sup>38</sup>

## **Body hair**

It was not just the treatment of head hair which indicated the level of social control exercised over the individual in Ottoman society. The Hanefi branch of Islam enjoins removal of hair from all parts of the body.<sup>39</sup> This included removing hair from all body crevices, even nostrils and ears. It was '*sunnat*, or Islamically recommended, for married women to remove all body hair every twenty days...For men, the recommended time between depilation is forty days'.<sup>40</sup> The ridding of body hair by both men and women, while extremely personal, was also publicly monitored by the fact that depilation occurred for most in the public *hamam* (bath). Hair in the nostrils and ears was plucked out, as was men's underarm hair. Hair removal from other parts of the body, such as legs, was done with a preparation called *nurah* in Arabic, *rusma*

---

<sup>36</sup> A. Afetinan, *The emancipation of the Turkish woman*, Paris, UNESCO, 1962, pp. 31-2, cited in Minai 1981: 44.

<sup>37</sup> Minai 1981: 44.

<sup>38</sup> Harvey 1871: 32.

<sup>39</sup> Mansel 1995: 101.

<sup>40</sup> Brooks 1996: 27.

in Turkish. In appearance *rusma*, an arsenic based depilatory, resembled mud and gave off a pungent acrid smell.<sup>41</sup>

Depilatory activities are depicted in the miniature, *A Scene from a public bath*, from an illustrated history called the *Menakib-i Tevakib*.<sup>42</sup> Two figures in the lower right-hand section of the main bath scene are attending to underarm hair with what appears to be a razor. To the left of them, a man is washing a grey substance, *rusma*, from his arm. In the top right-hand niche, which represents a private cubicle of the bath house, another figure, who looks like he is washing very dirty legs, has also applied *rusma* to remove body hair from his lower legs. This paste was also used sometimes for removing pubic hair but men more often used a razor. A sixteenth-century traveler, Nicolas de Nicolay, records that on his visit to a *hamam*, both razor or paste were available to the bather in order to attend to this task. While a bath attendant assisted in the scrubbing, rubbing and plucking of all the other parts of the body, he observed that

as [for] touching the privy members, they give you a razor, or rather a Psilothre (which they call *rusma*) which is a paste whiche beying layde upon the hearye places doeth forth-with cause the haire to fall out. And of this paste the Turkes both men and women do often use for that they do abhore to weare haire in those places.<sup>43</sup>

Even the sultan is reported as shaving ‘those parts, which are not to be nam’d without immodesty’ alone.<sup>44</sup>

Total nudity was frowned upon by Ottomans. A basic tenet of Hanefite Law under the section of ‘sight and touch’ pronounced it ‘unlawful to look at or touch the private parts except in case of necessity’.<sup>45</sup> It further states that a ‘man may see any part of

---

<sup>41</sup> According to Sir Richard Burton, *rusma* consisted of seven parts quicklime and three parts *zirnik*, or orpiment (an orange to yellow mineral consisting of arsenic trisulphide), and was applied to a perspiring skin which had to be washed off immediately the hair is loosened or it burnt and discoloured the skin. Burton 1964: 253. Dernschwam tells us that the ‘burning effect could be eased by applying oil’. Hans Dernschwam, *Tagebuch einer Reise nach der Konstantinopel und Kleinasien (1553-1555) nach der Urschrift in Fugger-Archiv*, ed. by Franz Babinger, München-Leipzig, 1923: 54-5, cited in And 1994: 251. cf. Thevenot 1687: 32, who also writes that *rusma* is sold in such great quantities in Turkey ‘that the Custom of it yields the Grand Signor a considerable Revenue’.

<sup>42</sup> *Menakib-i Tevakib*, New York Morgan Library no. M466, c. 1600. Reproduced in *Turkish miniature painting: the Ottoman Period*, Istanbul: Dost Publications, 1987: 75.

<sup>43</sup> Nicolay 1585: 59.

<sup>44</sup> Tavernier 1677: 43.

<sup>45</sup> This ‘applies to doctors, to the surgeons who perform the circumcision of boys and those who perform the excision of girls, to midwives and to the physicians who administer clysters. None of these specialists may, however, transgress the bounds of necessity.’. Abu Bakr Efendi 1971: 170. Abu Bakr Efendi’s text is a close copy of ‘the *Multaq’a L-Abhur of Muhammad B. Ibrahim ul -Halabi*, the most recent authoritative elementary handbook of the Hanafite School of Law

another man's body, as also a Muslim woman may see the body of another Muslim woman except the part between the navel and the knees'.<sup>46</sup> Miniatures depicting men in the baths, such as *Scene from a Public Bath*<sup>47</sup> show the bathers observing this injunction. *Pestemals* (bath towels) cover their bodies from waist to knee. There is one exception: the top right-hand figure in the *Scene from a public bath* miniature stands naked, but side on; his genitals are not visible. As he is also alone in a separate cubicle reserved for private use he cannot be observed by others.<sup>48</sup>

Ottoman miniatures from a later period depicting women at the *hamam* are less discreet.<sup>49</sup> *Scene of women in the hamam* show the depilated pudenda of two women in a group setting.<sup>50</sup> *Woman Bathing* by the eighteenth century master painter, Abdullah Bukhari, an artist renowned for his erotic vignettes, also reveals the bare pudendum of his female *baigneuse* by draping her *pestemal* over her thighs.<sup>51</sup> Portraying women's genitalia in this way further conveys the notion that their sexuality is uncontrollable.<sup>52</sup>

As a rule women's pubic hair was not removed by the shaving method. Burton observes: 'the bushy "veil of nature" in women is always removed by depilatories and vellication'.<sup>53</sup> To reduce hair growth and avoid the rough stubbly regrowth of shaved hair, women were more likely to have used either *rusma* or another paste known as *agda* as a depilatory. *Agda* is a simple candy-like paste of lemon juice and sugar which is rolled on by hand until the hair adheres to it and can be pulled out. This method, which is a lot like waxing, also leaves the depilated area soft and silky to

---

which has been in...school use throughout the Turkish Empire from the sixteenth century onwards...Abu Bakr used it in his teachings of the Cape Malays in the nineteenth century. Abu Bakr Efendi 1971: vii.

