GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN MUSLIM CULTURES

Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures

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Contents

List of Contributors
Foreword by Deniz Kandiyoti

Introduction
Gul Ozyegin

PART 1 CHALLENGED MASCULINITIES

1 In Vitro Nationalism: Masculinity, Disability, and Assisted Reproduction in War-Torn Turkey
Salih Can Açıksöz

2 Challenged Masculinities: Sexuality, ^{c}*Urfi* Marriage, and the State in Dahab, Egypt
Mustafa Abdalla

3 Of Migration, Marriage, and Men: Rethinking the Masculinity of Transnational Husbands from Rural Pakistan
Aisha Anees Malik

4 "Men Are Less Manly, Women Are More Feminine": The Shopping Mall as a Site for Gender Crisis in Istanbul
Cenk Özbay

5 Between Ideals and Enactments: The Experience of "New Fatherhood" among Middle-Class Men in Turkey
Fatma Umut Beşpınar

6 The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows: Masculinity and Male Friendship in Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Istanbul
Serkan Delice

PART 2 PRODUCING MUSLIM FEMININITIES, SEXUALITIES, AND GENDER RELATIONS

7 The Continuous Making of Pure Womanhood among Muslim Women in Cairo: Cooking, Depilating, and Circumcising

Maria Frederika Malmström

8 Introduction to “In Conversation on Female Genital Cutting”: A Pedagogical Perspective
Victoria A. Castillo

9 In Conversation on Female Genital Cutting
Goran A. Sabir Zangana, Maria Frederika Malmström, and Faith Barton

10 “I’ve Had to Be the Man in This Marriage”: Claims about Gender Roles and Sexual Practices during Judicial Divorce Cases in Damascus Shari’a Court One in 2005–2006
Jessica Carlisle

11 Negotiating Courtship Practices and Redefining Tradition: Discourses of Urban, Syrian Youth
Lindsey A. Conklin and Sandra Nasser El-Dine

PART 3 MAHREM, THE GAZE, AND INTIMATE GENDER AND SEXUAL CROSSINGS

12 Identity in Alterity: Burqa and Madrassah Education in Pakistan
Saadia Abid

13 The Daring Mahrem: Changing Dynamics of Public Sexuality in Turkey
Sertaç Sehlikoglu

14 Sexing the *Hammam*: Gender Crossings in the Ottoman Bathhouse
Elyse Semerdjian

PART 4 THE DESIRING, PROTESTING BODY AND MUSLIM AUTHENTICITY IN FICTION AND POLITICAL DISCOURSES

15 Women’s Writing in the Land of Prohibitions: A Study of Alifa Rifaat and Female Body Protest as a Tool for Rebellion
Miral Mahgoub Al-Tahawy

16 Rewriting the Body in the Novels of Contemporary Syrian Women Writers
Martina Censi

17 The Virgin Trials: Piety, Femininity, and Authenticity in Muslim Brotherhood Discourse
Sherine Hafez

PART 5 RE-THEORIZING IRANIAN DIASPORA AND “ISLAMIC FEMINISM” IN

IRAN

18 Can the Secular Iranian Women’s Activist Speak?: Caught between Political Power and the “Islamic Feminist”
Leila Mouri and Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi

19 Queering the “Iranian” and the “Diaspora” of the Iranian Diaspora
Farhang Rouhani

Index

List of Contributors

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Foreword

Deniz Kandiyoti

The Arab uprisings of 2011 and the Gezi protests in Turkey in 2013 set the stage for some arresting spectacles that provided much food for thought about changing gender orders and relations in Muslim cultures. As women of all ages joined the protests in Cairo—insisting on a continued public presence—vicious and organized displays of violence and sexual harassment became commonplace. The suppression of popular protest by power holders has always been gendered and sexualized: male youth, and especially working class youth, are criminalized as “terrorists” or thugs, while women of all classes may be labeled as “loose women” unworthy of protection when they step into the public domain. However, new barriers were breached by the Arab uprisings. The spotlight was turned, as never before, on the political nature of gendered violence. The lid was lifted off the taboo topics of harassment and rape and provoked a public discussion, prompting the formation of networks coalescing around help and advocacy initiatives. Busting Orientalist notions of essentially misogynistic Arab masculinities, some men showed a willingness to take positions on women’s rights and did so publicly by joining demonstrations and anti-harassment groups in a rare display of cross-gender solidarity in the face of brutality.

Although the sources of discontent that fueled the Gezi protests in Istanbul in the summer of 2013 were varied, ranging from concerns about the environment, urban plunder, police brutality, and censorship of the media to general lack of transparency, there was no mistaking the mood of exasperation of youth with governmental attempts to dictate norms of modesty and propriety in the realm of gender relations. Protests projected a spirited rejection of such interference as evidenced in a public “kiss-in” (discussed in detail in Chapter 13) in reaction to an attempted ban on public displays of affection. Repeated acts of defiance, through the medium of music, performance, and cartoons, alongside street protests, revealed a lively youth subculture that unmasked the political intent of “normalizing” patriarchy as a tool of governance.

Even earlier, in 2009, the Green Movement in Iran that arose in protest against contested presidential elections set the scene for a now-forgotten incident. Majid Tavakoli, a student leader arrested after delivering a fiery speech against dictatorship, was alleged by pro-government news agencies to have been caught trying to escape dressed as a woman. A series of photographs showing him wearing a headscarf and chador were clearly intended to expose him as a coward and to humiliate a hero of the student movement. Surprisingly, what followed was that an Iranian photographer invited men to post pictures of themselves wearing *hejab* on Facebook, which they did in large numbers under the caption “We are all Majid.” Would an earlier generation of men have considered cross-dressing as a means of ridiculing authority and of protest?

That these new forms of expression coexist with the world of ISIS slave markets in Syria, where captured women are treated as war booty, points to a moment of great turbulence and turmoil that places gender at the heart of political contestations in Muslim majority countries. This also points to the need for a new language that captures the complexities of changing gender orders and ideologies. This volume takes up this challenge by providing ethnographically rich engagements with this fluid landscape, traveling between the macro and the micro and between different disciplinary perspectives. It also reminds us of the distance we have travelled since the days when an exclusive focus on women and on the assumed influences of Islam (whether in the form of critiques or apologias) dominated both academic and popular writing on Muslim cultures.

One facet of the current turbulence, reflected in this volume, is clearly rooted in a global predicament. Under conditions of neo-liberalism, most states have abdicated their paternalistic functions of provision of public goods and welfare. High rates of unemployment and increasingly precarious forms of employment have become commonplace at a time when aspirations for consumption and affluent life styles—circulated through global images of consumerism—have never been higher. At the domestic level, the male provider role, one of the bedrocks of male privilege, is under significant strain.

The effects of these strains permeate several chapters. Whether we are talking about Egyptian men making a living as providers of sex for foreign women in tourist resorts (Chapter 2), rural Pakistani men migrating to Britain as transnational "grooms" to marry British-Pakistani women (Chapter 3), or men adjusting to working in a highly feminized retail sector in the new culture of shopping malls in Istanbul (Chapter 4), we encounter (often painful) negotiations and readjustments of their masculine roles. In the Egyptian case, feelings of emasculation and disempowerment accompany the sale of their sexual services as a commodity and they resort to ᶜ*Urfi* marriages to compensate and regularize their situation vis-à-vis state authorities. Pakistani men's position in transnational marriages as *ghar damad* disrupts conventional power relationships in the conjugal union, creating tensions that are partly offset by the status they acquire back home as economic providers for their elderly parents and extended families. In the Istanbul shopping mall, which "prioritizes communication, empathy, radiance, self-presentation, and being obsequious and servile—all culturally coded as unmanly," some men are simply unable to make the necessary accommodations even if they are good at their actual jobs.

Recuperations of the masculine self take numerous forms. Arguably the most extreme instances of disempowerment occur through the effects of disabilities that war veterans endure: loss of mobility, independence, and potency. This predicament is analyzed in Chapter 1 in relation to conscripted veterans of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. This conflict, which has destabilized the intimate relationship between military service and hegemonic masculinity, has called forth a governmental response to re-masculinize the disabled body by providing support for paraplegic veterans' quest for fatherhood through assisted conception, demonstrating the broader political stakes around the reproduction of normative masculinities.

Finally, the "new fatherhood" ideals of secular Turkish middle class men (Chapter 5) are enacted in a triangle of tensions between their own unsatisfactory relations with their fathers, global images, and normative prescriptions about involved parenthood and current

Islamization policies that act as a foil to their own practices. The exigencies of the reproduction of their class, however, means that although fathers wish to be emotionally close to their children, they do not compromise on their full-time commitment to demanding and competitive jobs, leaving their wives to either quit their jobs or work part-time or out of the home.

References to Islam take varied, finely observed, and nuanced forms. The themes of embodiment, embodied agency, and body practices that run through numerous contributions are cross-cut by discussions about what may be constituted or imagined as being properly Islamic. The ethnography on female genital cutting in Egypt in Chapter 7, for instance, shows that older women's ideals of femininity are crafted through a range of repetitive body practices, such as cooking and depilation, associated with womanly purity. The practice of genital cutting is itself assimilated to the concept of cleanliness and purity as an instance of proper Islamic observance—an interpretation that younger women may contest. The adoption of a particular style of burqa that conceals the whole body, including the face, by female students in the Madrassah Jamia Hafsa (MJH) in Islamabad (Chapter 12) is not only meant to produce a puritan sense of Muslim identity but also to demarcate the self from both non-Muslim Western and Pakistani women "others." In Egypt (Chapter 17) the visual markers of Islamic purity, in evidence during the so-called "virgin trials" that put teenage supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood in the dock, appear to be constantly calibrated in relation to the need to consolidate group boundaries, epitomizing how competing political projects are played out over women's bodies. An unsettling of the Islamicate concept of *mahremiyet* (the Islamic notion of privacy and intimacy) takes place in Turkey (Chapter 13) when head-scarfed cover girls pose for a fashion magazine, covering parts of their bodies but simultaneously uncovering them by exposing them to the public gaze. The "kissing protest" of couples embracing in public constitutes a riposte to the ways in which the culture of *mahremiyet* has started to dominate the regulations of the public sphere. Both infringements, moreover, speak of a new visio-sexual culture grounded in the neo-liberal transformations of Turkey's economy and the emergence of an Islamic public.

The combination of sociological and anthropological studies with historical and literary perspectives multiplies our vantage points. Historical studies on the regulation of bodies and gendered spaces provide a deeper time frame to our understanding of gender and sexuality. Through a close reading of eighteenth-century Ottoman state archival documents and a late-seventeenth-century Ottoman historical narrative, Chapter 6 chronicles the emergence of the category of "beardless youth" and of a homosexual subculture among a group of Janissary-affiliated lower-class young shampooers who served as sex workers in the *hammams* (bathhouses) of Istanbul. Here male homosexuality is treated as a dissident and productive practice, relation, and way of life that is placed in a wider social, cultural, and economic context of masculinity, violence, and male friendship. The regulations of eighteenth-century *hammam* in Ottoman Aleppo discussed in Chapter 14 point to the anxieties it generated among state and clerical authorities as a liminal space where Muslim and non-Muslim bodies mix. The presence of non-Muslim (*dhimmi*) women was seen as particularly threatening to Muslim women's *mahremiyet* (privacy and modesty), hence the imposition of separate bathing times and a ruling by an Aleppo court judge who affirmed that a *dhimmi* woman was gendered male at the moment she views a Muslim woman in a state of nudity.

The boldest voices that dare to delve into the realms of embodiment and sexuality, including the taboo subject of homoerotic desire, undoubtedly come from contemporary women writers. Examinations of women's writing in Egypt (Chapter 15) and Syria (Chapter 16) illustrate how treatments of the female body and sexual desire open up avenues for a dissection of relations of power and domination between sexes and classes and for searching analyses of women's subjugation as well as fantasies of rebellion and escape.

Discussions of intergenerational change, negotiations around gender norms, and divergences between norms and lived realities also run through numerous contributions. These are explicitly treated in Chapter 11, which examines the way urban youth in Syria negotiate local norms concerning premarital relationships and courtship practices focusing on how they stretch the boundaries of gender interaction to fulfill their ideal of a companionate marriage. The ingenious device deployed in Chapter 10 of using arbitration sessions attended by couples seeking a judicial divorce in Syria offers important insights into both the norms governing marriage, which are invoked by disputants trying to explain the breakdown of their conjugal unions, and the fact that lived realities within many marriages do not necessarily reflect legal categories or political and social ideals. Intergenerational differences and tensions are implicitly referenced in many other contributions as well. Whether we are talking about a "new fatherhood" that sets a younger generation of men apart from their own fathers, ideals of femininity and beauty that separate different generations of Cairene women, the gulf between the generation of Turkish men who defined maturity and masculinity through military service and the disenchanted draft dodgers of the Kurdish conflict, all point to the turbulence around gender norms and relations. The reader will also not fail to be struck by the diversity of representations of youth in these pages: head-scarfed cover girls, male escorts, migrating rural youth, female madrassa students, male sales assistants in shopping malls, white-clad adolescent supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, courting Syrian couples, the "beardless youth" of the Ottoman *hammam* all jostle for our attention in this kaleidoscopic vision of Muslim cultures.

The volume closes with a focus on questions of feminist voice and identity. It is no coincidence that the case of Iran is foregrounded in these discussions. The Islamic revolution of 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic has presented unique challenges for activists trying to carve out a space for public deliberation on women's rights. It has also created a new Iranian diaspora trying to find its voice. Chapter 18 interprets the rise of "Islamic feminism," not only as the outcome of political conjunctures in Iran but also as the project of scholars based in the diaspora who, in attempting to establish a new perspective on women's rights in Islam, may have unwittingly muted or de-legitimized the voices of secular women activists in Iran battling against very difficult odds. Finally, Chapter 19 analyzes diasporic Iranian women's memoirs through a queer diasporic analytical lens with a view to disengaging the idea of an "Iranian Diaspora" from concerns over authenticity and belonging.

This collection will leave the reader with much food for thought and a deeper understanding of gender and sexuality in Muslim cultures.

Introduction

Gul Ozyegin

This volume brings together international scholars from different disciplines (sociology, anthropology, history, social geography, and feminist literary criticism), not only to explore Muslim identities through the lens of gender and sexuality—their historical and contemporary transformations and local and global articulations—but also to interrogate our understanding of what constitutes a "Muslim" identity in selected Muslim-majority countries in this pivotal historical moment, characterized by transformative destabilizations in which national, ethnic, and religious boundaries are being re-imagined and remade. Foundational writings on the Middle East and gender have largely come from theorists who sought to offer an analytical vocabulary and theoretical framework through defining what is intrinsic to Islam in organizing gender and sexuality. Speaking directly and powerfully about the problematic enterprise of studying the Middle East and gender by conflating women and gender, and Islam and Muslim, a number of important feminist scholars (notably Deniz Kandiyoti, Lila Abu-Lughod, Afsaneh Najmabadi, Leila Ahmed, and Marnia Lazreg) in recent decades have shown how such theoretical perspectives that attend predominantly to an essentialized and reified notion of Islam fail to grasp how Islam has interacted with sociopolitical and economic conditions at particular times and in specific geographic locations where the institutions of patriarchy, issues of citizenship, Western imperialism, modernity, war, secularization, nation-building, and anti-colonialist ideologies and movements are just as critical to understanding the ways that sexual and gender orders have been constructed, maintained, and challenged. This volume attempts to contribute to this body of feminist scholarship by confronting crucial issues under new perspectives that circumvent both religious and gender essentialism and transcend orientalist misconceptions.

The canvas provided by the concept of Muslim cultures as a site for examination is far larger than the contemporary examples from Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, and the Iranian diaspora, and the historical examples from the city of Aleppo and Ottoman İstanbul in the eighteenth century, that this volume offers. In the compilation and shaping of this volume, I chose depth over breadth, seeking to highlight diversity and fracture in the configuration of gendered and sexual politics within each nation-state by presenting to the reader multiple examples of research and discursive analysis from a variety of disciplinary perspectives on each country. It is also important to note that this volume does not claim comprehensive coverage of the vast field of gender, sexuality, and the body. Many important issues and topics are not dealt with here. The exclusions are not intentional, but relate to practical circumstances.

Not content with essentialist theories that fail to attend to the range of lived experiences, the authors in this volume have conducted in-depth ethnographic and historical research to offer nuance to our understandings of local and cultural formations of Muslim identities. A series of key questions guide the volume: How does close attention to gender and sexuality broaden our understanding of Muslim-majority countries, historically and in the present? What analytical questions are raised about “Islam” when its diverse referents and multifaceted expressions are examined? How does the embodiment of “Muslim” identity get reconfigured in the context of twenty-first century globalism? How has the “Islamic view’s” interaction with various socioeconomic and political systems affected gender and sexual order in Muslim countries? What roles do gender and sexuality play in the construction of cultural, religious, nationalistic, communal, and militaristic identities? How have power struggles signified in and on the bodies of women and sexuality? How have global dynamics, for example the intensification and spread of neoliberal ideologies and policies, affected changing dynamics of gender and sexuality in specific locales?

I organized the chapters into five thematic sections: Challenged Masculinities; Producing Muslim Femininities, Sexualities, and Gender Relations; Mahrem, the Gaze, and Intimate Gender and Sexual Crossings; The Desiring, Protesting Body, and Muslim Authenticity in Fiction and Political Discourses; and Re-Theorizing Iranian Diaspora and “Islamic Feminism” in Iran. This organizational strategy allows the chapters to speak to one another across time, cultural locales, and disciplines, and enables the reader to engage the volume in comparative and cross-disciplinary fashion.

Challenged Masculinities

Masculinity is a major focus of this volume. The perspectives on men and masculinities in this collection underscore heterogeneity and instability; most importantly, they bring our attention to the idea of a crisis of hegemonic masculinity. Each chapter’s research focuses on men whose life experiences or aspirations to escape from patriarchal constructions of masculinity are in tension with the dominant norms. The ethnographic research from Egypt, Turkey, and Pakistan highlight the ever-increasing global centrality of neoliberal economic transformations, national and transnational male migration, the altered forms of gendered division of labor, and militarism and warfare and how these processes bring about a crisis in the reproduction of a normative gender identity. Each author in this section places considerable emphasis on how men subjectively experience crisis or provide a unique account of how they define it. They aim precisely to understand the native self-understanding and practical realizations of crisis as these are worked out on the ground. This approach involves an emphasis on both subjectivity and attention to the interconnections between the global and local, the role of the state, and how these factors come together to shape the types and forms of (re)negotiations and enactments of masculine identities.

Salih Can Açiksöz’s chapter provides an important account of how the bodies, sexualities, and reproductive capacities of disabled Turkish veterans have become subjects of new “corrective” interventions by the state. During the decades-long Kurdish conflict in Turkey, more than 10,000 of the three million Turkish conscripts deployed against Kurdish guerillas have become permanently physically disabled. The relationship between the state as the agent of warfare and the state as the provider of welfare (and a patriarchal gender order) are crucial to understanding the shaping of hegemonic masculinity and citizenship in Turkey. As Açıksöz explains, there is a patriarchal contract between the state and male citizens who are subjects of compulsory military service in Turkey. Fulfilling the basic requirements of being a soldier—male, young, able-bodied, and heterosexual—operates as a key rite of passage toward adult masculinity and full membership in the national community. As Açıksöz puts it, "a young man becomes marriageable and employable, a husband and a breadwinner, and a full citizen by virtue of completing his military service." The way in which hegemonic masculinity is constructed has adverse repercussions for disabled veterans, who experience not only disability but "expulsion from hegemonic masculinity." Açıksöz's research powerfully demonstrates how disabled veterans in Turkey (re)negotiate their identities in a societal context where there is a strong stigma associated with disability and there are widespread discriminatory practices against the disabled. Excluded from wage labor, culturally isolated, and "unproductively" homebound, these veterans lose their sense of independence. For disabled veterans, military service "has made disabled veterans 'less of a man'" instead of fulfilling the promise of passage into adult masculinity and full-fledged citizenship. Moreover, concerns with their disabled bodies emerge in the midst of a broad program of state-level pronatalism led by the current neoliberal Islamist government and its associated emphasis on defining women as mothers and housewives and men as fathers and breadwinners. Over recent decades, the state has begun to take drastic steps to attempt to rectify the masculinity crisis of disabled veterans. Açıksöz writes that "Making the disabled veteran body the object of a new governmental regime, various state medical and welfare institutions have campaigned to remasculinize disabled veterans via a variety of discursive, institutional, and medical practices, which now include state-sponsored in vitro fertilization (IVF)." Situating the state-sponsored assisted conception program for paraplegic disabled veterans within the relationship between the state, citizenship, and hegemonic masculinity, Açıksöz shows how medicalized fatherhood gets entangled with larger issues of citizenship, pronatalism, and nationalism in contemporary Turkey.

In "Challenged 'Masculinities: Sexuality, ᶜ*Urfi* Marriage, and the State in Dahab, Egypt," Mustafa Abdalla examines how the shift to neoliberal economic policies in Egypt formed challenges to men's position in the patriarchal gender order. Abdalla's case study is a powerful illustration of the uncertainties and negotiations that accompany men's perceived inability to meet societal expectations and dominant constructions of masculinity. Abdalla's study highlights the contradictory experiences of a group of poor young men with rural backgrounds working in the service industry in the tourism sector in Dahab, a major vacation destination for foreign tourists. Working there puts them in direct contact with Western female tourists; for these men, serving tourists provides a livelihood but also a newfound freedom to engage in sexual relations with Western female foreign tourists in a cultural context where chastity for Muslim men is also a key ideal. Abdalla argues that, because their prospect of achieving economic agency is minimal, these men invest heavily in their romantic and sexual selves. In the absence of potential economic capital, they invest in their own bodies and sexuality. While in one way their sexual liaisons with foreign tourists create a sense of heightened masculinity (they boast of their lovers and love affairs in peer groups), they also suffer submission and emasculation vis-à-vis their sexual partners and the state. The author notes that in these relationships the men often experience “deep feelings of emasculation and at times humiliation” as a result of Western tourist women’s purchasing power as well as their erotic assertions in sexual encounters. Abdalla references, for instance, women-imposed practices that the men in Dahab consider foreign to their own cultural and religious backgrounds, such as oral sex and longer periods of foreplay. This male submission, however, is countered by a novel construction, by way of distinguishing between cold-blooded, passionless Western women, who are slow to be aroused, and hot-blooded Egyptian women. This invented dichotomy in the narratives of the men, the author notes, served in some way to mediate the tension caused by their perceived emasculation. These men are also subjected to heavy monitoring by the state; constant police surveillance creates a sense of insecurity and fear in them, making them feel that “their masculinity was, once again, under attack.” Men in Dahab have responded to state regulation and oppression in a number of ways. Chief among them is the creation of a subculture of ᶜ*Urfi* (temporary) marriage practices that “respected and accommodated itself to the moral authority, but that also fit and spoke directly to their economic needs.” Enabling both resistance and conformity simultaneously, the transformation of the context within which Muslim ᶜ*Urfi* marriages occurs in Dahab is a significant reminder of how so-called “traditional” local practices are, in fact, flexible enough to be re-signified and used in the context of global encounters.

In “Of Migration, Marriage, and Men: Rethinking the Masculinity of Transnational Husbands from Rural Pakistan,” Aisha Anees Malik explores “the key discourses of a masculine identity that is questioned and even undermined” by transnational marriages of rural Pakistani men who immigrate to the United Kingdom through marrying diasporic kin. She conceptualizes the rural men in Pakistan as being multiply defined by several roles (David Gilmore’s three features of masculinity—“impregnators, providers and protectors”)—roles that men in Pakistan regard as the foundation of their gender identity. Pakistani men who migrate to the United Kingdom are forced to compromise all three of these dimensions while abroad, simultaneously experiencing a heightened sense of masculinity in their communities at home. Malik notes that Pakistani men in marriages with British-Pakistani women feel that they are emasculated and unable to do gender the way they would in their home country because of their separation from their own families and kin, and as they become subordinate and reliant on their wives and their wives’ families, who are generally already established in Britain. This results in a type of gender crisis. In Pakistan, migrating comes with prestige, as it usually brings wealth. In order to cope with their emasculation while in the United Kingdom, Pakistani men have developed several mechanisms to regain their traditional male status: they employ different types of masculinity (hegemonic, complicit, resistant, and subordinate) to adjust to their new lives in the United Kingdom. At the same time, in Pakistan these men experience a confirmation of their masculinity due to their ability to provide for family members and extended kin by sending money back and invest in status symbols in their home communities. These men are seen as wealthy benefactors and they participate in a culture that many young Pakistani men see as luxurious and superior to their own local culture. Malik conducted participant observation in two Pakistani villages and with different families, including young men who conveyed accounts of British-Pakistani migrants and marriages. Malik is interested in the stories young men share with each other. She argues that it is in the tension between the specific and diverging realities and imaginings of these young men that we see the fluid and changing faces of local, national, and transnational constructions of multiple masculinities.

Cenk Özbay's contribution, "Men are Less Manly, Women Are More Feminine: The Shopping Mall as a Site for Gender Crisis in Istanbul," asserts that the retail industry in Istanbul shifts gender performance in favor of femininity by requiring men to act less masculine and women to act more feminine, and that the industry also creates an acceptable, almost welcoming atmosphere for queer sexualities. Özbay argues that women are required to perform an exaggerated femininity by focusing more on appearance, fashion, and a servile demeanor. Simultaneously, the retail industry does not allow men to perform their cultural understanding of hegemonic masculinity, defined as toughness, the suppression of feelings, the act of giving orders, and devaluing the needs of others. Instead, it urges them to display more feminine behaviors and personalities toward customers and fellow workers. Gay men in the retail industry, Özbay asserts, are not only allowed to outwardly display their sexuality and atypical gender performance in the workplace, but are even sought after by management. Although gay men may sometimes face antagonistic behavior by co-workers and management, there is an overall sense of comfort for queers in the retail industry. This reorganization of the gender hierarchy brings about a gender crisis for men in which they are forced to develop coping mechanisms to deal with these changes and undergo realignment and develop a new respect for feminine men. These men have to "recalibrate their gendered selves and bodies in order to make sense of the relations in the workplace environment." Male workers are encouraged to feminize themselves by becoming softer and more civilized, and to care more about their groomed appearance. As Özbay convincingly demonstrates with his study of retail workers in shopping malls, the transformation of local gender constructions can lead us to reinterpret "structural transformations such as neoliberalization, globalization, and deindustrialization through a global scale."

The significance of the emergence of new forms of masculine desire within the context of Turkey's global neoliberalization is also at issue in the chapter presented by Fatma Umut Beşpınar. Analyzing the narratives of secular middle-class fathers in "Between Ideals and Enactments: Experience of 'New Fatherhood' among Middle-Class Men in Turkey," Beşpınar shows how these men define fatherhood in new ways, and in particular how they desire to move away from what they consider emotionally void fatherhood to a model of "new fatherhood" that centers on intimate fathering marked by nurturance, interrelatedness, and emotionality. Beşpınar suggests that although these fathers strongly reject the model of the emotionally distant father in favor of the father who mothers, they cannot completely transform this strong desire into praxis, due in part to the unchanging demands of their professional identities. Also, there seems to be an emergent, troubling connection between these fathers' strong desire for their offspring to be raised secularly as global citizens and the increasing intrusion of piousness in schooling by the current Islamist government. These men see that their child-rearing practices, through the adoption of middle-class global norms, are in conflict with the Islamization of Turkey and significantly constraining transformations of gender roles. For these secularist men, the increasing invasion of pious policies in the education system and defining practices and standards of child-rearing in religious ways are disturbing and unwelcome developments.

In “The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows: Masculinity and Male Friendship in Eighteenth-Century Ottoman İstanbul,” Serkan Delice places historical male homosexuality in a wider social, cultural, and economic context of masculinity. Based on a detailed analysis of a series of Ottoman state archival documents from the years 1709 and 1789 and a late-seventeenth-century Ottoman historical narrative describing the lives and relationships of a group of Janissary-affiliated, lower-class young shampooers who served as sex workers in the *hammams* of Istanbul, Delice shows the emergence of a distinctive identity: “beardless youths.” These so-called beardless youths were regarded as leading “improper” lifestyles and enacting “immoral” sexual acts, alliances, and attachments by refusing to mature into the masculinity that was socially and culturally prescribed to them. According to Delice, these youths used homosexuality to invent and establish wider dissident and disturbing relations in the social fabric by weaving alternative webs of identification and sociability. They enacted and performed their masculinities in an ongoing relational process, negotiating the potentially useful gaps between patriarchal imperatives and manhood.

Producing Muslim Femininities, Sexualities, and Gender Relations

This section of the volume is devoted to studies of women, constructions of femininity, and gender relations in divorce and mate selection through local (dominant and contested) understandings of Islamic norms. The approaches taken by the authors particularly highlight the production of Muslim femininity through embodied practices of the self and social relations, and the political investment in the “purity” of the female body and sexuality as one of the crucial sites of Muslim authenticity.

Maria Frederika Malmström’s chapter is an ethnographic study of different generations of Muslim women from two lower-income neighborhoods in Cairo. She demonstrates how the achievement of a correct moral and feminine Muslim self is constructed through an in-depth analysis of everyday practices (i.e. cooking, depilation, circumcision) in which women use the local tropes of sweet, soft, smooth, and pure to orient themselves within a feminine ideal. She also draws on the theoretical framework of Aristotelian’s *habitus* to understand how moral virtues are acquired through a coordination of outward behaviors and inward dispositions through the repeated performance of acts that encapsulate those particular virtues. The values of purity and cleanliness are central to ideas of the Muslim self and are manifested through bodily modifications. These include female circumcision and depilation (hair removal) as forms of cleansing the body; “both the inside and the outside should be clean according to the ‘purifying force of adhering to Islamic rule’ rather than to the Western perception of hygiene.” One of the author’s main tenets is that these women are not passive victims of idealized femininity, but rather that they personally strive to achieve this highly esteemed identity of an ideal Muslim female. However, even though some women may adhere to the cultural construction of femininity, there are also women who question these norms. For instance, the idea that the fuller-figured woman is the ideal woman is being challenged by younger Muslim women who question the necessity of the traditional view of these gendered constructions.

These younger women also see no connection between female circumcision and Islam. According to Malmström, many young women she spoke to “compared female circumcision to plastic surgery, a body modification that enhances beauty.”

Faith Barton’s interview with Maria Frederika Malmström and Goran A. Sabir Zangana focuses on female genital cutting (FGC). Barton is an American feminist who is interested in “how the body lives through, relates to, and negotiates structures of power” from the perspective of embodiment in feminist theory. Goran A. Sabir Zangana is the founder of Doctors Against FGM, which disseminates information relating to FGC, provides educational programs about the risks associated with the performing of FGC, and works on policy change around the issue. Working closely with civil society organizations in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Zangana advocates for approaching FGC through a health lens. He argues that this perspective not only provides the opportunity to introduce laws and regulations that address FGC’s health consequences, but also offers a platform to discuss openly and freely issues that would otherwise be regarded as taboos. Maria Frederika Malmström is an anthropologist whose extensive fieldwork in Cairo has been an important bridge between the voices and perspectives of women who went through circumcision and transnational NGO actors and organizations who are working to stop FGC. By bringing these perspectives and experiences together, Barton’s interview nuances our understanding of a culturally inscribed, complicated practice that is often flattened out as an atrocity by Western feminist and mainstream discourses. Victoria A. Castillo presents an introduction to “In Conversation on Female Genital Cutting” from a pedagogical perspective, adding a significant dimension to the linking of academic research, activism, and teaching. No issue better reflects conflicting feminist positions than FGC, which often highlights enduring tensions and points of difference between scholarship and activism and local and global on the other hand. What are some of the ways in which knowledge generated about genital cutting and activism around it are used in the Western feminist classroom? Speaking to this question, Castillo illustrates how she accomplishes a nuanced and in-depth engagement with feminist debates among students that effectively counters seeing FGC as either an innocent cultural practice or an atrocity. Particularly, she outlines a two-fold strategy through which students learn to unlearn easy generalizations and powerful misconceptions.

If we want to comprehend the inner workings of the distance between the normative ideals of gender and sexual relations and their enactments in a marriage, then their representations and narrations in divorce is a very productive starting point. Jessica Carlisle brings a rare and unique perspective to the understanding of marriage in modern Syrian society in her chapter, “‘I’ve Had to Be the Man in This Marriage’: Claims about Gender Roles and Sexual Practices during Juridical Divorce Cases in Damascus Shari’a Court One in 2005–2006.” Carlisle’s study is based on 10 months of fieldwork in Damascus Court One, where she closely observed hundreds of closed sessions between spouses in divorce cases. As Carlisle explains in detail, Syria’s Muslim personal status law allows for several forms of divorce, including judicially pronounced divorce on the grounds of marital discord (*shiqaq*). She reports that both wives and husbands regularly petitioned the Damascus court for *shiqaq* divorce during her fieldwork. In cases arbitrated by court-appointed lawyers, spouses were asked to recollect their marriages and dissolutions in intimate detail. In recounting failed marriages, spouses appealed to the normative gender norms while referencing their spouses' inappropriate gender and sexual behaviors. Events in their marital histories that marked phases of inappropriate behavior were related to disappointment with the spouses' role performances and inappropriate sexual behavior ("usually a wife's alleged frigidity, or a husband's 'unnatural' sexual demands") as well as issues of "domestic violence, housekeeping, interest in the children, relationships with spouses' relatives, freedom to leave the house, attitudes to household spending, provision of food and the furnishing of the home." Building on Suad Joseph's notion of patriarchal connectivity, Carlisle notes that in Syria, the object of the ideal marriage is to promote connectivity. Thus, the success of a marriage should be gauged primarily by the strength of conjugal connectivity, in which "spouses should anticipate and be attentive to one another's needs," rather than how well a marriage serves the needs and desires of the individual spouses. Carlisle argues that in the process of contesting whether their actions did or did not transgress normative gender rules, "spouses reified some normative standards, discounted the significance of some normative lapses and appealed to the transcendent importance of marital connectivity." The sessions she observed showed the complicated tensions between the dominant gender and sexual norms and the lived realities in marriages.

Lindsey A. Conklin and Sandra Nasser El-Dine, in "Negotiating Courtship Practices and Redefining Tradition: Discourses of Urban Syrian Youth," significantly expand our understanding of the ideals and practices of gender relations in premarital intimate and sexual relations. Analyzing youth narratives from 36 in-depth interviews, the authors identify two oppositional discursive frameworks among the youth: *muḥāfiẓ* (conservative) and *munfatiḥ* (open-minded, liberal, or tolerant). While *muḥāfiẓ* youth mobilize discourses about the importance of upholding Islamic tradition for Muslim identity through practices of gender-segregation and norms of virginity, *munfatiḥ* youth oppose tradition and idealize what they consider Western values governing gender and sexuality in intimate relations. These oppositional discourses are deeply embedded in political stances, serving to preserve or transform Muslim identities by rejecting or idealizing Western values. Both discourses emphasize the centrality of love for the stability of marriage and marital happiness, albeit they differ in how love is found and realized. The importance of gender segregation is particularly underscored as representing Islamic authenticity by conservative youth. The authors argue, however, that tradition is not something external which is to be followed but rather is something that is actively reinvented. Indeed, conservative youth oppose the traditional practices of earlier generations, such as early and arranged marriages, and consider these practices un-Islamic. The reinvention of "tradition" by conservative youth is constructed in opposition to what they perceive as Western values promoting promiscuity and lack of commitment. Conservative youth also expand the boundaries of the permissible in their courtship practices; in the process of doing so they redraw the boundaries of Islamic authenticity. They believe men and women should become acquainted before marriage, but this process should be a sexually sober one and should strongly emphasize the end goal of marriage. Searching for compatibility is fundamental to the meanings attached to courtship. Love is not the prelude to and basis for marriage: the ideal Muslim relationship is one which generates love after marriage if compatibility is achieved. Therefore, for conservative youth, the goal of courtship is finding the right spouse to marry. For their liberal counterparts, romancing, sex, and intimacy (not always leading to marriage) are the end goals of courtship. For liberal youth, a premarital culture of romance and sexual intimacy embodies important "Western" values such as individualism, freedom, and personal growth. Courtship becomes a site of resistance to what they consider a restrictive and archaic Islamic tradition. The authors' study illuminates a divided Syrian youth within the context of increasing Islamization of Syrian society. However, this polarization is not a neat one. Indeed, when we consider that a third of those in the study group do not firmly place themselves in either oppositional discursive framework, but rather flexibly pick and choose arguments and justification, often in contradictory ways, we see the emergence of a more complicated map of gender transformations that reflects a society in flux.

Mahrem, the Gaze, and Intimate Gender and Sexual Crossings

The burqa is the pervasive symbol of the voiceless, veiled Muslim woman; it is the most potent image of Islam in the West's popular imagination. Saadia Abid's "Identity in Alterity: Burqa and Madrassah Education in Pakistan" offers a rare "insider" look at purdah (concealing practices) of female students in the Madrassah Jamia Hafsa (MJH), an Islamic seminary for female students in Islamabad. The students at MJH adopt the burqa, a loose dress that conceals the whole body, including the face, as the proper purdah. They use it as a means of producing and expressing a puritan, heightened sense of Muslim identity and of achieving identification with one particular school of Islamic thought. Explicating the meanings attached to purdah by the students and teachers of MJH, who predominantly assert that a woman "needs to be kept hidden," Abid points out the significance of concealing the face; according to the students and teachers she studied, "the revealing of such beauty can bring harm to the moral order of society." For the students, the burqa hides the physical and tangible body. The students at MJH regard corporeal practices to be religious virtue divinely ordained, and thus the plain uniform ("the black, all-concealing burqa") could signify religious virtue and purity. However, they also use the burqa as a strategy of distinction and religious superiority to others who supposedly become the slaves of fashion. Abid argues that these religious and gender ideals are both socially and sexually constructed; purity is defined in opposition to two groups of "others"—non-Muslim Western women and Pakistani women who emulate them. Sartorial restraint signifies purity and personal self-discipline, but religious superiority can only be created by wearing the burqa, which is essential for the MJH students' display of group identity. As Abid puts it, "on an individual level, the uniformity of dress and color hides the identity, while on the group level, it creates identity."

In order to explore the changing boundaries of heterosexual culture in urban Turkey, Sertaç Sehlikoglu takes up the issue of gazing and hiding as a foundational dimension of the Islamicate culture of *mahremiyet* (value of intimacy and privacy) that regulates bodies, intimacies, and sexualities in the public sphere. In "The Daring Mahrem: Changing Dynamics of Public Sexuality in Turkey," her analysis focuses on two examples that "trouble the culture of *mahremiyet*." The first is the headscarf-clad cover girls of *Âlâ* magazine, widely popular among the Islamic bourgeoisie; these images bring together conservative Muslim values and high fashion. The second is a kissing protest that recently took place in Ankara to protest the state's banning of public displays of intimacy. Although at first these two examples seem to be unrelated, Sehlikoglu argues that they should be read as part of a structural shift in heterosexual culture. She suggests that continuity and consistency reside in daring *mahrem* (transgressing the rules of the *mahremiyet)* because "both … threaten the power dynamics of gazing and hiding in the culture of *mahremiyet*." As Sehlikoglu stresses, the word *mahremiyet is* derived from the word *mahrem* (sacred and forbidden), and has multiple meanings and connotations "including privacy, secrecy, and domesticity." In Western theory, looking is a practice imbued with sexual and gendered meanings in which the female body is the object of a sexual look. Men in a patriarchal society are positioned to look at women; the look is charged with power and sexual desire, and women are expected to avert the male gaze, which displays aggressiveness, boldness, and a sense of entitlement in gazing. However, in the Islamicate culture of *mahremiyet*, covering and hiding the *mahrem* (the forbidden, private) from the outsider, the unrelated man, is also "the main component of the gazing relationship." Controlling and regulating women and their movements are grounded and institutionalized by the *mahremiyet* culture. Thus, not just gender distinction, but also outsider and insider distinction are critical to and critically enforced through the culture of *mahremiyet*. Sehlikoglu argues that the women on Âlâ magazine's cover articulate a contradictory, "uncanny" image by both hiding their bodies and exposing them to the public eye with pride, instead of avoiding the gaze. She with daring eyes looks "directly into the spectator," "thus following and violating *mahrem* norms at once." She is not positioned as a passive object whose appearance dares the *mahrem*; her eyes are not averted. On the contrary, they look out. The Âlâ woman blurs the inhibiting boundary between secularists and Islamists. For Islamist commentators the increasing infusion of pious women in the public sphere who combine pious identity with high fashion is at odds with Muslim piety, while for the secularist they represent another incompatibility: they are supposed to be hiding and not fashionable if they are covered and truly pious women. Meanwhile, the kissing protest in Ankara highlights particular implications of the AKP government's attempt to enforce the culture of *mahremiyet* in order to regulate the public sphere. The author concludes that the kissing protest targets the gaze of hegemonic masculinity by disempowering and discrediting the male gaze while celebrating intimacy publicly instead of relegating it to the realm of privacy.