<sup>46</sup> Abu Bakr Efendi 1971: 170.

<sup>47</sup> See also *Bath attendants at a bath in Topkapi Palace*; illustrated by Osman, in Seyyid Lokman's *Hünername*, (The book of accomplishments) vol 2, 1588, fol. 148r TSM H 1524. Reproduced in And 1987: 62.

<sup>48</sup> cf Thevenot 1687: 31-2.

<sup>49</sup> An earlier miniature entitled 'Indoor hamam', from No. 4, Album c. 1620-2, (1928-3-23-046, British Museum), also depicts a woman bather unclothed except for a towel over her knees. For a description, see Titley 1981: 2.

<sup>50</sup> From Fazil Hüseyin's *Zenanname* (The book of women), 1793 Istanbul University Library (IÜK) T5502. Reproduced in And 1987: 93.

<sup>51</sup> Album leaf signed by Abdullah Bukhari, Istanbul, and dated A.H. 1154 (1744-2) TSM Y.Y. 1043 A reproduction of this work is in Rogers 1986: 162.

<sup>52</sup> Although nudes exist in Islamic painting traditions, they are not common. Bukhari, as his name suggests, may have originally come from Bukhara in Central Asia. Emel Esin, *Turkish miniature painting*, Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo, Charles E. Tuttle, 1960: 6. His pear-shaped females—a preferred female form in the East—were possibly influenced by titillating figure-studies popular in Isfahan during the mid-seventeenth century. See Rogers 1986: 255.

<sup>53</sup> Burton 1964: 253.

touch. This practice, if begun at puberty and faithfully observed, eventually reduces hair growth to the point where little body hair remains. While this custom is waning in Turkey today, the pre-nuptial rites for both bride and groom still require them to remove all body hair; this is still done in segregated parties at the *hamam* before the wedding.

What prompted the Hanefite tradition of total body depilation remains unclear. 'Rituals and practices designed to cleanse or purify the body may serve', as Elizabeth Grosz suggests, 'as metaphors for processes of cultural homogeneity'.<sup>54</sup> Bassano de Zara, an Italian who resided in Turkey in the 1530s, wrote the Turks considered it a sin to have hair on their private parts.<sup>55</sup> He also thought the depilation of the pubic area was done so that Turkish women could more easily decoratively dye with henna this region and four fingers length above it.<sup>56</sup> Meanings attributed to earlier precedents of women depilating their pubes—eg Greek women in the fifth century BCE—have provoked arguments among scholars. Some propose that depilation was done to allay men's phobias relating to pubic hair. Others argue that 'literary evidence makes it clear that the point of this [custom] was to increase [women's] sexual attractiveness'.<sup>57</sup> Ottoman practice in general suggests that body hair, while not impure in itself, concealed or trapped impurities.<sup>58</sup> Its removal was necessary to restore ritual purity and social stability.

### **The long and the short of male head hair**

The removal of hair from their bodies was not all that was required of the Ottoman male: Turkish men also shaved their heads. A seventeenth-century traveller, Jean Thevenot, noting this custom, wrote: 'The Turks shave their heads and think it strange that the *Francks* suffer their Hair to grow; for they say that the Devil nestles in it'.<sup>59</sup> The Ottoman custom of shaving the head appears to have its origins in early Islamic lore. The seventeenth-century Ottoman chronicler, Evliya Çelibî, writing of this custom tells us that the

---

<sup>54</sup> Grosz 1994: 193.

<sup>55</sup> Luigi Bassano de Zara, *I Costumi et i modi particolari de la vita de Turchi*, Rome, 1545: 2–4, cited in Penzer 1967: 217. It has been suggested that South American Indians, who also practised total body depilation, did so because they 'considered brute creation so inferior to [themselves] that [they] thought it degrading to resemble an animal in any way, even in hairiness'. Cooper 1971: 86.

<sup>56</sup> Luigi Bassano de Zara, cited in Cooper 1971: 85.

<sup>57</sup> P.E. Slater, *The glory of Hera*, Boston 1968: 12–13, argues the case for genital hair phobia. This is cited in Kilmer 1982: 104–12, who argues the case for increased sexual attractiveness.

<sup>58</sup> While human hair is considered 'pure', according to an Islamic tradition, under every hair is major pollution and on every skin is major pollution. Abu Bakr Efendi 1971: 12, 20.

<sup>59</sup> Thevenot 1687: 30. Following Byzantine practice, the term 'Francks' refers to Europeans.

Prophet having conquered Mecca, and his principal antagonists having embraced Islam...ordered his disciple Selman Pak, the very same day, to shave his head. <sup>60</sup>

Al-Tabari, 'one of the great names of Muslim religious history', explains that 'the prophet ordered the Muslims to shave their heads and put themselves in a state of penitence'.<sup>61</sup> This custom was presumably adopted by the Turks when they adopted Sunni Hanefi codifications of the law. The early Ottoman Turks wrapped elaborately folded turbans over their shaved heads to distinguish themselves from non-Moslems. After conquering Constantinople, they also adopted a decorated Byzantine skull-cap called the *tarboosh*, but covered it with a turban to signify 'right of conquest'.<sup>62</sup>

In contrast to European custom, it was considered an affront to uncover the head; salutations were made by bowing and placing the left hand on the right side of the chest. The Moslem Ottoman Turks considered the European custom of doffing one's hat absurd; their perception of this mode of greeting is captured in a common Ottoman mode of abuse recorded by a nineteenth-century traveller: 'May your fatigued and hated soul, when it arrives in purgatory, find no more rest than a Giaour's [unbeliever] hat enjoys on earth'.<sup>63</sup> The turban signified, according to a tradition ascribed to the Prophet, 'the barrier between unbelief and the Faith'.<sup>64</sup>

Travellers' accounts and depictions of the cropped and shaven heads of male bathers in the *hamams*, apparent in Ottoman miniatures, support the likelihood of head shaving being a constant practice, at least among those living in Istanbul, until the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>65</sup> It was still a common practice well into the middle of this century, as popular Turkish author, Aziz Nesin, recalls. He observes that, as a child, he was told by his father that

Moslems don't wear long hair; infidels wear long hair. And if children let their hair grow, all their strength goes to hair—they don't grow. There should be no hair on a boy. A man doesn't let his hair grow—it's a disgrace.