Further illumination of the importance of *mahremiyet* in the Islamicate culture is provided by Elyse Semerdjian's historical-anthropological study of the Ottoman Bathhouse, the *hammam*. The *hammam* helps to highlight the regulation of genders and sexualities in the multi-religious Ottoman Empire. Semerdjian's conception of the *hammam* as an ambivalent liminal space, a symbolic threshold that "separates binary distinctions between private/public, cleanliness/dirt, sacred/profane, Muslim/non-Muslim," brings to the foreground the anxieties and threats posed to the societal body (Muslim male order) via the mixing of the individual bodies of Muslims and non-Muslims. It also highlights why and how the discourses of Muslim clerics and jurists targeted the *hammam* as the problematic, sexually transgressive space and regulated it heavily through imperial laws, guild regulations, and court orders. Semerdjian's analysis emphasizes the ways that intellectuals and the Ottoman state understood the bathhouse and monitored male and female bodies differently within it. She points out that although bathhouses were always monitored, in the eighteenth century women became a major focal point of surveillance. According to the author, the regulation of *hammams* in the city of Aleppo in the eighteenth century put in place particular constructions of bodies and genders. Although both male and female non-Muslims were regarded as sources of pollution, the non-Muslim women bathers posed a more threatening problem—thus the enforcement of separate bathing times for Muslim and non-Muslim women. Furthermore, the scope of the regulations concerning women bathers, the author argues, rendered non-Muslim women an unstable gender category. Because non-Muslim women (*dhimmi*) were seen as posing a particularly great threat to Muslim women's *mahremiyet* (their sanctity, modesty, and privacy), a non-Muslim woman was understood to be "gendered male at the moment she views a Muslim woman in a state of nudity." The author highlights the liminality of the *dhimmi* woman's imposed gender identification as an unstable category; she was designated as male because she served as a conduit of the male gaze.

The Desiring, Protesting Body, and Authenticity in Fiction and Political Discourses

The body, including embodied sexual difference, sexuality, political repression, and protest, and the political investment in the female body and sexuality as one of the crucial sites on which struggles for power and hegemony are waged, is a major thread in the chapters by Miral Mahgoub Al-Tahawy, Martina Censi, and Sherine Hafez. The authors see the linking of the individual body—the discursive and material inscription of social structures into bodies—in the writings of the Arab women writers, and in discourses of Muslim Brother and the Egyptian State. Miral Mahgoub Al-Tahawy notes the new uses of the body for protest in recent Arab women's movements. She notes, for example, blogger Aliaa Al Mahdy, who put a nude picture on her Facebook page to raise awareness and protest the lack of progress for women in the wake of the Egyptian revolution. Moroccan artist Latifa Ahraralso uncovered her body in front of an audience. Most recently, in protest against the violent conflict in Syria, the artist Hala Faisal stripped herself of clothing in Washington Square Park. Al-Tahawy argues that Arab women's writing has been an integral part of body protests. Such writing, she argues, expresses the oppressed body and uses the body as a tool to break prohibitions by focusing primarily on sexuality, and in particular lesbian relationships, explicitly describing the details of sexual relationships without fear of persecution by traditional patriarchal society. Al-Tahawy suggests that Arab women's writing is analogous to a naked protesting body; the written protest parallels protest acts of nudity by activist women. Her chapter in this volume examines the collection of stories *Who Could the Man Be?* by the Egyptian writer Alifa Rifaat (1930–1996), who is considered one of the most significant voices in addressing questions about women's bodies, their sexual desires, and lesbian sex in Arab literature. According to Al-Tahawy, Alifa Rifaat's racy narrative voice informs and reflects relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed, enabling her to uncover and challenge the values of the traditional patriarchal society and ultra-conservative religious rhetoric. In the course of her analysis, Al-Tahawy also historizes Alifa Rifaat and carefully examines the context of production and reception of her work, particularly explicating the controversial claim that Alifa Rifaat's discourse constitutes a "precursor to Islamic feminism."

Martina Censi, in "Rewriting the Body in the Novels of Contemporary Syrian Women Writers," explores the different representations of the body in the novels of Rosa Yāsīn Ḥasan, Samar Yazbik, and Hayfā' Bīṭār. She uses the tools of comparative literature and feminist literary criticism and also conducts interviews with the authors. In *Guardians of the Air*, Rosa Yāsīn Ḥasan deals with the theme of political repression, represented through the love story between a young Alawita woman and her Druze partner, on whose bodies both pleasure and violence are inflicted. Censi argues that the erotic body is not only the space of encounter with the other, but also the space of search for self-assertion. In *Smell of Cinnamon*, Samar Yazbik explores the theme of domination and subordination in class relations through a lesbian relationship between two female protagonists. In this novel, the body acquires its eroticism only through lesbian relationships. In *Woman of Modern Times*, Hayfā' Bīṭār puts the ill and suffering body at the center of negotiations between the desire to conform to a stereotypical idea of modernity and the commitment to tradition. Through a comparative analysis of the three novels, Censi shows how these novels operate in dialogue with each other, collectively contributing to the representation of contemporary Syrian society as being in dialectical tension between the drive for collective control and individual claims. Censi also concludes that because these women writers narrate both female and male bodies in their writings, they prioritize the significance of the liberation of the individual both from the restrictions of the patriarchal system and from political repression, rather than only women's emancipation.

The "virgin trials," or legal proceedings against young women protestors who are members of the Muslim Brotherhood organization, epitomize how vying political projects in Egypt today play out in women's bodies. In post-revolutionary Egypt, women's bodies have increasingly become the site of struggles for power and hegemony over public discourse. In "The 'Virgin Trials': Piety, Femininity, and Authenticity in Muslim Brotherhood Discourse," Sherine Hafez asks what the construction of these bodies as youthful, pure, and pious "virgins" tell us. What claims do they make about piety, femininity, and authenticity? What are the implications of these statements for the current political scene in Egypt? She argues that the case of the "virgin trials" points to how consistency and uniformity are communicated through women's bodies to a Muslim majority public in Egypt today in an attempt to counter state hegemony and challenge its domination over the public sphere. The criminalization and demonization of these bodies, on the other hand, according to the author, characterizes the state's response to militant Islamism.

Re-Theorizing the Iranian Diaspora and "Islamic Feminism" in Iran

The chapters in the last section by Leila Mouri and Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi and Farhang Rouhani suggest that we must dare to ask difficult, overarching questions about local and global hegemonic discourses in post-colonial feminist scholarship and activism. These questions set the terms of debate about women's political mobilization in Muslim-majority countries. Connecting these two chapters are new ideas about the Iranian diaspora and the feminist knowledge production in diasporic contexts. It is no exaggeration to say that Western feminist theory and activism have a complex history with feminism/women's movements in the rest of the world. In "Can the Secular Iranian Women's Activist Speak? Caught between Political Power and the 'Islamic Feminist,'" Leila Mouri and Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi highlight for us the challenges facing secular women's rights activists in Iran, who must strategically deal with both the Iranian State and what they consider the diasporic construction of a new category: Islamic feminism. The authors show that although there are several distinct and overlapping strains of women's activism in Iran with diverse views on tactics and strategies for improving women's status, marked by "a hybrid movement of secularists, feminists, and the religiously devout," the figure of the Islamic feminist is often situated as the most authentic and legitimate voice for representing Muslim women and their concerns. The figure of the Islamic feminist is expressly celebrated by its proponents as a form distinct and divergent from secular feminist activists whom the Iranian government vilify as un-Islamic, "[tools] of American imperialism—as a western-imperialist project plot designed to destabilize the Islamic government." Both in the typification of activist women and in the language of analysis, the category of Islamic feminist has permeated Western and post-colonialist feminist scholarship to such an extent that, the authors argue, it undermines the potential contributions of secular activists. The usurpation of secular feminism by Islamic feminism ("Iran civil society activists, including women's rights activists advocates, are often incorporated into the Islamic feminist category even despite their clear objection") limits recognition of the vision and inspiration that a secular, liberal struggle can provide. And so, though at the forefront of various legislative struggles for securing women's rights in Iran (especially regarding prison torture and stoning), secular women's rights activists find themselves "unable to speak." According to the authors, this "has resulted in a political and epistemic violence, silencing the speech and actions of Iran's secular feminists and women's rights defenders." The authors highlight the nature of the power dynamics between Iranian secular activists and feminist post-colonial scholars within the context of the Iranian domestic political context and global forces that have mutually impacted this relationship.

Enduring scholarly and political preoccupation over authenticity and authority, and the question of whose voice and politics are privileged to represent Iran, Iranians, and the Iranian diaspora, has been recast within a new and emergent framework by Farhang Rouhani. This framework reflects new and productive destabilization of core assumptions about home, family, gender, and nation in Iranian diaspora studies. In "Queering the 'Iranian' and the 'Diaspora' of the Iranian Diaspora," Rouhani recommends that we abandon the routine binary oppositions and the dualities of home/away, belonging/not belonging, nation/diaspora to transcend the divisive concerns over authenticity and "an exclusive connection to a rooted idea of belonging" that characterize most of the writings and scholarship on the Iranian diaspora. Borrowing Garvey's conceptualization of "queer un-belonging" in which multiple home-spaces and inhabiting are recognized as holding new possibilities for intimacy, desire, and relating to others, Rouhani traces the inhibiting boundaries of conventional national and global community formations that stifle intimacy and imaginings of multiple belongings from a queer perspective. He claims that "a queer diaspora lens … supports a vital set of reading practices to counter the conventional Orientalism through which people read books," such as the much-discussed genres of Iranian diasporic memoir-writing. He critically examines Jasmin Darznik's popular memoir *The Good Daughter*, which focuses on three generations of Iranian women—a memoir which, according to Rouhani, not only challenges conventionally held understandings of gender, nation, narration, and home by unsettling the Iranian immigrant women's memoir genre, but also inspires new identities and ways of relating, as well as new opportunities for building community through the intimate sharing of experiences within the disorienting spaces in which it functions. For Rouhani, when viewed through a queer diasporic lens, *The Good Daughter* is disorienting because it is able to simultaneously question and reaffirm the meanings of "home" in the context of diaspora by challenging and reasserting Iranian nationalism and by building nostalgia and ripping it apart at the same time. Rouhani also contrasts a queer diaspora methodology of reading texts with examples of more conventional, orientalist readings of *The Good Daughter*, concretely showing the reader the rich promises of a queer reading practice.

I hope that the rich empirical material offered to the readers of this volume will generate fresh and significant comparative reflections on the imbrications of the three analytically distinct yet deeply intertwined realms of gender, sexuality, and the body in Muslim cultures.

PART 1
CHALLENGED MASCULINITIES

Chapter 1
In Vitro Nationalism: Masculinity, Disability, and Assisted Reproduction in War-Torn Turkey

Salih Can Açıksöz

Introduction

This chapter explores the ramifications of the decades-long Kurdish conflict for masculinity, male embodiment, sexuality, and politics of reproduction in Turkey. More specifically, it examines how the bodies, gendered subjectivities, sexualities, and reproductive capacities of Turkish veterans disabled in clashes with Kurdish guerillas are made, unmade, and remade through the complex interactions of multiple technologies of state and war-making, governmentality, welfare, military medicine, and assisted reproduction in the context of the ongoing peace and reconciliation processes. Focusing on the state-sponsored assisted conception program that seeks to make fathers out of paraplegic veterans, this chapter aims to contribute to our understanding of masculinity, disabled sexuality, and new reproductive technologies from the viewpoint of a war-torn Muslim-majority society.

This chapter draws from my doctoral work on Turkish conscripted soldiers disabled in clashes with Kurdish guerillas in the context of the Kurdish conflict, one of the longest-lasting ethnopolitical armed conflicts in the Middle East (Açıksöz 2011, 2012). My doctoral work explores disabled veterans' memories and experiences of warfare, disability, welfare, and urban poverty, and analyzes how new gender and political identities are forged out of these embodied experiences and memories. For my dissertation research, I conducted more than two years of multi-sited fieldwork with disabled veterans in Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey, between 2005 and 2007. I attended disabled veterans' grassroots organizations and any major event they organized or participated in, such as protests or ceremonies, collected their life histories, and conducted numerous interviews with them and people influencing their lives, such as military physicians, government officials, journalists, and disability activists.

Based on the findings of followup research on this fieldwork, this chapter delves into paraplegic veterans' quest for fatherhood through assisted conception.[1] In addition to the disabled veterans' narratives of family building that I collected during my fieldwork, my data includes a series of interviews that the well-known female journalist Ayşe Arman conducted with paraplegic veterans for the popular Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* in late 2010. This interview series, entitled "Interrupted Lives," features not only paraplegic veterans and their wives, but also obstetricians who specialize in working with paraplegic veterans, and provides the very first public account of Turkish disabled veterans' sexual and reproductive lives (Arman 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).

This chapter explores veterans’ assisted reproduction and medicalized fatherhood experiences in relation to the masculinity crisis that they experience as disabled men, and situates the state’s assisted conception program within broader sociopolitical concerns over the recovery of disabled veterans’ masculinities. Building on the literature on disability and sexuality (Gerschick 2000, Shakespeare 1999, Shuttleworth, Wedgwood, and Wilson 2012, Tepper 1999), I illustrate how assisted conception helps paraplegic veterans challenge stereotypes regarding disabled masculinity (impotent or asexual “half-men”) and position themselves within the normative frameworks of manhood and family. Finally, I briefly discuss the implications of paraplegic veterans’ quest for fatherhood for our understanding of the transformation of biological citizenship, politics of reproduction, and nationalism under the rule of neo-liberal Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) government.

Military Service as a Masculine Rite of Passage

In contemporary Turkey, compulsory military service applies to all able-bodied heterosexual male citizens who reach the legal age of 20. One cannot overstate the importance of this gendered institution for nationalist symbolism, the definition of citizenship, and the socialization of men. Leaving women, openly gay men, and the disabled outside, compulsory military service draws the contours of both hegemonic masculinity and the national community (Altınay 2004, Sinclair-Webb 2000).

Military service was made compulsory for men in Turkey in 1927. Reinforcing the state monopoly on violence within the new national territory, compulsory military service also provided the political elite of the newly founded republic a useful institutional means to access the male half of the population. Through military service, generations of young men from different ethnic and class backgrounds were remade as acceptable national subjects. They were taught Turkish, literacy, “correct” forms of belief and worship, body care, and social decorum, and molded into educated, modernized, disciplined, docile, and productive laborers and citizens (Altınay 2004, *Şen* 1996). Hence, cultivating what the republic deemed proper masculinity, the exclusively male institution of compulsory military service both reflected and consolidated the gendered citizenship regime of the new republic, which promised young men an equal place in horizontal comradeship in exchange for their submission to the state’s military authority (Koğacıoğlu 2004, Sirman 2000).

This promise has taken deep roots in Turkey partly because of the legal sanctions that apply to those who have not undertaken their service. Evading military service is no easy task in Turkey because what it practically means for draft evaders is the suspension of even basic citizenship rights (Sinclair-Webb 2000). Failing to perform military service limits one’s ability to travel, especially out of the country. If caught, draft evaders are taken into military custody and forcefully recruited. Evading military service also means avoiding legal registration of residency, without which one cannot be included on the electoral register and hence is not allowed to vote. Moreover, until the very recent changes in the Turkish Nationality Law undertaken as a part of the European Union harmonization process, those who failed to complete military service before the age of 40 could be expelled from citizenship.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that military service was merely imposed by the state in a top-down manner. The particular masculinity that military service cultivated and its symbolic and socioeconomic implications have an appeal to wide segments of the population. Thus, the legal sanctions awaiting draft evaders are also supported by less formal social sanctions concerning formal employment and marriage. Employers are generally unwilling to employ men who have not completed their military service. Similarly, many families do not favor marriage until the prospective husband has completed his service. In other words, military service is both a legally and socially warranted prerequisite for becoming an unmarked man in Turkey.

To summarize, compulsory military service in Turkey operates as a key rite of passage into adult masculinity and full membership in the national community. A young man becomes marriageable and employable, a husband and a breadwinner, and a full citizen by the virtue of completing his military service. This social and legal expectation forms a sort of patriarchal contract between the state and male citizens.

A Broken Gendered Promise

The intimate relationship between military service and hegemonic masculinity has been dramatically destabilized since the onset of the armed conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 1984.[2] This destabilization manifested on multiple levels after the 1990s. In the context of the conflict, the number of draft evaders has reached an unprecedented level, estimated somewhere between 400,000 and 500,000 (Mater 2005). Middle and upper-middle classes have increasingly capitalized on their social and economic resources to develop strategies for dodging the draft and, even more importantly, avoiding deployment in the conflict zone—strategies such as paid exemption from full-term military service, becoming and remaining enrolled in college and graduate school for extended periods, and obtaining a medical report documenting ineligibility for military service (aka the "rotten report"). Young men were reported mutilating themselves by cutting off their index fingers or having their spleens removed with the purpose of obtaining medical exemption (Başaran forthcoming). Moreover, the first conscientious objection movement of Turkey emerged in this period through the efforts of activists who openly resisted the draft despite the extremely harsh measures taken by the state.

This destabilization is nowhere more evident than in the life stories of conscripted soldiers violently disabled during their military service. In the course of the Kurdish conflict, more than three million Turkish conscripts have been deployed against the PKK guerillas. Although official numbers are not disclosed, tens of thousands of soldiers have been injured and thousands of them have become permanently physically disabled. It should be noted that these numbers do not even include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) cases, since the Turkish military-medical establishment systemically refuses to grant disability benefits to soldiers with PTSD symptoms.

The post-military life of conscripts disabled during military service is a radically different story from the dominant cultural script. It is a story not of "becoming man," but of expulsion from hegemonic masculinity in a country where disabled people cannot join public life as equal citizens because of the strong stigma of disability and widespread discriminatory practices against the disabled.

During my fieldwork, I visited 35 disabled veterans at their homes in lower-class neighborhoods in the peripheries of Istanbul and Ankara, where they led a volatile coexistence with Kurdish forced migrants. Most of my informants were wounded during the height of the conflict between 1993 and 1996. Nearly all of them were between 35 and 40 years of age when we met. More than half of them had experienced lower extremity amputations after getting injured in landmine explosions. The rest mostly had orthopedic disabilities due to gunshot injuries, and a few had bilateral blindness due to trauma.

On my visits, I was nearly always hosted in the salon (guest room), where my informants reconstructed their life histories. In almost all cases, the moment of injury constituted a sharp break both in the consistency of my informants' life-story narratives and in their actual life trajectories, radically separating their pre-conscription and post-injury life worlds. Upon leaving the military hospital, most became dependent on their natal families for financial support and daily care, either temporarily until their eligibility for compensation and welfare entitlements was eventually approved through a number of maze-like bureaucratic processes, or permanently, as in the case of most paraplegic veterans. This somewhat reversed rite of passage brought about a striking sense of infantilization and shame for disabled veterans, moments condensed in tropes of "the shame of being diapered by the mother" and "the shame of asking for cigarette money from the father."

Most veterans had lost their former blue-collar jobs and were employed at state institutions as unskilled laborers in accordance with the state's paternalist job placement policies. Those who were single before conscription experienced desertion by their girlfriends or fiancées and difficulty in finding a spouse, whereas the already married few faced marital problems exacerbated by financial troubles, intensified domestic violence, or bodily stigma. They frequently felt themselves cut off from their able-bodied friends, a feeling often reinforced by their inability to perform lower-class male bonding practices such as attending football games. Being both disabled and politically marked, their experience of the urban space was transformed in a way that made them feel vulnerable to various forces, such as street crime, political retaliation, and the ordinary performative violence of street masculinity.

In order to understand the disabled veteran's masculinity crisis, one has to understand the overall situation of the disabled population in Turkey. Despite some recent improvements pushed through in the context of Turkey's European Union accession process, the country has historically had a bad record in terms of the living standards, employment options, and mobility chances of its disabled citizens.

Some statistics may be useful to understand the plight of disabled citizens. According to the first *Disability Survey* of Turkey, conducted in 2002, there are 8.5 million disabled people in Turkey, constituting 12 percent of the total population (Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People 2002). The survey findings clearly delineate the socioeconomic inequalities impinging on the lives of disabled people: 78 percent of the disabled population do not participate in the labor force, in contrast with 41 percent of the general population; 36 percent are illiterate in contrast to 12 percent of the general population;

and 34 percent are never married in contrast to less than 26 percent of the general population.

Another nationwide research project stunningly reports that the word “disabled” (*sakat*) is most commonly associated with the word “needy” (*muhtac*) (Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Administration for Disabled People 2009). Still another recent research poll shows that more than 70 percent of the population would prefer not having an orthopedically disabled neighbor.[3] In such a milieu, the lives of disabled veterans, most of them already coming from lower-class backgrounds, were characterized by their exclusion from the public sphere and wage labor and their consequent social and economic dependency. Moreover, they had to face the strong cultural stigma of disability and live in a cultural climate in which people called them “half-men” or even “living dead,” as a popular sports commentator once infamously did on live TV. In short, military service made the disabled veteran “less of a man” rather than providing a passage into adult masculinity and full-fledged citizenship.

Remasculinizing Veterans

The social situation of the disabled conscripts just described has been an important source and surface of gendered anxieties for the Turkish state and society. The disruption of the idea that “military service makes a man” was a big blow, especially to the hegemonic militarized approach to the Kurdish question. As the conflict escalated and disabled conscripts became more and more publicly visible in the mid-1990s, a number of social actors within and beyond state institutions—including military officials, politicians, state bureaucrats, media personae, and nationalist philanthropists—started to call on the state to take drastic steps to fix this gendered crisis by ameliorating disabled veterans’ lives. The resulting shift in the state’s relationship with disabled veterans of the Kurdish conflict would have a radical impact on the lives of these men in the 2000s.

The best way to understand this shift is through Foucault’s concept of governmentality. The notion of governmentality is a part of Foucault’s broader scholarly attempt to reconceptualize power as not simply a repressive but a productive relationship that operates not only at the level of the state but at the micro levels of society that are not often associated with power, such as forms of knowledge and expertise or institutions like schools and hospitals (Foucault 1990, 2003, 2007, 2008). In Foucault’s work, governmentality refers to “an array of practices through which the population of a modern nation-state is governed, including institutions such as schools and the police, agencies for the provision of social services, discourses, norms, and even individual self-regulation through techniques for disciplining and caring for the self. These forms of governmentality encompass more than what might formally be called ‘the state’” (Ewing 2008, 6). In other words, governmentality cannot be reduced to the activities of the state because it “involves a multitude of heterogeneous entities” that seek to “enhance the security, longevity, health, prosperity, and happiness of populations” (Inda 2005, 6).

Informed by Foucault’s work, I conceptualize the emerging interest of political authorities and experts in the well-being of disabled veterans as a process of (further) governmentalization of the disabled veteran population. I argue that this process culminated in the constitution of a new governmental regime that is thoroughly gendered. Within the matrixes of this new governmental regime, various state, medical, and welfare institutions campaigned to remasculinize disabled veterans via a variety of discursive, institutional, and medical practices. This governmental regime formed the basis of an emergent militarized and exclusively male interest group whose relationship with the state is politically overdetermined by the vicissitudes of the Kurdish conflict.

This new regime finds its spatial manifestation in a set of military-medical institutions that were designed exclusively for soldiers wounded in the Kurdish conflict. A new orthopedics clinic, "the sixth floor," as my informants love to call it, at Gülhane military hospital in Ankara was a fundamental breakthrough in this direction. The sixth floor was followed by similar medico-institutional spaces for disabled veterans: Turkey's largest rehabilitation center in Ankara; a unique military holiday resort on the Aegean coast designed to accommodate the needs of persons with different types and degrees of disability; a recreational facility; and Gazi Adaptation House, encompassing restaurants, hobby gardens, a small zoo, and an artificial lake with waterfalls that frequently appears in the media for all the disabled veterans' wedding ceremonies it hosts. These new politically marked, military-medical institutions have played a key role in disabled veterans' lives, surpassing their role as treatment and rehabilitation centers. They have constituted liminal spaces in which injured soldiers first learned to become disabled men and perform manhood with a new embodiment, rediscovering different domains of masculine experience from violence to sexuality.

An important aspect of this new governmental regime was the introduction of a bundle of welfare rights and entitlements. These include free high-quality prostheses that, at least in discourse if not in practice, "meet the highest standards of the world," in addition to job placement, interest-free housing credit, firearm licenses, and now even state-sponsored assisted conception. The lurking gendered agenda of recovering the masculinity of disabled veterans is obvious in these rights and entitlements. Prostheses give back normative body image and partially restore mobility, both crucial elements in the process of remasculinization. Interest-free housing credits aim to make disabled veterans homeowners, thereby increasing their eligibility for marriage. Note that the Turkish word for getting married, *evlenmek*, is derived from the root "ev" (house) and literally means "getting a house." The job placement policy seeks to restore their breadwinner status, whereas firearm licenses provide them with the masculine right to violence that they lost by becoming disabled. In other words, it is not only disabled veterans' bodies that are being governmentalized, but also their masculinities, which are constructed as technoscientifically fixable states of being in need of state intervention.

Disability, Sexuality, and Medicalized Fatherhood

A major concern that drives this new governmentality is to help disabled veterans marry and build families so that they conform to the ideal unmarked citizen image, which is to be married with children. For that purpose, Gazi Adaptation House even hosts disabled veterans' weddings at a minimal cost. However, for disabled veterans, getting married is still a troublesome issue. "They don't marry a '*kız*' (girl/virgin) to gazis" is a common grievance among disabled veterans, who often have a difficult time finding a suitable spouse because of the social prejudices against disabled men. Even though I had heard it numerous times before, I had not appreciated the significance of this phrase until I witnessed a failed matchmaking attempt at a state-sponsored disabled veterans' organization, which was led by the wife of a martyr pilot, Berna Abla.

> As soon as I stepped inside, I noticed the angry voice of Berna Abla, the head of the association, who was talking really loud on the phone with someone, whom I later understood to be the mother of a divorcee (*dul*) who was proposed to by a disabled veteran. After she hung up the phone, Berna Abla, upset, explained that the mother was indisposed to give the hand of her daughter to an 'unsound' despite her insistent attempts to convince her. "OK, my guy is not sound," she cried out shaking in anger, "What about your girl? As if she were sound [virgin]. Isn't your girl a dul?"

The word "dul" signifies both divorcee and widow in Turkish. Especially for younger women, *dulluk* (being a dul) is a very precarious social category, burdened with the stigma of unchastity. Asking a gazi to marry a dul sounds like a betrayal to his nationalist sacrifice. Nevertheless, Berna Abla was not alone in suggesting that a gazi would be a good match with a dul. While criticizing a disabled veteran missing both legs for eloping with a young girl, the head of another association, a martyr's mother and a true matriarch, also said: "I tell gazis not to marry young girls but duls. They are the ones who know the meaning of sacrifice." In her words, there is a social correspondence between the gazi and the dul. They are socially "wasted," one by becoming disabled and the other by losing her virginity. But the main point is: the state-sponsored remasculinization process of disabled veterans is actively supported by state-related figures like military officers and their spouses, who often play an active role in the arrangement of disabled veterans' marriages.

When I read Arman's interviews, I realized that the state's attempts to recover disabled veterans' masculinity went beyond what I had imagined. In the course of my research, I had met only two paraplegic veterans. One of them was single and having difficulty finding a marriage partner. Thus, it had not occurred to me that assisted conception would be a major concern for paraplegic veterans. When I did some research about paraplegic veterans' access to assisted reproduction technologies after reading Arman's interviews, I found out that until the 2000s, disabled veterans very rarely had a chance to utilize these technologies. In the early 2000s, a military officer's wife, who is revered by disabled veterans as a godmother figure, initiated the foundation of an assisted conception unit at Gülhane military hospital in Ankara. That clinic was the first to specialize in methods like testicular sperm aspiration/extraction (TESA/E), which involves the direct removal of sperm from the testicles to obtain viable sperm cells, either by surgical biopsy or through a needle. It seems that now a number of obstetricians in Ankara are famous for getting miraculous results with paraplegic disabled veterans, and Arman interviewed one of them for her series, hailing him as "the doctor who made fathers out of disabled veterans."

State-sponsored in vitro fertilization helps paraplegic veterans become fathers, completing the life cycle of hegemonic masculinity. But there is more to it. During my fieldwork, the intimate topic of sexuality had rarely emerged as an issue in my conversations with disabled veterans. The exception was their experiences with sex workers. I knew, for example, that some sex workers made special arrangements for disabled veterans under treatment at the rehabilitation center by renting first floor apartments close to the center. I was also aware that whenever they found the opportunity, my informants reasserted themselves as sexualized adult men in their life stories. “Disabled men are hornier than anyone else,” my amputee informants loved to say and explained, “In amputees, blood does not lounge in the legs.” Then they would cheerfully tell me socially inappropriate disability humor stories, like how a disabled veteran missing both legs went to bed with a sex worker, who, being unaware of the guy’s amputated legs, mistook his stump for his penis and panicked. Resignifying the stump, the corporal symbol of lack, as the phallic symbol of excess, these stories exemplified narrative resistance to the stigmatizing stereotypes of disabled men as asexual and infantilized “half-men.”

In the case of paraplegic veterans, new reproductive technologies offer an even more convincing tool to counter social stereotypes, given the “strong popular association between male fertility, potency, and masculinity” (Throsby and Gill 2004, 336). Male infertility often remains hidden as one of the most stigmatizing male health conditions because it is “popularly, although usually mistakenly, conflated with impotency, as both disrupt a man’s ability to impregnate a woman and to prove one’s virility, paternity, and manhood” (Inhorn 2004, 163). Assisted conception gives paraplegic veterans not only a chance to have children, a major prerequisite of adult masculinity, but also the proof that they have an active sex life and that they are not “half-men.” For example, one of the couples that Arman interviewed continuously underline that they have a “very harmonious” sexual life. The husband indicates that he has no difficulty with erection, whereas his wife tells Arman: “There is a way to do everything and there are different methods. We also have a sexual life. My husband is no different from a normal man. Actually, he is excellent. Mashallah!” Similarly, an obstetrician Arman interviewed also assures the reader that “These couples are very compatible not only in terms of living together but also sexually.”

The remaining two couples in Arman’s interviews reveal a more cautious picture by emphasizing that they are in love and the fact that just because “he [the husband] cannot do certain things does not mean that they do not have a happy marriage.” They also voice complaints about the social stigmatization of wives of paraplegic men as “adulteress” women, women who seek sexual satisfaction outside of the conjugal marital relationship. These concerns led the third couple to hide from everyone, including their own parents, that they had a test tube baby and instead tell them that they had the baby “naturally.” Actually, journalist Arman later tells the reader that this couple did not want to be in the newspaper and refused the publication of their interview despite the $12,000 cash offered by Arman, and accepted the offer only after they received a written guarantee that their identities would not be disclosed and their faces would not be shown. Obviously, the couple must have felt that the disclosure of assisted conception, which already evokes anxieties over virility, would seriously undermine the masculinization that comes with fatherhood.

The continuing gendered anxieties of the couples Arman interviewed illustrate the frail nature of the technoscientific masculinization enabled by new reproductive technologies. This frailness is obviously not limited to the case of Turkish paraplegic veterans. Writing in the context of Egypt and Lebanon, Marcia Inhorn notes, “Infertile men also worried about the stigma that might surround the child if its ‘test tube origins’ were revealed, due to the popular societal assumption that an IVF baby might be the product of donor gametes” (Inhorn 2004, 175). She thus concludes that the stigma and secrecy surrounding male infertility are compounded by the "technological stigma" of the assisted reproduction itself; not only male fertility but also the very technologies designed to overcome it are seen as potentially emasculating and stigmatized (Inhorn 2004). For paraplegic men, the situation is even more complex, since there is no secrecy surrounding their presumed infertility. On the contrary, even if their partners become pregnant in a technoscientifically unmediated way, paraplegic men's sexual and reproductive capacities and their masculinities are always already under question. Nevertheless, the meanings and social status attached to paternity and fatherhood allow paraplegic veterans to reiterate more stable and less contested adult heteronormative masculine performances, which enable them to inhabit a less stigmatized social space as disabled men.

Biopolitical Transformations

I had mentioned that Arman's interview series provided the very first public accounts of Turkish disabled veterans' sexual and reproductive lives. Arman's interviews are important not only because they make disabled sexuality visible but also because they represent a shift in the mainstream public discourse concerning disabled veterans, a shift that we have to understand in relation to the larger biopolitical transformations that Turkey experienced under the decade-long rule of the AKP governments.

The first transformation concerns the state's changing population policies. Over the 2000s, the successive AKP governments increasingly abandoned the state's decades-long antinatalist population policies in favor of a pronatalist approach to population. Placing new restrictions on abortions and contraceptives, introducing cash for kids' programs to boost the birth rate, and redefining the ideal family in the state development paradigm, the AKP rule has gradually reshaped the contours of reproductive citizenship in Turkey (Acar and Altunok 2013, Unal and Cindoglu 2013). The AKP Prime Minister, Tayyip Erdogan, repeatedly asserted that abortion is murder and argued that C-section deliveries hindered population growth as he became increasingly bold in voicing his pronatalist beliefs. When the prime minister participates in wedding ceremonies, his political signature is to publicly ask newlyweds to promise that they will have at least three children.

State-sponsored assisted reproduction for disabled veterans is firmly positioned within this broader transformation in the state's population policies. Until the 2000s, disabled veterans did not receive any financial support for their quest for test tube babies and had to either find a sponsor or pay for assisted conception out of their own pockets. Private obstetrics clinics sometimes offered to cover their expenses as a form of nationalist charity to advertise their services in a militarized and privatized milieu. I came across such a story on the Internet.[4] A newlywed disabled veteran suffering from damaged urinary tracts, a burst testicle, and infertility alongside major orthopedic disabilities shared his predicament on a confession website after a two-year-long wait to adopt a child. A charitable person who saw his post contacted and introduced him to the director of a private infertility and test tube baby center. After a surgical biopsy on his remaining testicle and several failed conception attempts, the disabled veteran finally became a father to a child named Armağan, “the gift.” Such gifts became superfluous after the restructuring of the social security system in 2008, when the state started to cover IVF expenses of disabled veterans along with other groups covered by social security. After the state’s (re)turn to pronatalism, providing free access to assisted reproduction technologies was now seen as a way to encourage and enable population increase.

The second major biopolitical transformation is in the field of disability politics. In the previous sections I talked about how disabled veterans became subjects of a new governmentality from the 1990s onward. Under the AKP rule, the larger disabled population underwent a similar process of governmentalization. This transformation was instituted on multiple fronts: concerted attempts to collect empirical data such as the first nationwide disability survey of 2002, deployment of new medical/welfare techniques for the measurement and classification of disability, legal reforms including the Turkish Disability Act of 2006, new welfare and social assistance programs for the disabled, accessibility planning for public transportation and urban design, elimination of discriminatory wording from laws, and national fundraising, consciousness-raising, and anti-stigma campaigns (see Bezmez 2013 and Evren 2013 for detailed analyses of this process). Despite their shortcomings in practice, all these governmental efforts produced a new discursive terrain for the public articulation of disabled citizens’ rights, needs, claims, and desires. As a result, disabled individuals started to become increasingly visible in the media, not as charity cases or grotesque figures of alterity, but rather as model citizens seeking to redress their grievances, fashion new lives, build families, and become productive members of society “despite all odds.” Arman’s interviews with the disabled veterans and the accompanying happy family pictures of men in wheelchairs surrounded by their spouses and children belong to this new representational genre of disability in the media.

The final transformation concerns the change in the nationalist politics of the body in the context of the peace attempts between the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement. Arman’s interviews were published in the heat of the Kurdish Opening, a vague democratization and peaceful negotiation process that the Justice and Development party government initiated in late 2009. Indeed, just before Arman’s interviews were run by the newspaper, disabled veterans organized spectacular protests all over Turkey in which they removed their prosthetic limbs and gave them back to state authorities to protest the peace attempts. In these demonstrations, disabled veterans utilized a political language of sacrifice and symbolically dismembered themselves once again to protest what they perceived to be the dismemberment of the country (Aciksoz 2011). Interestingly, in Arman’s series, there is no mention of such protests. Once constituting the only available public discourse about disabled veterans, the discourse of sacrifice is slowly losing its political efficacy as the belligerent and ethnic tone of Turkish nationalism, and its obsession with the aesthetics of sacrifice wanes in the context of current peace and reconciliation attempts. The new Turkish nationalism that the AKP tries to inculcate stresses healing and rehabilitation more than sacrifice and dismemberment. Under the AKP rule, Turkey’s neo-liberal developmentalist imagery is obsessed by the prosthetic reconstruction of the body through technoscientific and capital investment, as evidenced by the world’s first two quadruple limb transplants, some of the world’s first face transplants, and the world's first robotic mobilization device for paraplegic individuals. In this new milieu, the biopolitical success of the state's welfare system in turning disabled veterans into fathers, giving them what they have lost through the violent interruption of their transition to manhood, matters more than ever. This is the age of in vitro nationalism.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, the fruitful dialogue between disability and gender studies has led scholars to examine how corporeal otherness and gender inequality are co-constructed in a variety of social fields (Fawcett 2000, Smith and Hutchison 2004). However, notwithstanding a few exceptional works (Gerber 2000, Shakespeare 1999, Shuttleworth 2004), a vast majority of this research has focused primarily on women (Shuttleworth 2004). Moreover, in the works that focus on the experiences and representations of disabled men, the analysis is guided by a recurring assumption that disability feminizes men (Diedrich 1998, 2001; Gerber 2000). Challenging this assumption that reflects and reinforces the idea that masculinity and femininity are fixed and monolithic oppositional entities, rather than fluid, multiple, and contradictory "processes of becoming" (Butler 1990), I follow the central premise of masculinity studies, which holds that multiple masculinities coexist in relations of power, contestation, and negotiation. From this perspective, disability may engender subordinate masculinities when disabled men fail to conform to hegemonic ideas about the male body, embody masculine dispositions (Bourdieu 1977, 2001), or reiterate normative gendered performances (Butler 1990, 1993). Thus, in order to understand how different masculinities are materialized in disabled bodies, one has to pay close attention to the gendered meanings, representations, and experiences of different impairments, as well as to the interplay between the gendered body and machinations of power, capital, and the state.

In this chapter, I have illustrated how Turkish disabled conscripts' embodied predicaments at the intersection of disability, class, gender, and sexuality are subjectively felt and socioculturally constructed as a masculinity crisis. This masculinity crisis, fracturing the militarized gender production machine and the state-enforced heteronormative and ableist conceptions of adult masculinity embedded in compulsory military service, has been the driving force behind the construction of a new governmental regime for disabled veterans. This new governmentality animated by gendered anxieties has utilized multiple forms of power and knowledge to remasculinize disabled veterans by acting upon the intimate details of their lives, technoscientifically fixing their embodied capacities, and remaking them as productive and reproductive bodies. The deployment of new reproductive technologies and assisted reproduction has been a crucial step in the reinscription of gendered normativity. Nevertheless, drawing disabled veterans into the world of heteronormative domesticity and reproductive sexuality has not been an unproblematic process, as illustrated by my discussion of the quandaries of technoscientific fatherhood.