---

<sup>60</sup> Çelibi 1846–50: 215.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-umam wa al-muluk*, Beirut, Dar al-Fikr, vol. 3, 1979: 80, cited in Mernissi 1991: 104. This order was made after the treaty of Hudaibiyya where Mohammed signed a truce with the Meccans in ACE. 628, year 6 of the Hejira. The description of Al-Tabari is made by Mernissi 1991: 8.

<sup>62</sup> Stewart 1966: 107.

<sup>63</sup> Harvey 1871: 19.

<sup>64</sup> Lewis 1995: 4.

<sup>65</sup> Examples of miniatures are *Bath attendants at a bath in Topkapi Palace; Scene from a public bath; Men bathing in a thermal pool* in the album of *Ahmet I*, 17th century, TSM B 408; Reproduced in And 1987: 62, 75, 133; *The men's bathhouse*, anon. c. 1810, The Stratford Canning collection in the Searight Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum. A reproduction of this work is in Montagu 1988: 85.

Hair is just for women. If a woman cuts her hair, or a man lets his grow, they sin.<sup>66</sup>

For this reason Nesin's hair was always cut with no. 0 clippers.

In contemporary Turkey, head hair is usually shaved only by those wishing to strengthen the hair. Many parents shave their children's hair in the belief that it will grow back stronger and thicker. Men whose hair is thinning or balding sometimes shave their heads for the same reason.

The tuft of hair that was sometimes left on the crown of the head symbolised, according to the Ottoman chronicler, Evliya Çelibî, 'the crown of happiness'.<sup>67</sup> He was even given an artificial tuft to wear while he was a page in the palace. Burton writes that the topknot was supposed to be left to provide a handle for drawing the wearer into Paradise, and was, at the time of his writing in the mid-nineteenth century, usually worn by boys and no longer fashionable amongst adults.<sup>68</sup> However, he tells us, if he was rightly informed, that Abu Hanifah (from whom the Hanefite orthodoxy of the Ottomans is derived) 'wrote a treatise on the Shushah, or long lock growing from the Nasiyah (head-poll) [stating it was] also a precaution lest the decapitated Moslem's mouth be defiled by an impure hand'.<sup>69</sup> In other words, it also served as a handle for an infidel holding the head of the Muslim about to be decapitated, or carrying a decapitated head. Burton also suggests that 'the Turks may have learned this practice [of growing a topknot] from the Chinese and introduced it into Baghdad'.<sup>70</sup>

## Facial hair

While the head hair was cropped, the facial hair of Ottoman males was worn long. Beards were grown only by 'mature' males. But while the criterion of maturity under Islamic law is fixed for both males and females at puberty, this was not necessarily the yardstick used by the Ottoman court.<sup>71</sup> 'Maturity' for the governing elite did not necessarily equate with a physical maturity and the ability to grow a beard; it was

---

<sup>66</sup> Nesin 1977: 59.

<sup>67</sup> Çelibî 1846–50: 133.

<sup>68</sup> Burton 1964: 269.

<sup>69</sup> Burton 1964: 269.

<sup>70</sup> Burton 1964: 270.

<sup>71</sup> Peirce 1993: 19. 'According to the *fetvas* of Ebussuud, the leading Ottoman juriconsul of the sixteenth century, if there were clear signs of puberty, it could begin as early as twelve years of age; in the absence of physical changes, it began at eighteen for males and seventeen for females.' *Ebussuûd Efendi Fetvalari I Shiginda 16. Asir Türk Hayati*, ed. M.E. Düzdag, Istanbul, 1983: 33, cited in Peirce 1993: 293, f. 19.

calculated by an understanding of the political maturity achieved through the completion of a training period. The right to father children was also granted at this time. From the reign of the third Ottoman sultan, Murad I, subordination of princes to the father's authority was publicly displayed by denying them the right to grow beards. (Princes were not, however, denied reproductive rights.) Even when princes were dispatched to be trained in provincial regions—as was Ottoman practice before the second half of the sixteenth century—they were required to send their shaved whiskers to the capital in deference to the sultan.<sup>72</sup> Those trained in the Seraglio as pages, *iç oglans*, similarly were not permitted to grow beards in deference to the sultan and their training status. Pages were required to pass through four schools of training under the tutelage of the white eunuchs. On entering the fourth school, they were permitted to have locks of hair from their temples hanging below their ears. Thomas Dallam, who was sent to the Ottoman court to install an organ—a present from Elizabeth I—described these ‘principall padgis’ as having ‘their heades...shaven, savinge that behinde Their ears did hange a locke of hare like a squirel’s taile, theire beardes shaven, all savinge theire uper lips’.<sup>73</sup> Another traveller, Robert Withers, explains the lock of hair was a ‘signe that they are the next [in rank], which are capable of the preferment of coming into the King’s chamber’.<sup>74</sup> At the end of their rigorous palace training, the pages who pleased the sultan and demonstrated an ability for further service were released from the palace to take up positions in the Ottoman government. Withers writes that pages ‘are most commonly of five and thirty, or forty years of age, before they are sent abroad: and because they come out

---

<sup>72</sup> See Peirce 1993: 20. Peirce cites Deshayes de Courmenin, *Voyage de Levant, fait par le commandement du roy en l’année 1621*, Paris, 1629: 176; Mehmed Zeki Pakalin, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü*, vol. 3, Istanbul, 1946–54: 331. Peirce notes that ‘a miniature illustration in the *Süleymanname* by Arifi, the court historiographer of Süleyman’s reign, indicates an exception to this rule: in a scene in which Süleyman converses with his eldest son, Mustafa, the prince has a beard’. Atıl 1986: plate 48, see ch. 3., fig 3-1, of this volume. Peirce notes that ‘Süleyman’s father, Selim I, appears to have been an exception to the customary growing of a beard by the sultans, or so at least miniature representations of him suggest’. Peirce 1993: 293, f. 21. However, another anomaly exists. The miniature of *Süleyman in the changing room of the bath in the third court*, in Seyyit Lokman’s *Hünernâme* (The book of accomplishments) vol.2, ca. 1588, fol. 147v, TSM H 1524, shows a young Süleyman without a beard too. As most depictions of Süleyman depict him with a beard perhaps in this miniature it is his youth that explains the omission.