Turkish disabled veterans' quest for fatherhood presents us with a broader lesson about the undertheorized relationships between gender, embodiment, and economy. The masculinity crisis of disabled veterans has been an emergency for the state and nationalist actors, but it has also introduced an opportunity for neo-liberal (disaster) capitalism that thrives on crisis. I coin the term “in vitro nationalism” to understand this neo-liberal biopolitical modality in which technoscientific imaginaries, nationalist attachments, governmental practices, and capital flows become entangled in contemporary Turkey. The biopolitical project of making fathers out of paraplegic veterans, on the one hand, presents a fascinating case in which assisted reproduction is used to imagine and construct a new national community, one that is consumerist, conservative, pronatalist, disability-friendly, technology-savvy, and politically stable if not peaceable. On the other hand, it testifies to the increasing deployment of nationalist discourses and symbols to facilitate new forms of technoscientific capital investment and routinized consumption of technologies of vitality. Turkey’s neo-liberal developmentalist imagery is obsessed with the prosthetic reconstruction of the body through technoscientific and capital investment, as exemplified by the Turkish biomedical institutions’ zealous competition in the global market to accomplish one of the first face transplants and the world’s only successful quadruple limb transplant, or to develop the first robotic mobilization device for paraplegics. The procreative paraplegic veteran body is an excellent poster child of this turn to in vitro nationalism, pregnant with new possible articulations of body, technology, and capital.

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[1] Paraplegia is the impairment of sensory or motor function, or both, in lower extremities, often as a result of traumatic spinal cord injury (SCI). Despite popular misconceptions and stereotypes about male sexuality and fertility after SCI, paraplegic individuals do have sexual lives. Most paraplegic men can have different types and degrees of erection and orgasm depending on the level and extent of paralysis; and although they often have lower fertility rates, paraplegic men can and do have children, especially through the use of assisted reproduction technologies (Brackett, Nash, and Lynne 1996; Brown, Hill, and Baker 2006).

[2] The Kurdish issue is one the most significant ethnopolitical armed conflicts in the Middle East. The plight of the Kurds, who constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in the Middle East, with no nation-state of their own, began with the formation of the modern state system in the Middle East. After the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the twentieth century, the territory where the Kurds lived was divided among four would-be independent nation-states, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, where more than half of the Kurds still live. Fearing their territorial sovereignty was at risk, these countries often took violent measures to suppress Kurdish political demands. In the case of Turkey, these measures included the ban on speaking Kurdish and the official denial of the existence of Kurdish ethnicity, engendering a full-fledged armed resistance led by the Kurdistan Workers‘ Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan/PKK) in the 1980s. Conservative estimates put the death toll at 40,000 and the number of injured and disabled is unknown. Despite the on and off negotiations between the Turkish state and the PKK in the 2000s, a peaceful solution to the Kurdish conflict still seems far off.

[3] http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/halkinin_yuzde_70i_engelli_komsu_istemiyor-109305.

[4] Mesude Erşan. “9 Yıl Sonra Baba Oldu.” [He Became a Father After 9 Years.] *Hürriyet* 27/07/2003.

Chapter 2

Challenged Masculinities: Sexuality, ^{c}*Urfi*[1] Marriage, and the State in Dahab, Egypt

Mustafa Abdalla

The shift to neo-liberal economic policies in Egypt over the past few decades has increasingly challenged men's position in society and their role as breadwinners, responsible for the household and the well-being of the family (cf. Ali 2002; Abdalla 2007). Despite the way the notion of manhood and male domination is undermined by the deteriorating economic conditions in the society, recent social science research on gender in Egypt has largely investigated this issue from the perspective of gender-based segregation and inequality, that is, male domination and female subordination (Hatem 1986; Abu Lughod 1988; Rugh 1988; Sayed, El-Zanaty, and Cross 1992; Hoodfar 1999; Sholkamy 2004). Men have, by and large, been ignored (cf. Wassef and Mansour 1999). Specifically, socioeconomic challenges to men and their inability to meet societal demands by enacting their masculine identities through marriage, sexuality, providing for the family, or maintaining other expected social roles have received little scholarly attention. This chapter endeavors to highlight some of these pressing and ignored issues concerning men, which directly or indirectly affect women (cf. Silberschmidt 2001). In this regard, the chapter addresses subjective male experiences of emasculation and marginalization in contemporary Egypt and their connection with dominant notions of gender roles and state policies. By focusing on a group of migrants in Dahab,[2] South Sinai, who worked in the informal tourist industry and established relationships with foreign tourists, I argue that these men experienced a multilayered process of emasculation that is interlinked with their relationship to the state, dominant constructions of masculinities, and their transnational relationships. The chapter shows how these aspects are intertwined and how men's position is strongly impacted by socioeconomic changes, leading them to adopt risky behaviors and practices that jeopardize their position in society.

The chapter presents anthropological data collected in Dahab between 2001 and 2003 among this group, who migrated from the mainland to seek better job opportunities. The research was conducted over several visits and utilized various research methods, such as interviews, participant observation, and analysis of media representations.

The chapter begins by providing an overview of how deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and the failure of the Egyptian state to provide citizens with promised services play a crucial role in shaping masculine identities and behaviors, while triggering feelings of alienation and emasculation. Making use of ethnographic research, it is shown through the lived experiences of the men involved that they have experienced multiple forms of marginalization; they lacked access to economic capital because jobs were short and funds scarce. This, in turn, prevented them from acquiring the social capital needed for a respected position in society. Consequently, they relied heavily on their physical capital (cf. Coles 2009), represented by their sexuality, as a means to restore male dominance. In so doing, these men engaged in risky behaviors by establishing casual relationships with economically and socially empowered female tourists; these practices further deepened feelings of emasculation among this group in relation to women and also the police, who attempt to control relationships between Egyptian men and foreign women in Dahab. Thus, on the one hand, experiences of emasculation drove these men to adopt certain behaviors to boost their masculinity and gain some economic power. On the other, these practices are considered aberrant and are associated with social stigma in Egyptian society; thus, ironically, they resulted in bolstering the feelings of disempowerment and emasculation that they aimed to quell. The chapter shows that there are a variety of "masculinities" (Coles 2009) present and lived out differently through the life experiences of these men. This suggests that there are underlying shifts, disruptions, or "crisis tendencies" (Connell 2009) in the hegemonic masculinity that guarantees male dominance in Egyptian society. Thus current socioeconomic changes and challenges work as tools in undermining male roles and introducing alterations to gender orders.

State Policies and Male Marginalization

During the last half of the twentieth century, Egypt experienced major economic and social transformations affecting people at the grassroots level. The 1952 coup overthrew the monarchy and installed a military regime led by Nasser (1954–1970), which instituted socialist policies and provided welfare services, including health care, employment, housing, and education to the population (Ayubi 2001). This orientation, however, was reversed by subsequent governments as a result of economic decline, soaring foreign debts, and the high costs of welfare services, food subsidies, and other basic commodities. Therefore, Sadat (1970–1981) adopted an open door economic policy, *Infitah,* and the Mubarak regime (1981–2011) made even more drastic structural adjustments. These were supported, and at times initiated and imposed, by international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Rugh 1988; Korayem 1997; Hoodfar 1999). The changes have left the Egyptian government without the means to adequately provide the services promised to its citizens, such as sound education, health care, and employment. They have also led to the redefinition of the citizens' relationship to the state, and—especially for men—of their role in the society. The drastic economic reforms resulted in the state's welfare structures being dismantled, leaving large segments of the population to struggle for their daily survival (Rugh 1988; Korayem 1997; Ali 2002; Abdalla 2007; Osman 2011). They have also widened the gap between the rich and the poor, leading to the deterioration of living conditions among the population (Mitchell 2002) and increasingly forcing people to resort to varying informal strategies for daily survival.

The impact of the socioeconomic changes have been especially vividly experienced by men because of social expectations and dominant gender ideologies. This last factor demands that men be breadwinners, family men, and responsible for the household. As in other parts of the Middle East (cf. Gilsenan 1996), in order to assert their masculine identity, men in Egypt have to be the ones to secure the funds needed for daily economic survival, to marry and establish a family, and to protect the family honor (Hoodfar 1999; Ali 2002; Abdalla 2007). However, recent modifications have produced great discrepancies between dominant gender ideologies and real life experiences. Men have been left unable to find work, to get married, to establish and provide for a family; this has resulted in the evident disempowerment of men in contemporary Egypt. In light of the state's abdication of its responsibilities toward the citizens, men find it increasingly difficult to live out their masculine identities and to fulfill their role and the responsibilities tied to it.

As in other parts in the region (cf. Constantinides 1985), marriage and the bearing of children are important prerequisites for status and guarantee manhood. In particular, marriage, the institution that has traditionally provided men with prestige and social value and offered the ground on which to act out their masculine identities, has become extremely difficult to bring about, given the increasing material demands that are beyond the means of many men. For this reason, recent changes have dramatically contributed to the rise in the average age at marriage in Egypt (Singerman 2007). This fact has deeply affected men in the very notion of their masculinity; a frustrating situation for the marginal and the poor "experienced as a form of violence that socially castrates and humiliates the men … depriving them of their masculinity and manhood" (Ali 2002:133).

A close connection between masculinity, risk-taking behaviors, violence, control, domination, and proving masculine identities through sexuality has frequently been documented (Herzfeld 1985; Cornwall and Lindisfrane 1994; Gilsenan 1996; Bourdieu 1998; Connell 1998, 2005; Gilmore 2001). Given the current conditions in Egypt, male domination and control are increasingly at stake. In Egyptian society, the failure of a man to act out the masculine identity and to take on expected male roles in the family leads to stigmatization and to his being described as effeminate: "[T]hose who did not follow this pattern [*of providing for the family*] and had no acceptable excuse were seen as lazy and useless, and their wives and children were pitied" (Hoodfar 1999:87). Nevertheless, structures within which men used to live out their traditional masculine roles and maintain their masculine identities are constantly being challenged. This represents a "crisis tendency" of masculinity (Connell 2009), which has led many to attempt to circumvent in order to restore their position. These circumstances were thus fundamental to the emergence of marginal forms of masculinity and the consequent search for channels, which were perceived as solutions to what can truly be considered a "crisis of masculinity" (Connell 2005).

Therefore, the discrepancy between the expectations outlined by the hegemonic culture and the men's actual lived experiences of poverty and marginalization has demasculinized them. Accordingly, the disadvantage, exclusion, and frustration which many men feel have, in many cases, led to hostile behavior in the form of escalating domestic violence, as well as the increasing rate of sexual harassment in the streets of Egypt as a result of "masculinity dysfunctions" ensuing the "marriage crisis" and the high rates of unemployment (Amar 2011).

Survival Strategies: Overcoming Socioeconomic Hardships

In light of the aforementioned challenges and transformations, large segments of the Egyptian populace have resorted to various informal and, at times, illegal survival strategies. For example, the medical arena, especially the growing illegal market in organs, blood selling, and the commodification of disease[3] (Abdalla 2015), has emerged as a domain for quick solutions to economic problems and, at times, for resuming interrupted social responsibilities (Abdalla 2011; Hamdy 2012). Furthermore, escalating living costs and increasing material demands have become catalysts for many men seeking job opportunities locally and abroad; this has left many households the responsibility of women (Jyrkiäinen 2014). Migration to urban centers has drastically increased over the past few decades. However, external migration has offered even better prospects, with the Gulf States as desired destinations, given their lucrative salaries (Choucri 1977; Brink 1991; Russell 1992; Hoodfar 1997; Whaba 2009). In some extreme situations, men have also taken suicidal risks in the search for solutions to their economic dilemmas. For instance, the past years have witnessed increasing numbers of men attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Europe in flimsy boats; many of them have drowned before reaching their final destinations (Hamood 2006; El-Bey 2008; Hafez 2010).

For some, religion appears to have provided plausible answers to socioeconomic pressures, leading to heightened religiosity among young men and an increasing identification with religion and religious groups to make up for disruptions to their male identities and to restore their sense of domination (Abdalla 2014). Other segments of the population have found temporary solutions to their problems in the informal economy in the form of street vending and, at times, larger business transactions, or by taking two or three jobs to meet daily life demands and provide for their families' basic needs (Khouri-Dagher 1985; Singerman 1997, 1998; Hoodfar 1999; Singerman and Ibrahim 2003). In the same vein, many men have resorted to taking informal jobs in the tourism industry that have provided not only the ability to earn a living, but a chance to enjoy personal and sexual freedom with female tourists (Abdalla 2007). For this reason, the tourist destination of Dahab has emerged as an ideal destination, given its booming informal tourist businesses and its reputation for having a unique culture, which encourages personal freedom away from home in the absence of dominant societal and familial control mechanisms.

The Dahab Phenomenon

Compared to the general economic stagnation and high rates of unemployment on the mainland, the Dahab of the 1980s and 1990s, with its booming informal tourist businesses, has appeared to provide solutions to many men who suffered poverty and unemployment at home. Its geographic location on the eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula on the Red Sea Gulf of Aqaba, Bedouin culture, and historical and economic developments caused Dahab to be promoted as a tourist destination under the Israeli occupation (1967–1982) and later under Egyptian control (Lavie 1990). Under the Israeli occupation, Dahab witnessed rapid development and adapted well to the growing influx of tourists. Shanty settlements were erected, beach restaurants were built of palm fronds, and wooden huts rose up to cater to backpackers and individual tourists, many of whom came to stay a day or two and ended up spending extended periods of time. The attraction of Dahab, under both Israeli occupation and Egyptian control, was equally promoted by tourist guidebooks' descriptions of it as a unique cultural site.

A relatively inexpensive option compared to other destinations, like Sharm el-Sheikh, Dahab drew tourists who wanted to experience the exotic Bedouin culture. This encouraged the Bedouins, almost exclusively from the Mezini tribe, to build artificial Bedouin villages; these attracted tourists of the hippie type. Because of tourist practices under Israeli control, Dahab became known, locally and internationally, for nudity, freedom, drugs, and the hippie culture (Lavie 1990). Even after it reverted to the Egyptian authorities in 1982, this reputation prevailed. It consequently attracted many Egyptian men, who migrated from the Nile Valley in search of jobs and personal freedom away from societal surveillance.

During the time of the research, the majority of the migrant men who worked in Dahab came from a rural background and suffered poverty and feelings of estrangement because of the state's harsh economic policies. At that time, their age ranged between 18 and 35 years. The majority of them had vocational training; some, however, had university degrees. Still others were pursuing their university education while working in Dahab to make enough money to provide for their own needs and to financially support their families back home. These men worked mainly in businesses that catered to tourists. Such jobs provided them with "golden" opportunities to interact with female tourists, to sell them services on the beachfront, to chat and flirt with them, and to identify potential sex partners. Many of the men were involved in intimate relationships with women from various racial and regional backgrounds. In most cases, the language barrier did not hinder the possibility of having a partner, as long as the men were able to negotiate with their potential partners and talk them into a relationship.

Comparable to other studies that have investigated relationships between local men and foreign women (Cohen 1971; Pruit and LaFont 1995; Bowman 1996; Malam 2004), men engaging in sexual relationships with tourists in Dahab enjoyed a renewal of their masculinity. The relationships with the women provided them with a way to boost their masculine identities and to be admired by peer groups. Samy,[4] a 27-year-old man, originally from Assiut, explains:

> Our society is tough and the way we were brought up is difficult. In my village, we could not inquire or even talk about sex …. Everything was *ᶜayeb* or *haram* [disgrace—forbidden] …. All of a sudden we are here and everything is possible …. We can have sex every night and feel how it is to be a man …. Many of my friends in Assiut are envious and wish they could have similar opportunities.[5]

Samy's comment parallels many others from the men in Dahab who believed that the Dahab culture was unique and had nothing in common with their dominant culture. However, this comment and many others show that manhood and the masculine experience of these men in their encounters with foreign travelers were reduced to self-affirmation through sexuality. This implies that, with deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, the meaning of masculinity and being a "real" man has shifted from its original meaning in dominant Egyptian culture (cf. Wassef and Mansour 1999). In men's attempts to restore their dominant position in society, sexual relationships with foreign tourists produced a new kind of hypermasculine identity strongly connected to adopting a collective habitus of sexuality and flexible life situations. In this regard, masculinity is reduced to engaging in premarital sexual relationships and other risky behaviors in easily accessible domains that provide a sense of manhood.

However, the heightened experience of masculinity through sexuality and the multiple relationships with foreign tourists has not gone unchallenged. The lifestyle of these men rendered them vulnerable to police escorts and harassment. Police in Dahab attempted to control the interactions and the relationships between the men and the tourists, which brought the structures of the state into conflict with the men's struggle to achieve a level of masculine dominance. This situation, however, represented a crisis for them, requiring creative adjustments and adaptations to avoid police violence. Thus, ᶜ*urfi* marriage practices emerged as a way to avoid police harassment and to create a tenuous sense of legality regarding sexual encounters.

ᶜ*Urfi* Marriages and Policing Sexuality in Dahab

In Dahab, sexualized behavior was part and parcel of the daily activities and the interactions between men and foreign women. It was used creatively to attract female tourists to the different businesses (Behbehanian 2000), and it was negotiated and initiated everywhere—in camps, restaurants, and on the beachfront. But these practices were not novel; they also prevailed among foreign women and local Bedouin men under Israeli control (Lavie 1990; Abdalla 2007). Clearly, displays of sexuality and other unorthodox practices posed a major challenge to Egyptian authorities once the Sinai Peninsula came under Egyptian control. For this reason, new regulations were enacted to control sexuality by enforcing harsh policies of arresting, and sometimes deporting, men who committed what were considered indecent acts publicly, or even privately.

In spite of the fact that existing laws in Egypt only tackle issues of prostitution (Ali and Salim 1992), and despite the absence of laws that regulate or prohibit relationships outside of wedlock (Abdalla 2007), police officials in Dahab chased couples to their doorsteps in order to reinforce a moral order and put an end to practices that had commenced under the Israeli occupation. Due to the crackdown of the police and the constant control of their sexual interactions, the men adopted a new strategy to protect themselves and yet give their sexual relationships a legitimate guise. The ᶜ*urfi* marriage contract emerged as a safeguard and solution to police harassment. The contracts are solicited at a lawyer's office in the presence of two witnesses. The authorities' acceptance of this form of contract resulted in the flourishing of the unregulated business of ᶜ*urfi* marriages. Samir, a 28-year-old man originally from al-Gharbia, who resorted to this kind of marriage several times to avoid police interference in his life, describes the phenomenon:

> … ᶜ*urfi* marriages have become the lawyers' main source of living here. You go there, pay the fees and come out with a ready-made contract signed and stamped by the lawyer and the witnesses …. Many men in Dahab have a collection of these contracts, which they have made with several women. Depending on the woman who is visiting; they take the appropriate contract out to show to the police whenever they stop them …. Of course, police officials know about these multiple marriages and the numerous contracts going around, but it seems that having the contract is sufficient to make them happy.

Unlike official marriages contracted under state supervision, ᶜ*urfi* marriages are customary, unregistered, and do not entail any legal rights guaranteed by state laws. However, the fact that the same relationships, with the support of the contract, are marked as marriages enables men to claim that the visiting women are their wives and not casual partners. That made this sort of marriage genuine according to police logic, even in cases when men bought the contract and filled in the necessary details themselves. Some women, however, refused to sign this contract, since they found it unfathomable to commit themselves to a "marriage" when they were only interested in a holiday romance. But even in these situations, police accepted the contracts, and probably the absence of female signatures passed unnoticed.

Nevertheless, ^{c}*urfi* marriages are not unique to Dahab. With rising costs of official marriages and the increasing material demands, secretly solicited ^{c}*urfi* marriages emerged as the solution from the early 1990s on. This is particularly evident among university students, who aspired to spend intimate moments together while circumventing financial hurdles that prevented them from having a legal marriage (Abaza 2001; Abdalla 2007; Singerman 2007; Bayat 2007, 2010; Karkabi 2011). In the Dahab context, however, the relationships with foreign tourists not only provided the men involved with emotional and sexual satisfaction and a different sense of their masculinity. In addition, these encounters gave them access to indirect economic opportunities in the form of gifts and often the financial support of their female partners during emergencies or funds made available to start their own businesses. Therefore, police attempts to abolish these transnational sexual encounters would mean depriving the men of valuable economic resources and opportunities to improve their life conditions and their position in society.

Thus, ^{c}*urfi* marriages became the answer for desperate young men. It meant all three: a redefinition of these relationships, an adaptation of behaviors by adhering to imposed "moral codes," and the adoption of innovative strategies that secured benefits bestowed on them by their female partners. These marriages also allowed them to engage in multiple sexual encounters that were considered legitimate and lawful.

In a life punctuated by contradictions and distorted experiences, men in Dahab did not find any conflict in labeling the encounters with foreign tourists as "marriages" instead of "casual relationships," or relating to the women involved as "wives" and not "girlfriends." This fluidity was part of a whole array of contradictions and accommodations that characterized their daily life situations. For instance, the majority of those men showed a certain degree of adherence to religion, prayed regularly, and filled up the mosque during the Friday prayers. However, when the prayers were over, they indulged in practices that the *Imam* had repeatedly described as sinful acts: sex and drugs. This behavior signals a state of moral liminality, in which religion becomes a transitional space or refuge that can be navigated, traversed, and appropriated from its traditional meanings to fit personal needs. While religion in itself played an important role in the lives of the men, yet, at times, it became a space for the "betwixt and between" (Turner 1967) to disguise daily practices and frequent encounters with foreign women. Religion became a site that clearly magnified contradictions and instabilities that were often characteristic of the daily experiences of the men. Hence, praying and maintaining strong ties to God were strategies that were consciously used to convey a respectable image to others.

This was the case with Samer, a man known for his multiple and frequent sexual encounters with foreign women. When I approached him for an interview, he excused himself for five minutes to say his prayers. When he returned he said: “You see, I am religious, I pray regularly, and I have nothing to do with what is happening here.” While Samer used religion to gloss over a certain “religious” image, others did not see any contradiction between being religious and simultaneously indulging in behaviors that contradicted their beliefs. On the contrary, in the middle of difficulties, insecurities, and vulnerabilities, men appropriated and redefined religion and their relationship to God to fit their daily needs and their vulnerable situations. Hany became aware of the change: “I used to pray before I came to Dahab. My relationship to God was very strong and very spiritual. Now, my relationship to God is very strange. I always ask him to provide me with a woman, and when I have one, I ask him to protect me from the police.”

Men’s submission to police demands shows that their responses stemmed from their powerless and liminal position. *ᶜUrfi* marriage, originally a secret social practice, had become an act to reconcile religion with daily realities and was explicitly and publicly employed as a defense mechanism that provided protection and warded off fears. By resorting to *ᶜurfi* marriage practices, men in Dahab fostered an innovative sexual subculture, one that respected and accommodated itself to the moral authority, but that also fit and spoke directly to their economic needs and facilitated their access to visas for travel when foreign women agreed to legalize the marriage by signing an official marriage contract.

Despite the fact that the men creatively adjusted to the new situation, they strongly felt the heavy presence of the state and its surveillance system through assaults directed at their liberties and the challenges facing their masculinity. The iron fist of the police and the constant control of the men’s behavior created a sense of insecurity and fear and a lack of trust, not only in the state, but also in their fellows, whom they suspected of being the “hidden eyes” of the police. These feelings of fear and insecurity made many men hesitate to invite women to their residences or accompany them to their hotel rooms. They even feared to walk with them in the streets, as many were stopped, interrogated, publicly humiliated, arrested, and sometimes deported to their hometowns. This is exactly what happened to Saeed, a young man who worked in one of several Dahab camps. Despite the fact that Saeed engaged in multiple relationships with foreign women, he managed for years not to resort to the *ᶜurfi* marriage strategy because of the nature of his job and the setting of the camp where he worked and lodged. “I cannot just run and marry every customer whom I want to sleep with. Many of them are here for a week or 10 days and we all sleep in the same camp. I do not have to go around in the streets of Dahab to find them, they come to me.”

One of Saeed’s girlfriends, a Dutch tourist, came to spend a week’s vacation in the camp where he worked and ended up staying longer than planned. One night, the police raided Saeed’s room and he was caught in bed with her. Saeed was detained for a couple of days before he was deported from Dahab. Months later, when I met him in Cairo, he was still facing charges because of this incident, including a court case. He told me how humiliating this experience had been and how brutally he had been treated during his imprisonment in Dahab: “… it is frightening, they can do anything to you, they can make up charges and then you end up in prison forever.” Nevertheless, Saeed believed that his secret relationships would not have been discovered if it were not for one of his friends reporting him. “I know the one who reported me. He was with us in the camp that evening and saw me when I went into my room with her," he said.

Saeed's story implies that not submitting to police demands or the imposed moral order could jeopardize one's life. Saeed was cautious and believed that the nature of his job and the setting of the camp would render him invisible. For the police, however, Saeed's behavior was considered an explicit challenge to their authority, and accordingly his deportation was a strong manifestation of their power that deprived him of his job, his sexual interactions, and his access to valuable economic resources.

The crackdown on male practices, the control of activities, arrests, and humiliations strongly affected the subjects' sense of being "real" men. Despite the fact that they had jobs, could secure funds unavailable to many of their peers on the mainland, and had access to women's bodies—all of which boosted their sense of masculine identity—the strong, constant police surveillance made them feel that their masculinity was, once again, under attack. The innovative strategies of protection that they adopted to circumvent police brutality, especially the ^{c}*urfi* marriage contracts, provided them with a space to initiate and enjoy their encounters. However, these interactions did not compensate for the deeper-lying feelings of fear, insecurity, and mistrust. In this situation, the men felt how they were not in control of their private lives and behaviors. Through the constant presence of the police, requiring submission and obedience, the men felt challenged in their sexual freedom and the very notion of their masculinity.

Nonetheless, the policing was not the only challenge to these men and their masculinity. There was a perhaps more serious challenge that stemmed directly from within the relationships they established with the women. In the context of these relationships, they entered various negotiations that directly challenged their masculinity.

Men on the Margins: the Dynamics of Relationships in Dahab

Having multiple partners was greatly admired. It provided those involved with the means to experience their manhood differently through both sexual prowess and economic power. Those who had limited or no opportunities to indulge in sexual relationships, either because of the nature of their jobs or because of language barriers, envied the others for the opportunities they had and for the hypermasculine image they projected. However, close scrutiny of the internal dynamics of the relationships demonstrates that the men involved often experienced deep feelings of emasculation and at times humiliation. For instance, a discussion conducted with them concerning sexual health and risk revealed that they were lax about their health. Their evaluation of risk was based on the appearance of their target women and their behaviors. A woman who appeared to be physically "clean" (*nidifa*) was regarded as a target and could be approached as a potential partner. On the contrary, a woman who appeared to be "unclean" or who was the one to initiate sex was considered high risk. However, the men did not consider women whom they approached to be risky. Thus, they relied largely on their intuition in determining if a woman posed a risk. This is clearly illustrated in Maher's words:

> I do not consider foreign girls to represent any kind of health risk to me. The nature here makes us relax and you need

> to be close to someone when you are relaxed …. I know what I am doing. I do not go and sleep with just anyone …. I use my senses in deciding if a woman carries any risk for me or not.

Generally, the men indulged in what is called "unsafe sex" whenever they could. The use of condoms as a method of protection was not their first priority, as they believed that they reduced sexual pleasure; therefore, they preferred to have sexual intercourse without them. Engaging in sexual relationships with foreign tourists, however, required the men to submit to the needs and demands of the women. Nader explained that he did use condoms to protect his own health, but that the more important reason was to "secure a woman's approval who would not accept to have sex with me without it."

According to the conversations I had with the men, the women's reluctance to have intercourse with them without condoms persuaded many of them to carry them along in order not to miss an opportunity. Despite this fact, the men remained unconvinced about the importance of condoms. They argued that diseases could be transmitted even with condoms, since "condoms break." However, their compliance with condom use was because of the women's insistence on and enforcement of safe sex. Another issue raised was that women imposed practices that they considered foreign to their own cultural and religious backgrounds, such as oral sex and longer periods of foreplay, as well as other pleasure enhancers, such as the use of medications and creams. The men, however, submitted to the women's needs and provided them with sexual satisfactions that they would not grant to Egyptian women. Their rationale was that Egyptian women are "hot-blooded" (*damuhum sukhn*) and therefore do not need a long period of foreplay or intercourse. Foreign women, however, were perceived as "cold-blooded" (*damuhm barid*). The construction of Egyptian women as "hot blooded" was rationalized on the grounds that they never ask for these practices and they seemingly do not need a long period of intercourse to reach satisfaction. By contrast, constructing foreign women as "cold-blooded" persuaded many men in Dahab to resort to medications and drugs, sometimes imposed on them by the women themselves, to prolong intercourse and thus satisfy the sexual needs of the "cold-blooded" foreigners. Mohamed explains:

> Intercourse with a foreigner differs from intercourse with an Egyptian. An Egyptian woman needs only five minutes, while foreign women need a longer time, to such a level that one might get to the point of ejaculating blood,[6] which might make him weak and affect his sexual performance one day. Foreign women have cold blood [damuhum barid]; therefore, they need more frequent sexual intercourse to reach satisfaction … they are not circumcised and this explains their need for a long intercourse period, in contrast to Egyptian women who need a maximum of a minute or two for satisfaction.

Moreover, the men felt extremely challenged with regard to their established relationships with foreign women, since they had no control over their partners, and thus the relationship. The women generally determined the rules that governed the relationships and independently made decisions about their length and type: casual, long-term, permanent, or just a holiday relationship. In most cases, the women's commitment to the relationship was limited to the locality of Dahab, which they frequented during their holidays to pay visits to their lovers and to enjoy feelings of being feminine, protected, and flattered. This control over the relationship gave the woman the power to terminate it whenever she wanted to. This left the men to suffer feelings of emasculation and disempowerment, after having grown up in a male-dominated society and having been socialized to be the decision makers in their households, with unquestioned control and power over their partners and the unconditional right to divorce.

The issue of procreation with foreign women was another domain where the men felt defeated and lacked control over the relationship, their partners, and the children they might have. In some cases, the women gave birth to the children in their home countries, rendering the men unable to have access to their progeny. During the time of the research, I met men who lamented their "irresponsible" behaviors, having had children whom they had never seen because their partners never returned after giving birth. An informant once explicitly expressed his sadness and depression because he knew that he had a four-year-old daughter in France whom he had no opportunity to see. His bitterness stemmed from his inability to have access to his child by legally claiming and carrying out his fatherhood rights. Even when mothers returned to Dahab with their children, the language barrier worked as a huge obstacle between the children and their fathers, especially those children who grew up in non-English-speaking countries. These encounters solidified and reinforced the men's feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, and social impotence in relation to their partners and their children.

Conclusion

By highlighting some of the intricacies in the encounters between Egyptian men and foreign female tourists in Dahab, this chapter attempts to emphasize the distorted relationship between the Egyptian state and its citizens and how it impacts people's lives, their behaviors, and thus the production of contradictory responses to problems produced by state policies.

It shows how social and economic hardships resulted in the emergence of a subculture in the locality of Dahab comprised of a disfranchised group of men who adopted different strategies to restore their threatened position in the society. These men's struggle to change led to the adoption of aberrant behaviors, employing their sexuality and the use of ᶜ*urfi* marriages to compensate for their emasculation. However, these practices jeopardized their relationships with the state, represented by the police authorities, and deepened their feelings of disempowerment and subordination in relation to their foreign partners.

The encounter with foreign tourists reveals that dominant gender ideologies about men's role in society, masculinity, and male behaviors are not static. They are changeable and interact with the social and economic processes in the society. As the lived experiences of the men in Dahab show, masculine identities are always in flux. The fluidity of the masculine identities involved allowed the men to adapt and find new liminal spaces of meaning, which they navigate and explore to transcend limitations and processes of state surveillance, control, and marginalization.

The chapter shows how harsh socioeconomic changes challenged men to the core of their masculinity. The imperatives of a neo-liberal era have negatively impacted the marginal and the poor and rendered men unable to meet societal expectations and dominant constructions of masculinity. In this situation, the men felt humiliated, betrayed, and thwarted in their right to have decent employment and to establish and provide for a family. Therefore, in their attempts to restore their position in the society and to have control over their life situations, they engaged in risky sexual behaviors to help them retain a sense of their masculinity and a feeling of being in control as “real” men. However, the same situations have shown that these practices were a product of men’s ambivalence and their liminal position, which emphasized the fluidity, shifting meanings, and nature of their masculine identities. This further shows that the male behaviors were nonconformist, which signifies resistance to dominant social codes, moral orders, and processes that have emasculated them.

Consequently, the men in Dahab, attempting to manifest themselves and to prove their masculine identities, creatively and innovatively adapted to imposed moral orders and took advantage of their physical capital by exploiting what it means to be a man through sexuality and multiple relationships established with foreign women. However, their endeavors further emasculated them in their own eyes, since their self-image as men did not correspond to their actual daily realities and their position in relation to their partners, who controlled and dictated the terms of the relationships.

Hence, the silent resistance of the men in Dahab and their attempts to restore their masculine identities resulted in constant shifts between dominance and subordination, depending on their actual experiences and the actors involved. This situation, however, has left many men to suffer from feelings of insecurity, depression, and lack of self-esteem. The men have particularly experienced feelings of powerlessness and frustration related to their emasculated roles, their position within the relationships with their partners, and at times because of their roles as fathers who were sometimes denied contact with their children.

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[1] A kind of customary, informal, and unregistered marriage that takes place in the presence of two witnesses, widely known in Dahab as the “Dahab Marriage.” Previously, this kind of marriage was practiced among Bedouins and tribal communities.

[2] Dahab means “gold,” and the place was given this name because of its golden sand beaches.

[3] I introduce this term to describe a phenomenon resulting from difficult economic conditions where patients market their diseases and knowledge about them in medical schools settings in order to earn some money.

[4] All names that appear in this chapter have been changed by the author.

[5] My translation; interviews with men in Dahab were conducted in Arabic.

[6] There is a common belief among Egyptian men that a long intercourse might lead to ejaculating blood, which would endanger men’s health.

Chapter 3

Of Migration, Marriage, and Men: Rethinking the Masculinity of Transnational Husbands from Rural Pakistan

Aisha Anees Malik

Introduction

This chapter[1] explores the context-specific nature of masculinities through experiences of men from rural Pakistan who migrate to the United Kingdom by marrying diasporic kin. Muslim women of Pakistani ethnic origin in the United Kingdom feature regularly in media headlines abroad as well as in Pakistan. Other than issues of cultural integration like the wearing of *hijab* to school and work, forced marriages to kin in Pakistan is the most defining characteristic of their victimhood. Within these marriages they are seen as “vulnerable brides” (Charlsley 2005a). However, little attention is paid to the situation of transnational grooms in such martial arrangements (ibid.; Charlsley 2005b). Migration is seen as an inevitable part of a woman’s fate in a patriarchal marriage,[2] as she moves to her husband’s home and hence is prepared from her childhood to deal with this eventuality. Men, on the other hand, seldom undergo this transition (Crewe and Kothari 1998). Moving away from home is generally undertaken for economic purposes in line with the demands of their masculine selves.[3] For these Pakistani men migration overlaps with marriage, marking a loss of status owing to the move of the groom to the household of his in-laws (Charlsley 2005b). This loss of status in the UK is accompanied by a gain of status in Pakistan, allowing for the questioning of essentialist discussions of masculinity and opening up space for research on its more variegated nature.

Background

One of the caveats of research on diasporic marriages that involve migration is the absence of male voices,[4] particularly those of the newly immigrated husbands, who appear only as entities “referred to” or “spoken of.” The subject positions of the migrant husbands in these transnational spaces are not investigated. The larger scholarship on migration also has gaps, like the neglect of research from within the sending communities in favor of the receiving communities (Gardner and Osella 2004). The intersection of migration and masculinity is also under-researched—the existing body of work pursues the two areas of investigation separately (Datta et al. 2009). Migration has been predominantly dubbed a masculine adventure, but studies on migrating men ignore issues of embodiment and emotional experiences (ibid.). To fill these gaps and understand the nexus of migration, marriage, and masculinity, I have conducted a micro-level study of a locality within Pakistan, which has a history of migration to Britain. Since marriage to kin in Britain today is the only route to immigration, the emphasis is on migrant husbands, fiancés of British-Pakistani women as well as men who aspire to become transnational grooms. Men are considered a "background" category (Connell 2005, 1806) in diasporic accounts of marriage and migration, which often emphasize women's disadvantages. The research foregrounds men's experiences of migration and how these experiences affect their masculinity, adding to the emerging literature on men and masculinities.

Migration to Britain through Marriage

Marriages with kin in Pakistan are preferred by most British-Pakistanis. According to Home Office statistics, of all ethnic groups, Pakistani fiancés/husbands file the most applications to join their spouses in Britain. Such marital arrangements have, however, come under scrutiny due to problems encountered by the British-born brides. Abusive migrant husbands, husbands who refuse to integrate and object to the western lifestyles of their wives, and husbands who neglect their family obligations in Britain and siphon money back home to Pakistan are often the topics of discussion in scholarly writing and in the media. Pakistani newspapers, on the other hand, are rife with stories of adolescent girls forcibly shipped to Pakistan for marriages within their own *beradari* (kin groups). Cases dealing with Pakistani husbands who abduct their own children and run away to Pakistan after a divorce in the UK are also not uncommon in both Pakistani and English courts. Despite these problems, marriage migration has its advantages for the receiving communities, as underlined below.

Pakistanis in Britain take marriage very seriously (Samad and Eade 2002). Parents see it as part of their responsibility to their children to see them married and well settled. It also allows them to re-create a pious home within an infidel and alien land. Marriage is also seen in the larger framework of their commitment to the extended family group. This extended family group includes people related not only by blood, but also through wider ties of reciprocity. Marriage and subsequent migration to the UK, then, is a way of economically supporting less fortunate members of this extended family. Within South Asia, marriage is seen as a bond not between two individuals but between two families (ibid.). It is for this reason that families go to great lengths to preserve this bond of marriage. Marriage is a means of extending as well as strengthening the Pakistani community's networks in Britain. These networks are a useful resource that they can count upon in the UK. It is true that today marriage is widely seen among Pakistanis as the only route through which new immigrants can be brought into the UK. Social advantages aside, there are economic benefits to be gained by this practice. The Pakistani community has done well, setting up small businesses like curry houses, takeaways, and grocery shops. These businesses are preferably run within the family. As their own children—the second and third generations—increasingly tend to find jobs outside the family shops and takeaways, they create space for other family members to be brought in from Pakistan. The sons-in-law from Pakistan are typically *ghar damad*[5] (house son-in-law/live-in son-in-law) for the first few years of marriage. They are dependent on their British wives and their families. Since they have no jobs when they turn up in the UK, they are perfectly suited for cheap or even free labor in these family-run businesses.

The challenges such migration and the underlying marital arrangement create for the men who come from Pakistan is missing in this debate on the advantages and disadvantages of transnational marriages among Pakistanis in Britain. A man's position as *ghar damad* in a transnational marriage is not a conventional and hence desirable position. The disruption to "conventional power relationships" (Charlsley 2005a, 395) caused by this position manifests itself in many of the problems mentioned above. This particular study, then, aims to investigate the key discourses of a masculine identity that is questioned and even undermined by the men's position as migrant husbands.

Masculine Selves

Masculinity is a sociocultural construct. Where "man" is associated with the biological and reproductive characteristics of the male person, "masculinity" refers to the socially constructed ideas of what it means to be a man. According to Oakley (1972), masculinity is associated with the set of behaviors and characteristics that correspond to social and cultural identity constructs of a biological man. Not all men possess these and there is a wide array of behaviors that vary across various social setups, hence the necessity for the term "masculinities" rather than just "masculinity." Within this myriad of behavioral practices, there are gendered practices that strengthen and legitimize patriarchal authority. Hegemonic masculinity (see Donaldson 1993; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 1995 and 2002), then, is the configuration of gender practices that shore up the legitimacy of patriarchy. As a form of masculinity that claims and tries to maintain a dominant influence over social life, it serves as a benchmark for masculine attributes, defining the successful ways of being a man and in the process labeling other masculine styles as inadequate and inferior. The migrant husband, then is an inadequate masculine self. Instead of the conventional practice in which the wife migrates to the husband's home, "it is the husband who migrates to join the wife, an experience whose challenges are not charted by the dominant models of masculinity" (Charsley 2005a, 390).