<sup>73</sup> Dallam 1964: 69. Dallam went to Constantinople to install an organ, a present from Queen Elizabeth to Sultan Mehmed III.

<sup>74</sup> Withers 1653: 77. The pages in attendance to Süleyman the Magnificent in the miniature of *Süleyman in the changing room of the bath in the third court* are depicted with these locks. In Seyyit Lokman’s *Hünernâme* (The book of accomplishments) vol. 2, ca. 1588, fol. 147v, TSM H 1524. Reproduced in Necipoglu 1991: 130, fig. 75. (Coincidentally, or possibly because of the same symbolic association of a training period being completed, brides before the marriage wore a lock of hair that was left to curl from each temple. Davis 1986: 74.



of the seraglio with their beards shaven, they are fain to stay within doors, for some dayes to let them grow, that they may be fit to come amongst other great men'.<sup>75</sup>

The significance of a beard has its roots in Muslim law and Turkish folklore.<sup>76</sup> 'The *Sunnat*, or practice of the Prophet, was to wear the beard not longer than one hand and two fingers' breadth.'<sup>77</sup> Antione Galland observed that

though the Mahometans, especially married Men, suffer their Beards to grow...they take great care to have it Shav'd down about their Cheeks and round their Face, and they cut their Beard with Scissors, So that one Hair may not be longer than another.<sup>78</sup>

It is believed that the Prophet's beard was shaved from him after his death by his favourite barber. 'It is said to be a brown beard, three inches long and without grey hairs.'<sup>79</sup> Portions of the Prophet's beard, considered an Islamic holy relic, have turned up in a number of places. The hairs from the beard housed at Topkapi Palace were taken from Cairo in 1517 by Sultan Selim I.<sup>80</sup> Beards therefore have a religious significance. Growing a beard to most Muslim men is *sunnat*—'a desirable act that expresses humility and emulates the prophet'.<sup>81</sup> In Ottoman times, beards were held in such high esteem that men would frequently take an oath on their beard.<sup>82</sup> Among Orthodox Muslims to swear by the beard of the prophet was, and still is, the greatest oath of all.<sup>83</sup>

The head and facial hair rituals of Ottoman men can be clearly linked to Islamic and Ottoman laws. Their shaved heads collectively and individually signified their allegiance to Allah and their penitence. Turbans and other head coverings proclaimed them as Muslims as well as indicating publicly the ranks and roles the individual held in Ottoman society. Likewise, the wearing of beards can be traced to Sunnite Islamic practice. Some hair practices, such as the wearing of the topknot, long side locks and the control over who was allowed to wear a beard, may have been introduced by the Ottomans as a means to stratify power. Strict observance of these hair customs demonstrated the cohesion and stability of the Ottoman state.

---

<sup>75</sup> Withers 1653: 85.

<sup>76</sup> Marcus 1992: 84.

<sup>77</sup> Burton 1964: 270.

<sup>78</sup> Galland 1695: 24.

<sup>79</sup> Cudden 1986: 188.

<sup>80</sup> Some hairs from the beard of the prophet Muhammed (*Lihye-i Saadet*) are housed in the Chamber of The Sacred Relics at the Topkapi Palace Museum. An illustration of this relic is in İlhan Akshit *The Topkapi Palace*, Istanbul, Akshit, Kültür Turizm Sanat Ajans, 1994: 76.

<sup>81</sup> Brooks 1996: 38.

<sup>82</sup> Thevenot 1687: 30; Marcus 1992: 85; c.f. Lane 1836: 29. Swearing oaths on beards has a long history. It was also an ancient Babylonian custom, see Cooper 1971: 41.

<sup>83</sup> Cooper 1971: 193.

## The Tanzimat reforms

By the nineteenth century the Ottoman state was anything but stable or cohesive. Years of internal strife had cost the empire dearly. The Ottoman Empire was regarded as ‘the sick dog of Europe’, and bit by bit Ottoman territorial holdings were lost to nationalist causes which were changing the face of Europe. In an attempt to reinvent itself the state, during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, introduced many new Westernized measures to arrest the disintegration of the empire and enable the Turks to compete in this new international arena. Among the changes were new hair and headdress practices.

Mahmud discouraged the wearing of long beards and introduced significant changes of costume. He laid down for his new army European-style tunics and breeches, and boots. Twenty years earlier such a break with sartorial tradition had led directly to the mutiny which deposed Selim III.<sup>84</sup>

Changes to traditional headdress practices, because of their religious implications, were harder to implement. Nevertheless, in 1828, with the consent of the *ulema*, the men of religion, the turban was banned in favour of the cylindrical, tasselled hat called a *fez*. This red felt beret, of North African origin, was adopted by civilians as well as soldiers.<sup>85</sup> The turban was now confined to the clerical class of the *ulema*.

## The Turkish Republic

Ultimately, the Ottoman state was unable to reform and reinvent itself—it existed in name only after the end of World War 1. In 1923 the Turkish Republic was proclaimed, with Mustafa Kemal—later known as Atatürk, Father of the Turks—as its first president. A secularized Turkish nationalism, or Pan-Turanianism—which sought to create an identity based on the Turk’s early Central Asian ancestry—replaced Ottoman Islamic ideology, which was now regarded as a foreign and usurping Arabic overlay on Turkish identity.<sup>86</sup>

Under Atatürk’s presidency, the most significant changes were those made to language. Virtually overnight the Arabic script was replaced by a Latin script, and the process of purging Arabic and Persian words from the language used within the new republic began.