David Gilmore's (1990) three features of masculinity are very instructive in understanding how the men in these transnational marital arrangements might feel undermined. Gilmore sees the three roles of men as impregnators, providers, and protectors to be the archetypal characteristics of masculinity in most societies. Men who enter these marriages may have to compromise on all three accounts. In some cases the British bride may even deny conjugal rights to her husband by virtue of her stronger position. She is among her own kin, he is away from his. She can conjure the support of her father and siblings and he, being a *ghar damad*, may be in no position to enforce his will (Charsley 2005a). His role as a provider is also challenged on two counts. Migration to the UK may offer most Pakistani men the opportunity to earn far more than they could in Pakistan, but often under harsh conditions. Migration can also lead to downward mobility (ibid.) owing to the non-recognition of qualifications and work experience. Chances for improvement through further education and training are limited by high fees for foreign students. Also, their authority to remit money to their families of origin back home is strongly challenged by their wives (Malik, 2010). As for Gilmore's third characteristic, powerless and without the security of their own kin, these men cannot exert the same control over their British wives and their children as they traditionally would in a Pakistani home. Most husbands complain that they have no control over the upbringing of their children. In extreme cases, this even results in some men abducting their children and leaving them with their paternal grandparents in Pakistan.

Men may respond in different ways to cope with these challenges. Some may resign to alternate masculinities, such as the "subordinate variant" (Charsley 2005a; 2005b). Others may turn to violence as a means to "repair and re-establish masculine selves in a setting that in their minds, has called into question their rights and privileges as men" (Mullaney 2007, 223).

A Tale of Two Villages—Raangi and Ghaathi

Raangi and Ghaathi[6] are two adjacent villages in the Pothwar[7] belt of Punjab, located southeast of the capital, Islamabad. Ghaathi is the larger of the two with a population of around 14,000. Raangi is a much smaller village with only 40 households. Both villages have a history of migration to Britain and are considered quite wealthy as a result. Residents proudly claim that there is not even a single household in the villages that does not have at least one member settled in Britain. Being a rain-fed area lacking a system of irrigation, sources of income and employment other than dependence upon remittances are: military service, owning small shops in Ghaathi or, in a few cases, running a small transport service using a privately owned Suzuki Carry.[8]

Migration has brought many visible developments to the area. Ghaathi boasts paved link as well as main roads, electricity and water supply connections in the houses, and a hospital that is open 24 hours. They have an Islamic school and a government school. A girls' college is also under construction with help from a rich British-Pakistani donor. The residents are quick to point out that none of this has been done by the government. All projects have been completed with donations from British-Pakistani residents of the village.[9] Raangi may not have the same amenities as Ghaathi, but because of the close proximity to Ghaathi the villagers of Raangi can easily access them.

Material opulence brought by foreign remittances is visibly evident as one travels from Gujjar Khan to Raangi. The first things that meet the eye in the otherwise placid rural landscape are beautifully adorned shrines and mosques and sporadic sprawling modern mansions, sometimes built in the middle of a field. As if to announce and establish the status of the owner, each has a unique landmark feature, usually built on the roof, so that it can be seen from far off. Chinese-style pagoda roofs are the most popular design and serve to conceal the rooftop water tanks. One owner has surpassed the rest by hoisting a *pajero*[10] jeep up to his roof. Most of these mansions are uninhabited. Built by migrants, they are managed by the owners' Pakistani kin or hired caretakers and are used for occasional holidays. In addition to building these holiday homes, the migrants have refurbished the ancestral village homes where their elderly parents or other siblings reside. The mosques and shrines are restored with beautiful tiled mosaics under the patronage of British-Pakistanis. These displays of affluence are remarked at by the villagers as a matter of pride and are also a cause of much competition among the Pakistani kin of British migrants, as they often are a source of social and political influence in the area.

Of Masculinities, Marriage, and Migration in Raangi and Ghaathi

It is difficult to frame the masculinity of migrant men or aspiring migrant men to the UK in a singular subject position, due to the complexity of the social processes that inform as well as transform their masculine selves. The narratives of these men reveal multiple subject positions, highlighting this complexity as is deliberated upon in the following sections.

Male Personhood

A male youth narrated a Punjabi saying:[11] "Those whose wrists and ears are bare, their husbands are of no use." The saying offers a glimpse into what it means to be a man in a typical Punjabi rural setup. Ensuring that one's women do not go "bare" is a desired characteristic of "the man" explained by both men and women of Raangi and Ghaathi and is a precursor to the strongly ingrained idea of "man the provider." This duty, however, in rural Punjab extends beyond one's nuclear family to the wider ties of kinship and reciprocity, and seems to be the most defining characteristic of a man.

In one of the households in Raangi, I meet 80-year-old Waddi Beji,[12] who has two sons and four daughters. Her eldest son migrated to England about 38 years[13] ago and is settled there, while she lives with the younger son and his family in her own home. Bent over with age, she sits on a cot in her courtyard cleaning wheat while her husband, also crippled with age, lies in another cot next to her. Her daughter-in-law rushes around doing household chores and tending to their needs from time to time. The old woman tells me that Akram (her younger son) is a dutiful son. The emphasis on duty toward parents is the most defining characteristic of her sons, but the monetary implications of this duty are the focus of her narrative. She complains about the rising cost of food, medicines, and even education and how inflation would have made life difficult if Aslam (the older son) had not been in England to chip in toward educating Akram's children[14] and looking after their aging parents. She points to the row of four spacious rooms at the end of the courtyard, all with attached bathrooms with modern fittings like commodes, wash basins, and expensive *tootian* (taps), saying that Aslam has sent money over the years to make this possible. Not missing in this accounting of foreign aid are her husband's hearing aids and her own walker. Discussions of Aslam and Akram's duty toward their parents and the absence of the mention of the four daughters in this regard is a bit surprising, as also residing in the same household is widowed mother of Karima (the daughter-in-law, Akram's wife), Choti[15] Beji. Choti Beji's eldest son married a British-born cousin and migrated to Britain about 20 years before. The younger sons have moved to the city in search of livelihoods and settled there for better opportunities to educate their children. Choti Beji is referred to as *chachi* (paternal aunt) by Akram's family and not as Karima's mother. The socioeconomic realities have meant a modification in the nature of duties. Karima is largely burdened with the care of her own mother[16] in addition to that of her elderly in-laws; however, Akram (considered the nephew, not the son-in-law) and the sons are jointly considered the people primarily responsible. This emphasis on Akram being Choti Beji's nephew and not her son-in-law is placed again and again to lessen the shame that comes with being dependent on a son-in-law rather than a son. Lest one question the capability of her brothers to look after their mother, Karima is also quick to point out that her brothers send money for the upkeep of their mother, thereby deflecting any suspicion of lack of manhood in them.

Being knowledgeable is another attribute of manliness. Though Waddi Beji and her daughter in law, Karima, themselves are quite knowledgeable about the rural economy, every detail they tell me is supposed to be verified by the "knowledgeable" Akram. Waddi Beji gives me the exact estimation of their yield of wheat, how it has differed over the years depending upon rainfall, and how it is insufficient to feed them all through the year. She talks of citrus fruit farming, vegetable growing, and even livestock, and comments on the effective utilization of land. But both Waddi Beji and Karima dot this conversation with claims that they do not know a lot and I should wait for Akram to give a detailed description. Akram, who is constantly presented as the most knowledgeable person, doesn't have much to add to the discussion. Being hardworking women themselves, they laugh at some of the *nikhatu* (good-for-nothing) boys of their village who are too dandy to work in the fields and know more of new fashions than farming and would rather marry and migrate to England than work here. But at the same time they pity these boys' families because of their difficult financial position and hope that they will be able to migrate.

The rural sports of *kabbadi* (South Asian wrestling) and dogfighting, as well as hunting, are also defining features of masculinity. Migration to Britain has preserved and fortified these sports rather than weakening them. Visiting migrants invest a great deal of money and effort in the revival of these rural pursuits. To working-class British-Pakistanis, these pursuits offer more than a nostalgic re-creation of the home that they left behind. Coursing is limited to the nobility and the landed in Britain. Spending winter holidays in Pakistan and accessing the same class privilege allows them to establish the status that they lack in Britain. I met up with three enthusiastic British-Pakistanis who were visiting Raangi for two weeks for the sole purpose of coursing. Their hounds were being reared by their Pakistani relatives for their use only, and they paid for the upkeep.

Affording security and protection to women is another defining characteristic of *Pothwari* male personhood. While doing field work, I am pitied again and again by both men and women for having no father or brother to look after me. I am often asked if my husband is good to me. Women, especially, comment on my lack of sons and urge that I, being still "young," should "try" for a son. This important feature is exemplified by the case of 22-year-old Mutahir, who is married to his first cousin (his mother's sister's daughter) and has been awaiting a spousal visa to Britain for over a year and a half. Much older in age than Mutahir, she works in a school in England and lives with her widowed mother. She has visited Mutahir twice (for about a month each time) since the marriage and is now expecting a baby. One of the primary reasons Mutahir gives for marrying her is that her widowed *Khala* (maternal aunt) and cousin are two *akailey* (lone) women living in England and they need support and protection. It was his duty as her cousin to marry her, especially since now *Khala* does not enjoy very good health.

The Masculine Imagination

Al-Imtiaz is a private, all-male college run in a two-room building in the village of Raangi. Around 30 students are enrolled in the college, which offers FA and BA[17] degree courses. Students enroll privately for these exams after being taught at the college. The college has been set up with the help of the headmaster's brother, who lives in England. The classes are generally run outside in the open *kuchcha* (unpaved) courtyard. The students sit on rudimentary benches and a chair is reserved for the teacher. The college also has a girls' wing in a separate location nearby. The girls' college is much better equipped, with more rooms and a high boundary wall enclosing the entire building, in keeping with the norms of *purdah*. The girls' college building has been built with various donations from immigrants. I engaged with boys and girls enrolled in the college to understand their take on migration through marriage.

Boys explain that people in their area have limited tracts of land and agriculture is dependent on rainfall. This limits their occupations to migration, joining the army, or working in one of the few locally run shops or a transportation business with a Suzuki Carry. Moving *baeroon-e-mulk* (abroad) and, to a lesser degree, military service are overwhelmingly the most favored career options.

These career options are not merely stated—their explanations carry rich imagery in the minds of young boys. England is imagined as a land that is abundant in wealth. Most of the young men express how one has a job already waiting as soon as one lands. They quote accurately how much a pound is worth in Pakistani money. Afzal exclaims excitedly how he can "smell the pound even from here." Similarly, talk of military service is imbued with nationalist fervor, how they want to serve their country, fight for it, and if need be lay down their lives for it, just as their fathers and grandfathers have done before them. Women are woven into these narratives. England is not only a land of wealth and luxuries but also of beautiful white women. They laugh and nudge each other with their elbows, urging each other to tell the truth about the reasons for wanting to go to England. "*Goris* (white women) are waiting for us there," Imran blurts out, laughing. Central to this imagination is the conception of *jannat* (paradise). Just as the promised *jannat* is brimming with bounteous "*doodh ki nehrain aur khoobsoorat hourain* (rivers of milk and beautiful houri)" the imagined land of England is full of luxuries and beautiful women.

There is a lot in Raangi and Ghaathi to fuel this imagination. The palatial homes built by British-Pakistanis, public displays of spending money on religious *melas* (festivals), *kabbadi* matches, dogfights, and gifts to relatives of imported sweaters, handbags, and wristwatches all feed into this imagery. Rahman points out that I should take a look at the nearby villages of Chargghi and Rampur, which have no migrants, to see how their *kachcha* (mud-thatched) houses compare to those I can see in Raangi and Ghaathi. He asks me to count the number of fuel stations that have opened up on the small road linking the city to their villages to cater to the carry *dabbas* owned by them and the XLIs[18] that are rented out by the *valaitis*[19] on visits to their ancestral villages. "You should see how they [*valaitis*] dole out sweaters and flash note[s]," remarks Rahman. These displays of opulent wealth by visiting *valaitis* conjure up images of *valait* and plant dreams of migrating abroad in the hearts and minds of the young men.

Then there is the constant talk of poor economic and political conditions of Pakistan. “There is nothing here in Pakistan [for us]. The whole country is corrupt. There are no jobs for those without *sifarish* (nepotistic recommendation) and *rishwat* (bribery). It’s a bloody third class country,” adds Afzal. Bordanaro (2009) explains, referring to young people living in the small port of Bubaque in the Bijagó Islands, that they feel marginalized and their hopes for social mobility are tied to migration to Europe. He writes, “Reluctant to be involved in the village economy, but excluded from the port’s market economy, with no jobs, aware of the weakness of the national economy and with little if any hope for their future, migration to Europe appears to them to be the only viable means of social promotion. Income and education are not the sole motivations of their aspirations to mobility, however. The young men’s fantasies of migration to Europe are based on a developmentalist narrative framework that creates a cartography of centres and peripheries, picturing Guinea-Bissau as a desperate and poor country, a nation of wretched people, while celebrating Europe as the land of development and opportunities’ (ibid., 126–7). Afzal and his classmates also compare the global statuses of Britain and Pakistan, state their reluctance to take farming as a profession, and believe that migration is the only route to upward social mobility.

The route to this imagined *jannat* (paradise), however, is certainly through marriage. Boys discuss how they prepare for their prospective career paths. Amjad wants to join the Army. He has begun his preparations by reading daily newspapers and doing physical training, like running every morning, to help him through the preliminary tests and interviews. Afzal pitches in that boys aspiring to migrate abroad are also making *tayyarian* (preparations) by combing their hair, setting it in fashionable designs, wearing trendy clothes, and hanging around visiting British-Pakistani families, hoping to catch the attention of their daughters, supposedly brought to the villages to choose spouses. As for those who have already “caught” a candidate, they have enrolled in English language classes in the nearby town and are learning how to chat on the Internet and even, in one case, learning to make *mithai* (sweetmeats). The young boy who is learning to make *mithai* has shown on his visa application that he works in a local bakery. Since sweet-making shops are opening up in Britain, he hopes to find a job in one there.

Reality Check

The imagination of migration is occasionally marked with a certain premonition of the unsettling of roles. Amjad remarks how the traditional mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is based on a certain degree of hostility. “Your mother always prompts you to discipline your wife. If the wife argues back, the mother eggs you to stop her retorts with a slap.” He laughs that this changes with the *valaiti* daughter-in-law. “*Us nu te khata par roti deni ai* (She [mother-in-law] serves her [daughter-in-law] dinner on the cot).” He adds that the gifting of a few sweaters is enough to change everything.

These assertions made by Amjad change the mood of the group, and the boys start discussing how they know that life in England, at least initially, will not be a bed of roses. They say they will have to work hard and without a lot of help, remarking how they have heard that everyone is too busy in England to solve the problems of others. They also opine that since their wives will also be working in Britain, they may have to pitch in with the housework. But they all agree that since one has to work hard in pursuit of a career, these hardships are nothing as compared to the rewards that they would reap.

British-born Pakistani women complain that their Pakistani husbands initially object to their western clothing (Malik 2010). Although women wearing western clothes is generally seen as a cause of conjugal conflict, most boys in the village claim that they have been exposed to it by watching TV and visiting Islamabad. When women wear such clothing nowadays in Pakistan, why would Pakistani women in England shock them with their attire? A few boys stay silent on the issue. When I probe, Rahman retorts that "they are all saying this here; wait till they land in England."

These apprehensions are reflected in the narratives of visiting transnational grooms. Shabbir has been married to his cousin in England for almost 20 years. He migrated to Britain 18 years ago on a spousal visa. His narrative of marriage and migration and settlement is more telling. He recounts how he found it difficult to find a job on reaching England. Life in the house of his father-in-law was complicated, if not difficult. When he moved with his wife to their own house, he had to wash dishes and do his laundry, and worked odd jobs to earn money. The £200 a month he earned amounted to nothing. His wife paid the mortgage and bought the groceries. He curbed many of his own personal wants so that he wouldn't have to ask his wife for money. It was a very frustrating period for him.

Shabbir reflects that "all these boys in the village who want to marry for the visa have no idea what lies in store for them. I want to warn them, but in a tightly knit village community I cannot give details without offending my father-in-law." His warnings are muted and generalized. He also claims that "these boys get impressed by the way we spend money in the village. What they do not know is that we work for a year or two like hell, save money and come here only for two weeks. The £2,000–3,000 that we bring along go a long way in the village and what they don't know is that we will be working like dogs on our return to England. Even if we told them the truth, they wouldn't believe us, saying, "*aapi te khayay piyay hosso, assan ki mana karday o* (you yourself fare well, and stop us from doing the same)."

Where Shabbir's reservations are muted, Asghar, who spent nine years in Manchester and returned in 2009, paints a very dire picture of the migrant husbands. He claims that their situation vis-à-vis their sponsoring British families is that of slaves and masters. The migrant husbands are looked down upon and mocked with derogatory labels like "*freshies*" or "*massair*"[20] or "*mangay*."[21] They are put on rations by their wives, who restrict their rights to even spend their own money. Every time they are sent for groceries, they have to bring back the receipt. If a *massair* smokes, he is only allowed a pack of 10. Some of the men Asghar knows are only given £3.5 in hand by their wives to go and buy a half pack of silk cut. Language is the biggest barrier. Half the time they do not even understand the insults their British sponsors are hurling at them. Their mobile phones are on the contracts of their wives, who keep an eye on whom they call, and these mobile phones can be taken back on perceived misbehavior.

Writing of the plight of Pakistani spouses, Charsley et al. (2012) asserts how the two-year probation leaves them exposed to abuse and exploitation. While there has been some acknowledgment of this for female Pakistani spouses, the same has not been afforded the male Pakistani spouse. Asghar's accounts of the freshies or the *massair* are a testimony to this. The silence on the issue has to do not only with the overarching immigration policy of the British government, which is primarily interested in curtailing immigration and is only interested in the well-being of its own nationals, but also with the refusal of these men to openly discuss their own victimhood, which would cause further demasculinization.

Asghar explains how these migrant husbands silently bear all this, at least for the first two years, until they get permanent leave to stay. They discuss their woes and problems with other freshies. Even when among these friends they discuss problems with in-laws, but never spousal problems. To own up to mistreatment by one's wife is the ultimate insult, hence they joke about overly domineering and protective wives but never, ever let on that they are mistreated. According to Asghar the most painful experience of these freshies is their treatment by other British young men. At all-male gatherings, the British-born brothers of their wives never even directly address them. However, if any relatives are visiting from Pakistan, the British brothers put the *massair* in their car and drag him to visit these relatives to put on a show. The fathers-in-law belong to an older generation and they may have some sympathy for the sons-in-law, especially if he is a close kin, but they are always guided by this feeling that their children, by virtue of their birth, are superior to their Pakistani cousins, and hence give preferential treatment even to disobedient daughters. Ikram Illahi, a visiting first-generation Pakistani, exhibited this sense of superiority in a meeting with me. He repeatedly called all Pakistani boys *nikhatu* (good-for-nothing), *baikar* (useless), lazy, and liars.

Failure/Success

Migrant wives fare no better than migrant men. They, too, are in a vulnerable situation, far from their families and open to abuse. But they are more likely than men to express victimhood (Malik 2010). Suffering is an emotion that is normally associated with women's narrations of their mobility (Gardner 2002). Men, on the other hand, undertake migration to succeed in their lives as breadwinners and caretakers of their families. Osella and Osella (2000) highlight the strong desire of migrant men to return home successful. In line with their masculine selves, they want to show how they have succeeded in the face of hardships and suffering. They tend to underscore the positive aspects of migration and hide the negative elements (Datta et al. 2009). Shabbir's muted expression of hardships and the silence of freshies in Asghar's narratives are an attempt on the part of these men to appear not as losers but as winners. They wish to depict, "themselves as 'heroic men' who have achieved a lot despite the considerable hardships they had faced" (ibid. 2009, 28).