---

<sup>84</sup> Kinross 1977: 466.

<sup>85</sup> Lewis 1974: 43. The *fez* takes its name from a city in Morocco where it was invented, probably in the sixteenth century.

<sup>86</sup> Atatürk’s mentor for this ideology was Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), a professor of sociology at the University of Istanbul.

As with other major phases in the country's history Turkish headgear changed again with the formation of the Turkish Republic. The *fez*, now interpreted as a symbol of reaction, was banned in favour of the hat. Its abolition generated great resentment. For most Turks at the time, 'to put on a hat' implied a desertion of Islam; for some it was perceived to signify entry into the service of a foreign power.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, Atatürk became the hat's champion. In a speech, presented in one of the most conservative regions of Anatolia, he said:

A civilized, international dress is worthy and appropriate for our nation, and we will wear it. Boots or shoes on our feet, trousers on our legs, shirt and tie, jacket and waistcoat—and of course, to complete these, a cover with a brim on our heads. I wish to say this openly. The name of this head covering is 'hat'.<sup>88</sup>

Trilbies, cloth caps, panamas and boaters—any hat with a rim—were now sported by Turkish men.

It is still law in Turkey that, except for the minister of religion, one cannot wear a rimless hat, the normal headgear of Muslims in public. (The headgear must be rimless in order to allow the touching of the forehead to the ground in prayer.)<sup>89</sup>

The veil and beards—which had been worn by few, if any, of the reforming Turkish leaders since the late nineteenth century—were also discouraged in modern Turkey because of their religious significance. These changes symbolised the secularisation and Westernisation of the new republic.<sup>90</sup> Throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, beards have mainly be worn by Turkish pilgrims who, after travelling to Mecca, retained them upon their return.<sup>91</sup>

### **Contemporary hair practices**

Since the 1980s, issues surrounding headdress and hair have again surfaced in Turkey. Used as political signifiers, these practices have invariably incited the government into action. In the 1980s the headscarf dispute—which continues today—erupted. This dispute centred around the rights of female university students, mainly

---

<sup>87</sup> Lewis 1995: 102. The *fez* was banned on 25 October 1925.

<sup>88</sup> Stewart 1966: 75.

<sup>89</sup> Glassé 1989: 104.

<sup>90</sup> Beards had been on the wane even before the end of the Ottoman Empire but their symbolism was still part of the ceremonial. A copy of the Koran and the *sakal-i Serif* (blessed hairs from the Prophet's beard) stood on the rostrum of Atatürk's first National Assembly (1920), Halman 1981: 153; Barber 1977: 271.

<sup>91</sup> Marcus 1992: 84-5.

in Istanbul, to attend classes with their hair covered. In the early 1980s, Turkish academics were forbidden to wear beards because of their left-wing connotations. As a result there was a mass exodus of Turkish intellectuals who refused to comply with this directive. They not only left the universities—many left the country. In 1998, it was reported that a government directive forbidding university students from growing beards because of their religious connotations was about to be issued.<sup>92</sup>

While these government directives—as was the case with the Egyptian example cited earlier—were all issued to control political fragmentation in the universities, the government is fighting an uphill battle controlling the politics of the ubiquitous Turkish moustache. An overview of at some of the shapes and meanings of the present day Turkish moustache demonstrates the complexities involved. An extreme nationalist moustache has drooping sides and reveals the upper lip clearly. This moustache emerged in the 1970s. Some claim its shape resembles an M, and stands for *Milliyetçi*, or nationalist. Regarded as a right-wing symbol, this moustache has its origins in an old Central Asian Turkic tradition. Part of the political agenda for the extreme nationalist party, who are currently the second biggest party in the Turkish parliament, is the adoption of those qualities associated with Turkish warriors of old—courage and bravery and military prowess—and a desire to unite all Turkic territories under the one banner. This links back to the Pan-Turanianism ideology from the turn of the century.

Since the 1970s, a leftist's moustache has been styled to resemble Stalin's moustache. It is straight and always covers the upper lip. There was also, in the early 1970s, a version worn by radical students which was M-shaped in order to declare their allegiance to Marx. It was often accompanied with L-shaped sideburns, to underline an allegiance to Lenin.<sup>93</sup> This 'badge' was copied from the facial hair worn by radical European students during and since the 1969 Sorbonne uprising. Political cartoons use the shapes of moustaches to symbolise which side of the political fence the wearer belongs.

A political religious moustache is different again. This moustache takes cleanliness as its guiding principle. It is carefully groomed. It does not cover the upper lip nor does it droop down the sides. Both the nostrils and mouth must be free of hair. This moustache differs from that of an overtly politicised traditional mosque-Muslim in

---

<sup>92</sup> Morris 1998: 8.

<sup>93</sup> Morris 1998: 8.

that the latter wears a clipped beard with the moustache. An extremely devout Muslim often adds emphasis to his affiliation by wearing traditional Islamic dress.

Alternatively, a Turk may choose not to wear a moustache. This may mean the wearer has no strong political affiliation whatsoever, or is not sure of his affiliation. Or it could mean that he is connected to the military, who are prohibited from wearing any facial hair at all. Alternatively, he may belong to the new breed of political intellectuals who do not want to be labelled by any identifying insignia. Perhaps the globalisation process is putting an end to reading meaning into the hair practices of the Turks—which is not to say, of course, that their old affiliations and allegiances no longer exist. Likewise, it is hard to tell if the two-day-old growth on a man's face is part of the current global fashion for designer stubble, or the result of shaving only twice a week—a practice observed by many Turkish men.

If you think it is confusing to decipher the many meanings associated with wearing a moustache in contemporary Turkey, the situation is further complicated by considering some meanings attributed to wearing a veil. The place of woman has been pivotal in the modernising process in modern Turkey. The 'woman question' of nineteenth century Europe has become the problem of twentieth century Islamic societies.

In the Islamic world there are four commonly held viewpoints—primarily male—about the veil as a symbolic structure in a Muslim society. The veil, for the traditional Muslim man symbolises feminine modesty as well as representing woman as an amoral sexual temptation and threat to men. For the man who has assimilated to Western modernism, the practice is seen as a symbol of the backwardness and degradation of women. Muslim reformist men place emphasis on the function of the veil as a symbol of respect and freedom, as well as protection from unwelcome advances. For the revolutionary nationalist man, it is a symbol of cultural separateness and integrity.<sup>94</sup>

In contrast, Western feminist discourse nearly unanimously regards the veil as a symbol of oppression and backwardness of Islamic societies. This sentiment is shared by most Western onlookers. Oppression of women is one excuse in the litany of complaints raised whenever Turkey's application to join the European Union is addressed.<sup>95</sup> However, the pronouncement that 'Muslims did not belong in Europe',

---

<sup>94</sup> Boals 1976: 204.

<sup>95</sup> Stone 1999: 38.

made at a recent meeting of the European Christian Democrats in Brussels,<sup>96</sup> suggests that the issue of whether women are veiled or not will actually have little bearing on the probable outcome of Turkey being excluded from the European Union well into the foreseeable future at any rate.

So what is the place of an educated woman who chooses to be covered in a society that has aspired to be both Westernised and modern? What and who does she represent? To answer this question, we need to return to the question raised by the parliamentary debate over the ‘covered’ female politician.<sup>97</sup> Where and what is her place?

Women members of parliament is not an issue in contemporary Turkey. Turkish women were granted political rights in 1934 (well before French women!). A woman have served as the prime minister of Turkey in recent times .<sup>98</sup>

Nor does the problem lie exclusively with the scarf. Although Turkey discouraged the wearing of headscarves after the secular nation state was formed, the practice was never outlawed.<sup>99</sup> The problem is the conjunction of the scarf—a symbol of Islam—and the secular parliament. As one female MP put it, a covered female politician ‘cannot be an emblem of Turkish women’.<sup>100</sup>

For many contemporary Turks, the problem also lies with the disjunction of a covered woman holding any public position. As a Turkish sociologist has written recently, ‘the most cherished master-narrative in Turkey relating education and modernization to women’s emancipation is contested by educated Islamist women’.<sup>101</sup> In present-day Turkey, the veiling of an educated woman is seen as paradoxical. They are not supposed to go together. From the birth of the republic until the 1980s, women who covered in Turkey were generally from traditional village backgrounds with little or no education. Veiled women were not urban, modern or educated. Women who are covering in Turkey today are now often all three. The increasing visibility of the

---

<sup>96</sup> Stone 1999: 38.

<sup>97</sup> In Turkish there is a special word signifying to cover oneself: örtünmek.

<sup>98</sup> Tansu Çiller, leader of the DYP (Dogru Yol Partesi, the Right Way Party) was Prime Minister in 1993–95 and again in a coalition government, formed in 1996–7. Unfortunately, Çiller is far from an uplifting role-model. A story circulated by *Associated Press* in September 1996 listed Çiller among the world’s ten most corrupt politicians of the 1990s. See Ayliffe 1997: 774.

<sup>99</sup> Özdalga 1998:39. Although no laws exist prohibiting the use of the veil, there have been various kinds of regulations related to clothing, eg the statutes pertaining to civil servants. Cf. Lewis 1995: 104.

<sup>100</sup> Kinzer 1999b: 10.

<sup>101</sup> Göle 1996: 2.

image of the educated, militant-Muslim woman in places occupied by Westernised elites signifies a challenge to the old elites as much as it signifies the opposition between the West and Islam.<sup>102</sup> The cherished concept of ‘universal civilisation’ held by Turkish reformist elites, which came to be synonymous with Western European culture and the ‘premise that traditions and religion disappear with the advent of modernity’, once considered ‘an evolutionary progression that is often taken as a natural consequence of secular scientific education’,<sup>103</sup> is no longer credible.

So who are veiling? Although most veiled women students come from Anatolian families, still practicing Islam in its traditional forms, they differ significantly from their parents—not only because of their higher educational level, but more importantly because they reject traditional interpretations of Islam. They embody the urban, educated, and militant new countenance of Islam in Turkish society. They claim old traditions of Islam are based on hearsay, whilst theirs is based on inquiry and going to the sources.<sup>104</sup>

Recent articles suggest that the socio-economic backgrounds of women covering are now more diverse. Women from all walks of life are veiling for a range of reasons and in spite of fierce opposition from family and friends. Ironically, in the past it was the upper and middle class Ottoman woman who were veiled for Islamic ideals, not the Turkish peasant woman who needed to have her movements unrestricted in order to toil in the fields, as she still does. The headscarf she wears probably originated for pragmatic reasons—such as keeping the sun off her and keeping her hair out of the way so she could work efficiently—as much as from Islamic traditions. Even when a daughter of a covered village woman wears a veil she will often receive opposition from her family. If the daughter has been educated it is hoped she will get a job that does not require back-breaking labour, and therefore a veil is unnecessary.

What are the new breed of Turkish Islamic women rejecting? The veiling of women in many Islamic communities has in recent history more often than not been used to represent individually and collectively that the woman/community is not Western—indeed, it often underlines that the wearer is emphatically anti-Western. Is this because the modern Western cultural imperialism failed to deliver all it promised? Can the West claim to have solved ‘the woman question’? In patriarchal societies what guarantees are there that Western feminism offers Islamic women anything

---

<sup>102</sup> Göle 1996: 98.

<sup>103</sup> Göle 1996: 2–3.

<sup>104</sup> Göle 1996: 88.

better than what they hold to be the ideal form of gender relations promised by Islam?<sup>105</sup>

A case in point is the story told by one young Turkish woman in an article featuring the stories of Turkish women who choose to veil themselves. A former model, she explains to the reader that among her reasons for covering was that she had ‘been among women with no character who wear jewellery on their flesh. My God chose and rescued me’.<sup>106</sup> A ‘before-and-after’ shot of the woman accompanied the article. The ‘before’ picture showed a young woman modelling lacy underwear on a catwalk. Complete with stockings and suspender belt, her long legs disappear off the page. The ‘after’ shot, contained in a square insert, depicted a head and shoulder shot of the same young woman after she had veiled. The juxtaposition of the two images is confronting. They challenge the viewer to consider who is more emancipated: the woman whose body is exposed, or the woman whose body is covered?

The paradox is similarly highlighted in a story that circulated the Medina of Algiers around the time of the Algerian War of Independence.

The story goes that there was once an old Arab who arrived in a European city straight from the wilds of his own land and was amazed at the pictures of women he saw everywhere: on the films, on shoe boxes, on cheese cartons—on everything that was for sale. He left town the same day, or so they say, greatly pitying the women who lived there; in his simplicity he believed that some terrible nameless form of punishment lay behind this exploitation of their likeness.<sup>107</sup>

Clearly the dilemmas surrounding the perceptions of the rights of women in both Eastern and Western societies are neither straightforward nor easily resolved.

## **Conclusion**

The study of hair practices in Turkish society—whether it is removed, covered or exposed—provides a valuable litmus test in charting changes in national identity and gender relations. Hair, and by extension the body, is an important site for studying and understanding the moral and social order of a community. How it is to be worn and cut or covered has a powerful impact on the lives of individuals. Under the Ottomans, Islamic notions of purity and pollution dictated how the body—and hair on the body—was controlled and regulated. Religious affiliation, gender and social

---

<sup>105</sup> Watson 1994: 155.

<sup>106</sup> Gülay Pinarbashi cited in Memecan 1995: 85.

<sup>107</sup> Djébar 1961: 5.



status were displayed publicly on the body's surface. As Ottoman hair practices reveal, these were harnessed by the state as a means of maintaining social order. The control of hair and headdress under the republic serves similar purposes. Whatever way you cut it, for Turks hair matters!

## Bibliography

- Abu Bakr Efendi, *The religious duties of Islam as taught and explained by Abu Bakr Efendi*, ed. Mia Brandel-Syrier, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971.
- Akshit, İlhan *The Topkapi Palace*, Istanbul: Akshit Kültür Turizm Sanat Ajans, 1994.
- And, Metin, *Istanbul in the sixteenth century: the city, the palace, daily life*, Istanbul: Akbank Culture and Art Publication: 59, 1994.
- And, Metin, *Turkish Miniature Painting: The Ottoman Period*, Istanbul: Dost Publications, 1987.
- Antoniou, Jim, *Islamic cities and conservation*, Geneva: Unesco, 1981.
- Atil, Esin, *Süleymanname: The illustrated history of Süleyman the Magnificent*, Washington and New York: National Gallery of Art, Washington & Harry N. Abrams, 1986.
- Ayliffe, Rosie, et al, *Turkey: the rough guide*, London: Penguin, 1997.
- Barber, Noel, *Lords of the golden horn*, London: Macmillan, 1977.
- Berg, Charles, *The unconscious significance of hair*, Washington DC: Guild Press, 1951.
- Boals, Kay, 'The politics of cultural liberation: male-female relations in Algeria', in *Liberating women's history, theoretical and critical essays*, ed. Berenice A. Carroll, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976.
- Bon, Ottaviano, *The sultan's seraglio: an intimate portrait of life at the Ottoman court*, London: Saqi Books, 1996.
- Brooks, Geraldine, *Nine parts of desire: the hidden world of Islamic women*, New York: Anchor Books, 1996.
- Burton, Sir Richard, *Love, war and fancy: the social and sexual customs of the East*, ed. Dr Kenneth Walker, London: William Kimber, 1964.
- Çelibi, Evliya Effendi, *Narrative of travels in Europe, Asia & Africa*, vol. 1, tr. J. von Hammer, London: William H. Allen & Co., 1846–50.
- Cooper, Wendy, *Hair: sex, society, symbolism*, New York: Stein and Day, 1971.
- Craven, Lady Elizabeth, *A journey through the Crimea to Constantinople*, London: G.G.J. & J. Robinson, 1789.
- Cudden, J.A., *The owl's watchsong*, London: Century Hutchinson, 1986.
- Dallam, Thomas, 'The diary of Master Thomas Dallam 1599–1600', *Early voyages and travels in the Levant*, ed., J. T. Bent, New York: Burt Franklin, 1964.
- Davis, Fanny *The Ottoman lady: a social history from 1718–1918*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Dengler, Ian, 'Turkish women in the Ottoman Empire', in *Women in the Muslim world*, ed. Lois Beck & Nikki Keddie, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978.
- Djebar, Assia, *Women of Islam*, London: André Deutsch, 1961.
- Douglas, Mary, 'Critique and commentary', in Jacob Neusner's *The idea of purity in Ancient Judaism*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977.
- Douglas, Mary, *Purity and danger: an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.
- Esin, Emel, *Turkish miniature painting*, Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1960.
- Evliya Effendi Çelibi, *Narrative of travels in Europe, Asia & Africa*, vol. 1, tr. J. von Hammer, London: William H. Allen & Co. 1846–50.
- Foucault, Michel, *The history of sexuality*, vol. 1, tr. Robert Hurley, London: Allen Lane, 1978.
- Galland, Antoine, *The remarkable sayings, apothegms and maxims of the Eastern nations abstracted and translated out of their books written in the Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages with remarks*, London: Richard Baldwin, 1695.
- Glassé, Cyril, *The concise encyclopedia of Islam*, London: Stacey International, 1989.
- Göle, Nilüfer, *The forbidden modern: civilization and veiling*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996.
- Grosz, Elizabeth, *Volatile bodies: toward a corporeal feminism*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994.
- Hallpike, C.R., 'Social Hair', *Man*, 4, 1969, pp.254-264.
- Halman, Talat Sait, 'Islam in Turkey', in *Change and the Muslim World*, ed., Philip H. Stoddard et al, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1981,.
- Harvey, Annie, *Turkish harems and Circassian homes*, London: Hurst & Blackett, 1871.
- Hershman, P., 'Hair, Sex and Dirt', *Man*, 9, 1974, pp.274-298.
- Hürriyet*, 25 July 1999.
- Ibn Battuta, Abu Abd Allah Muhammad, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325–1354*, tr. H.A.R. Gibb, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963.
- Kafadar, Cemal, 'Women in Seljuk and Ottoman society up to the Mid 19th century', in *Women in Anatolia: 9000 years of the Anatolian woman*, exhibition catalogue, Istanbul: Turkish Republic Ministry of Culture General Directorate of Monuments and Museums, 1993.

- Keddie, Nikki, *Women in Middle Eastern history: shifting boundaries in sex and gender*, eds Nikki Keddie & Beth Baron, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991.
- Kilmer, Martin, 'Genital phobia and depilation', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 102, 1982, pp. 104–12.
- Kinross, Lord, *The Ottoman centuries*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1977.
- Kinzer, Stephen, 'MP's scarf brings faith row to a head', *The Age*, 4 May 1999a, p. 12.
- Kinzer, Stephen, 'New MP to be stripped of Turkish citizenship', *The Age*, 17 May 1999b, p. 10.
- Lane, E.W., *The manners and customs of the modern Egyptians*, London, J.M. Dent, 1836.
- Leach, E.R., 'Magical hair', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 77, 1958, pp.147-64.
- Lewis, Bernard, *The Middle East: 2000 years of history from the rise of Christianity to the present day*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995.
- Lewis, Geoffrey, *Modern Turkey*, London: Ernest Benn, 1974.
- Mansel, Philip, *Constantinople: city of the world's desire 1453–1924*, London: John Murray, 1995.
- Marcus, Julie, *A world of difference: Islam & gender hierarchy in Turkey*, Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1992.
- Memecan, Burçak, 'Örtülü hikâyeler', *Aktüel*, Issue 233, 1995, pp.84-88.
- Mernissi, Fatima, *The veil and the male elite: a feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam*, tr. Mary Jo Lakeland, Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley, 1991.
- Minai, Naila, *Women in Islam: traditions and transitions in the Middle East*, London: John Murray, 1981.
- Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley, *Embassy to Constantinople: the travels of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Christopher Pick, London: Century, 1988.
- Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley, *The complete letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, vol 1, 1708–1720*, ed. Robert Halsband, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965.
- Morris, Chris, 'Cutting blow to the proud Turkish mo' (from *The Guardian*), *The Age*, Tuesday, 30 June 1998, p. 8.
- Necipoglu, Gülru, *Architecture, ceremonial, and power: the Topkapi Palace in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries*, Cambridge, MA, & London: MIT Press, 1991.
- Nesin, Aziz, *Istanbul boy: Böyle Gelmiş Böyle Gitmez (That's how it was but not how it's going to be) The autobiography of Aziz Nesin*, part 1, tr. Joseph S. Jacobson, Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1977.
- Neusner, Jacob, *The idea of purity in Ancient Judaism*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977.
- Nicolay, Nicolas de, *The navigations, peregrinations and voyages made into Turkie*, London: Thomas Dawson, 1585.
- Özdalga, Elizabeth, *The veiling issue: official secularism and popular Islam in modern Turkey*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1998.
- Peirce, Leslie, *The imperial harem: women and sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Penzer, N.M., *The harem*, London: Spring Books, 1967.
- Rogers, J.M., *The Topkapi Saray Museum: the albums and illustrated manuscripts*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986.
- Stewart, Desmond, *Turkey*, Netherlands: Time-Life International, 1966.
- Stone, Norman, 'Spotlight on a new world', *Cornucopia*, 17, 3, 1999, p. 38.
- Synnott, Anthony, *The body social: symbolism, self and society*, New York & London: Routledge, 1993.
- Tavernier, J.B., *A new relation of the inner-part of the Grand Seignor's seraglio*. London: R.L. & Moses Pitt, 1677.
- The Koran Interpreted*, trans. Arthur J. Arberry, London: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Thevenot, Jean, *Travels into the Levant*, tr. B. Lovell, London: H. Clarke, 1687.
- Titley, Norah M., *Miniatures from Turkish manuscripts: a catalogue and subject index of paintings in the British Library and British Museum*, London: The British Library, 1981.
- Turner, Terence S. 'The social skin', in *Reading the social body*, eds Catherine & Ehrenreich Burroughs, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1993.
- Watson, Helen, 'Women and the veil: personal responses to global process, in *Islam, globalization and postmodernity*, ed. Akbar S. Ahmed & Hastings Donnan, London & New York: Routledge, 1994.
- White, Charles, *Three Years in Constantinople*, vol. 3, London: H. Colburn, 1844.
- Withers, Robert, *A description of the Grand Signor's seraglio or Turkish Emperours Court*, London: Jo Ridley, 1653.

1999. Hairy Politics: Hair Rituals in Ottoman and Turkish Society. In 24th Annual Conference of the Australian Association for the Study of Religions. Sydney: Charles Strong Memorial Trust. Aykut, Susan. 1999. Hairy Politics: Hair Rituals in Ottoman and Turkish Society. In 24th Annual Conference of the Australian Association for the Study of Religions. Sydney: Charles Strong Memorial Trust. )| false.Â

2016. Modern Man in the Making: Facial Hair, Fashion and Medico-Social Construction of Masculinity in the Late Ottoman Society (1900-1920). Artuklu Human and Social Science Journal 1/1: 46-54. )| false. Search Google Scholar. The Society for Turkic, Ottoman and Turkish Studies invites its members to submit app...lications for the funding of small-scale projects. Generally, all proposals aiming at supporting young scholars and/or Turkology as a study program will be considered. See more. Ottoman and Turkish Studies at NYU.

2 October Â. We welcomed David Gutman (Associate Professor of History at Manhattanville College) at the Richard Ettinghausen Library on Tuesday, October 1, 2019 for a book talk: â€œThe Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885-1915: Sojourners, Smugglers and Dubious Citizens,â€ which tells