Success is measured differently for these men. Some, like Shabbir, point to the life of comfort he has built for his aging parents in Raangi. He is the eldest of three brothers. He has helped set up his other two brothers in small businesses in town. Their children are getting education in English medium schools. He is satisfied with his achievements. Similar sentiments are expressed by boys aspiring to migrate through marriage. While discussing the hardships they may face in the move, Afzal mentions that one migrant in a family improves three generations of a family. Loss of one man is not a very high price to pay. Martyrdom, after all, is also highly prized by these *Pothwari* martial men.

Coping Strategies

> *Hazrat Ali ka qol hai keh Jo murda hota hai who akarta hai; jiss mein jan hoti hai woh jhukta hai.*
>
> (It is Hazrat Ali's[22] saying that the corpse stiffens; one who has life in him bends.)

Mutahir uses this religious explanation to show his resolve to mold himself to his wife's temper on joining her in England. He is conscious of the fact that being an only son among four daughters, and not the eldest, he has had a pampered life. He was the reward for his parents' many *manatain muradain* (implorations and pleadings) at shrines. He once dragged in firewood (dried thorny bushes used in the area for cooking meals) and his parents started crying at the arduous and lowly task they had put him to. But he is determined to make something of himself. His father is too unwell most of the time to work, and he has three unmarried sisters. The eldest sister is married and lives in England and sends money frequently to support them. "*Aakhir kab tak beti ke paisay khain gai* (How long will we eat a daughter's money?)" he asks me. Also, in his mind he seems to be doing his wife a favor and moving there as her protector, since she is alone with her widowed mother. He uses all these justifications to cope with the perceived threats to his masculinity that he may have to face. He also shares with me his plan for the future that will ensure his hold on his own nuclear family in Britain: he will send his children back to Pakistan to be raised by his parents.[23] As for any objections raised by his British wife, he says, "Understanding is the real thing between husband and wife. She will understand. Besides, she works full time. I will also have to work full time; who will take care of the babies? She will be happy to send them back. I want them to be raised like me, in a loving environment, growing up to respect elders."

Mutahir is still in Pakistan. His coping strategies are plans for the future. For the migrant husbands who are already in the UK these coping strategies are not mere words. Asghar points out how the migrant husbands bond with each other at work for comfort and support, how they only speak Pothwari with each other and exclude all English-speaking members from their fraternity. Asghar could speak English on arrival, but he did not let them know. He adopted their freshie accents and spoke with them. The day they found out that he could speak like the locals they became reserved in his company. They frequent mosques where they can meet other men in their situation. Some of his pals have fixed days when they can meet in the mosque without the scrutinizing eyes of their in-laws or wives. They dream of days when they will be able to earn enough to move away from their in-laws and reestablish their manhood.

Conclusion

The interaction of marriage, migration, and masculinity is a neglected area of research. Research on male marriage migrants in two villages of the Pothwar plateau in Punjab, Pakistan, has shed light on the combination of social and economic processes of migration and transnational marriages and their interaction with kinship and masculinities. The personhood of these *Pothwari* men differs from that of men in the West in that it is informed by a web of obligations to their kin. Their masculinities are also not coherent, discrete entities, but are negotiated within changing sociocultural settings and are shifting. Rather than occupy any one position (hegemonic, complicit, resistant, or subordinate), they exhibit more than one subject position at the same time, symbolized by a variety of masculine responses to the social processes in which they are embedded. Men's aspirations to migrate are in line with the dominant form of masculinity. Their preparations for the trials, coping strategies, and notions of success and failure correspond to various other masculine positions. The spatial context also changes their subject position. The subordinate position of migrant husbands in Britain translates as a hegemonic one in Pakistan. Even within Britain, the move away from the household of the father-in-law enables the subject position to transform, if not into a hegemonic one, to a complicit one.

Migration, then, seemingly allows for a ratification of the fluidity and complexity of masculinities, as many authors have noted in varying contexts, calling upon us to rethink them (Cole 2009; Beasley 2008). My analysis shows that the experience of migration involves a complex situation of belonging to different socio-spatial contexts, making man discursive rather than normative. Being a man, whether occupying a hegemonic, subordinate, or any other position, does not necessarily follow an ideal type within that category. Neither does it mean that one occupies a subject position to the exclusion of all others. The migrant husband is a product of his own specific history and geography, and that description alone decides what sort of a man he can be. Migration, then, allows for a scrutiny of masculinities where masculinity is not only linked to adventure-taking, responsibility, and the accumulation of social and economic resources, but also to seemingly subordinate positions at the same time. These positions too are context-dependent—for example, subordinate or marginal in Britain but dominant in their villages in Pakistan.

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[2] Deniz Kandiyoti (1988: p. 278) places Pakistan in the classic patriarchal belt marked by patrilocally extended households. Within the system of classic patriarchy, a girl after marriage moves to the household headed by her husband's father, where she is subordinate to not only all the men but also to senior women, especially the mother-in-law.

[3] Crewe and Kothari (1998) challenge a preoccupation with economic explanations and give diverse reasons for migration, highlighting the gendered nature of individual migrants' experiences.

[4] This study builds upon my doctoral research (Malik 2010) on the Pakistani diaspora residing in Slough, UK, entailing an ethnographic investigation into the lives of British-Pakistani Muslim women and the strategies they employ to negotiate various aspects of their diasporic existence.

[5] The label *ghar damad* for migrant grooms is not used by my respondents in Pakistan. Charsley (2005 b), from whom I have borrowed the usage, also notes the objection of her respondents in Bristol, UK to this term. It is a literal translation of the term "residing son in law"—the uxorilocally resident groom.

[6] The names of both villages, as well as those of the respondents, have been changed upon respondent request.

[7] The Pothwar belt mentioned here spans the area of northern Punjab, extending from the Jhelum River up to Rawalpindi.

[8] The Suzuki Carry, locally called the "carry *dabba*," is a mini-pickup van popular in the rural areas of Pakistan due to its affordable cost and its utility—it can carry both people and goods.

[9] Such amenities are lacking in scores of other Pakistani villages as they await government intervention.

[10] The Mitubishi Pajero is an SUV popularly termed *pejaro* in Pothwar. It was considered a status symbol in the feudal culture until it was recently overtaken by another SUV, the Parado. Middling landlords, politicians, and businessmen continue to own *pejaros* to mark their higher status.

[11] *Jehray kanni hathi nangay, Unan dey khasam nikamay* (Punjabi). *Nanga* is a term generally used for "naked" in Urdu. Hence ears and wrists unadorned with jewellery give the impression of being as badly bare as naked.

[12] *Waddi* means older and *beji* is the address of a mother.

[13] Both her age and the number of years her son had been away were estimates made by Waddi Beji.

[14] All of Akram's children, two sons and a daughter, were sent to universities in the city with the support of their uncle.

[15] *Choti* means younger.

[16] In a traditional household this would have been the responsibility of Choti Beji's own daughter-in-law, not her daughter.

[17] FA and BA are equivalent to 12 years and 14 years of education, respectively. The typical Pakistani high school finishes at 10 years of education; FA and BA levels of education are pursued in a college.

[18] The Toyota XLI is a popular saloon car that, like the Pajero, symbolizes status.

[19] *Villayat* is an Urdu term that refers to England. *Valaiti* is the Punjabi version, denoting a British-Pakistani.

[20] *Massair* is a cousin. Since most marriages are to first cousins imported from Pakistan, the term has come to symbolize a transnational groom among members of the Pakistani diaspora in Britain.

[21] *Mangay* is a derogatory slang of the Punjabi word "*mang*," which means a betrothed.

[22] The son-in-law and first cousin of the Prophet Muhammad.

[23] Asghar also narrates how the freshies dream of sending their children back home. "A dream which is nothing more than a fairy tale," he remarks.

Chapter 4

“Men Are Less Manly, Women Are More Feminine”: The Shopping Mall as a Site for Gender Crisis in Istanbul

Cenk Özbay[1]

In this chapter I will examine the gendered and sexualized experiences of retail workers who are employed by transnational companies in shopping malls in Istanbul, Turkey. Here I argue that the feminine gender regime at the malls contradicts the prepotent gender order of Turkish society and triggers a “gender crisis” through which workers encounter a set of different rules, norms, and codes and circumspectly recalibrate their gendered selves and bodies in order to make sense of the relations in the workplace environment as active, happy, and “successful” individuals.

My curiosity about the lives of retail employees commenced with my work experience at Citron,[2] a Spanish retail giant, between the years 2004 and 2005. I needed a job that I could do without paying too much attention, hence I started working at Citron. As the weeks passed, I noticed the complex web of power relations amongst the customers, managers, head-office employees, and retail workers. I sensed the deep and perceptible forms of social inequality as I watched and took part in the encounters between these four groups. I was also able to unravel the intriguing contours of an incipient subjectivity among workers. As I carried out my job, I started to know “the retail worker” and even began taking preliminary field notes about the architecture of the dynamic social relations, discourses, and practices through which this new retail subjectivity emerged in the store.

Here, I use the concept “the subjectivity of the (retail) worker” in order to distance from the binary senses of power, domination, and hierarchy in the workplace and to highlight the implicit and often unnoticed routes of empowerment that opened up for the worker (see Kondo 1990; Du Gay 1996; Salzinger 2003; Ngai 2005; Hanser 2008). Shopping malls and stores do not produce garments, although they do produce intangible qualities of service, interaction, and impression. Simultaneously, they elicit certain subjects (i.e. the retail worker, manager, customer) via respective discourses, norms, values, regulations, and practices. The subjection process for the retail worker not only binds these young bodies to the bureaucratic, spatial, and temporal hierarchies of capital, but also capacitates them to have individual identities formed vis-à-vis concurrent desires, hope, respect, fear, shame, suffering, danger, and melancholy at different scales. The production of the retail subjectivity in relation to the hegemonic forms of the idealized, adroit worker or the multiple channels of resistance and abjection, as well as the ways of dealing with their “lives” and “futures,” generates different gendered and sexualized injunctions. I will endeavor to provide a sociological explanation of how different retail workers respond to these gendered demands of work while the retail subjectivity is constructed, elaborated, taken up, or rejected.

I came to Istanbul in 2008 in order to conduct research on the retail industry for my doctoral studies. It was not really easy for me to find a job at a shopping mall because I was then 28 years old, which was considered “too old” to be employed as a new sales assistant according to the standards of retail work in Turkey. After a long term of job-searching, I was hired by ZIP, an American retail company, at a store in one of the most upscale shopping malls in Istanbul.[3]

After presenting a brief outline of the neo-liberalization process as experienced in Istanbul and the position of shopping malls as one of the hallmarks of the rising new city, I will explore the facets of gender and sexuality among retail workers.

The Shopping Mall Boom and the Retail Worker

Istanbul has been experiencing a radical transformation into a composite structure of neo-liberal urban governance in which local and transnational capital, the metropolitan municipality, and the national government developed a flexible collaboration to re-imagine, restructure, and privatize the city space. Neo-liberalization at the urban scale started in the late 1980s, halted in the 1990s, and escalated again in the last decade, with multiple ambitions and desires to make Istanbul a notable regional center, if not a leading world city. Approaching urban space through a technocratic lens that always prioritizes the needs of global capital, privatization, commodification, and profit-making, these neo-liberalizing tendencies of local administrators attenuated the public character and democratic capacities of the urban populations via numerous cases of top-down mega-projects and urban renewal enterprises (Keyder 2005; Bartu Candan and Kolluoglu 2008; Kuyucu and Unsal 2009; Aksoy 2012). One of the most visible and imposing outcomes of this process of urban transmutation is the construction and opening of “modern” shopping malls around the city. Istanbul has a Brobdingnagian traditional closed bazaar (the Grand Bazaar, although it was the center of the city’s economy in the past, caters to mostly tourists today) in the heart of the old city, as well as numerous local marketplaces consisting of shops and restaurants, situated on boulevards and in passageways and arcades.

The story of modern shopping malls in Istanbul began with the opening of the first one in 1987 with a celebration in which the Prime Minister participated. representing the mall as a major contribution to the globalization of the Turkish economy. There are now approximately 100 shopping malls in greater Istanbul—an area that covers almost 800 km^2 and has more than 15 million inhabitants. These shopping malls are immensely popular places in terms of high numbers of visitors, intriguing architecture, the presentation of global companies and the latest brands, politicians’ and celebrities’ unceasing interest, and popular media’s endless coverage about them, mostly favorable. Accordingly, shopping malls are the new public spaces where the globalizing, consumption-oriented professionals and middle classes, as well as the tourists, meet and the rising Turkish economy exhibits its strength in the most meretricious way.[4]

What is missing in this joyous picture is people who work in these extravagant palaces of hyper-consumption. In other words, shopping malls *as workplaces* are not discerned or mentioned in public debates. Such silence hides the existent labor relations that take place in the stores and covers up difficulties retail workers experience, and at the same time the meaning and effects of the greater socioeconomic change from an industrial town to a post-industrial urban milieu (or from a Fordist system of production to a neo-liberal, service-based economy) is obscured. I examined elsewhere the outline of the local economy that makes this transition and the existing labor regime in the shopping malls possible (Özbay 2010a). A number of constitutive forces have determined the characteristics of the current scene regarding workers' situation in the shopping malls—or, in the services sector, in Istanbul. Among them, the liberalization of imported goods in the 1980s, rapidly evolving consumer taste and its manipulations by the burgeoning advertisement industry, de-industrialization and the loss of secure working-class jobs, large numbers of young and relatively uneducated people (therefore the unending labor supply), and different forms of the explicit support to the service economy provided by the state, including the very long working hours guaranteed by law, might be mentioned. Furthermore, traditional gender conservatism that forbids youth to leave their families in order to live alone plays a crucial role shaping the dynamics at shopping malls as workplaces.

I argue that a distinct type of young person, "the retail worker," emerged in this particular political, economic, cultural, and spatial configuration in Istanbul. Here, I conceptualize the retail worker as a Weberian "ideal type" or "persona"[5] who lives with her family, either in one of the previously prestigious but recently decaying areas of the city center or in one of the less affluent neighborhoods (most of them illegally built squatter settlements) in the outlying districts of the city. She graduated from high school, yet her academic and familial background did not permit her to take the centralized national university exam. If she somehow tried to be admitted to a university "by chance," she failed. She started working retail by coincidence. For example, one day she was strolling in one of the shopping malls and saw a sign saying "We need help" in the window of a chic shop that she had always fancied. Or, a friend might just have told her that she had started working at one of the fashionable shops and invited her to do the same. Why not?[6] So she becomes a retail worker who spends most of her awake time in the shopping mall, laboring six days and 45 hours per week, and sometimes additional, unpaid work hours; dealing with customers, relating to other workers, and being deferential to managers; cultivating a desire to participate in the global consumer culture thriving around her; getting multiple credit cards and loans from banks; increasingly feeling suffocated by the lack of options for her life and "exit strategies" for the future. By working non-stop in the shopping mall for a period of time, she begins to realize that she has left the heyday of her jubilant teenage years and become a confused young adult with a lot of vague desires and yearnings without any "real possibilities" or practical opportunities to build the future she has been dreaming of.[7]

I believe it is crucial to comprehend the gendered and sexual mediations that reshape the subjectivity of the retail worker in order to interpret structural transformations such as neo-liberalization, globalization, and de-industrialization through a human scale. I think the retail worker must be thought of alongside other representable "ideal types," or the protagonists in public urban discourses that are juxtaposed and constitute the contours of the public, popular culture, citizenship, politics, and belonging in contemporary Turkey. Below, I will rough out the gender regime and performative gendered repertoire that enable the retail worker to construct her/his identity as a young adult subject in the city, have a good rapport with others, and produce meaning through various social interactions that take place in the everyday life of the shopping malls.

The Feminized Gender Regime in Shopping Malls

Raewyn Connell (1987, 2002) effectively brings together issues and concepts that coordinate our gendered lives in modern societies and outlines structural, but at the same time relational and bodily patterns of power as the gender order of a particular society. The gender order of the world (Connell 1998), or of a particular society, is based on the social and structural inequality between men and women, which has been elaborated by feminist theory since its inception, i.e. women being the "second sex" (De Beauvoir 1949), or the development of the term "patriarchy" to express male domination and the political organization of "opposite" genders in society (Pateman 1988). Gender regimes of social institutions and organizations, such as shopping malls, are small-scale reproductions of the gender order with contextual nuances and specificities. In Connell's thought, gender regimes accumulate and work in accordance with the governing logic of the gender order: men's superiority over women with the devaluation of "feminine" and privileging "masculine." In each institutional setting this gendered principle is reified and reproduced.

Scholars have noted how the gender order operates through and produces further inequalities between women and men in different fields of social life in Turkey (see for example Özbay 1990; Tekeli 1994; Arat and Altinay 2009; Dedeoglu and Elveren 2012). Despite the fact that it is tremendously difficult to generalize the rules that regulate gender relations in Turkish society, where class, ethnic, religious, and regional differences intersect, a general framework of the gender order can still be detected. Women in Turkey have certain legal rights and egalitarian opportunities in some domains, such as higher education and jobs in the public sector; they simultaneously experience visible and covert forms of discrimination and exclusion—untold barriers in national and local politics or the definition of the contested concept "honor" (*namus*), which enables and legitimizes patriarchal families' control over women's bodies and actions according to a set of "traditional" rules and codes (Abdo and Mojab 2004). Overall, I contend that men predominate women in Turkey and, notwithstanding the continuous struggle against it, most women experience gender subordination, sometimes in violent ways, especially in the lower strata of the society. In most cases, the gender order of Turkish society provides men with the material and symbolic capacity to empower themselves, intimidate women in public and intimate spheres, and, most important, sustain their hegemony through diverse paths of gendered discrepancies, including, but not limited to, the emphasis on virginity (Ozyegin 2009), veiling (Gokariksel 2012), and the aging of the female body (Erol 2011).

During my research in shopping malls I have observed that the web of social relations in these spaces challenges and, to a minimum extent, reorganizes the gender order of Turkish society. In this sense, the spatial, temporal, gender, and sexual arrangements in shopping malls can be seen as manifestations of "crisis tendencies" in Connell's (1987, 2002) terms, in the sense that women are greater in number and more powerful in labor relations and practices,[8] and their femininity (values and attributes that are traditionally seen as feminine) is extolled and mainstreamed. I argue that the gender regime in the upscale shopping malls in Istanbul is feminine. This apparent primacy of women over men and of feminine virtues over what is viewed as masculine in the workplace environment is unique.[9] The gender regime of this particular institutional setting presents an indisputable contradiction to the gender order of the society, in which men, especially in the economic field, subordinate women and masculine traits such as being dominant, rational, and assertive are exalted, while feminine qualities, such as deference and solicitude, are devalued and suppressed in business. On the other hand, the feminized gender regime of the shopping malls is reinforced and proliferated through the rise of the service sector (the biggest contributor of the GNP in contemporary Turkey), which overrules traditional mentalities of doing business and running workplaces. It prioritizes communication, empathy, radiance, self-presentation, and being obsequious and servile—all culturally coded as unmanly.

The feminized gender regime in shopping malls has different implications for heterosexual men and women as well as queer people. Gender and sexuality positions and the gendered meanings generated and circulated through emergent social relations are interlaced with class, ethnic, and sexual identities. In this sense, gender is a major channel through which the social performance of bodies according to certain rules and regulations are displayed and embodied. Based on calculation, imitation, intuition, and reflexivity, people "do gender," repeat fixed deeds, reiterate specific speech acts, and exhibit bodily gestures to convey, naturalize, and stabilize their gendered identities—exactly what kind of women and men they are (Butler 1990; Fenstermaker and West 2002). This concomitantly social and bodily process is always interwoven with class (Bettie 2003). Gender, just like "class acts" (Sherman 2007), is not a pre-given condition or a freestanding category before the individual's existence, but they both come into play as subjectivity is formed. Therefore, gender can be interpreted better through the lens of class identity and relations, and vice versa. The gender regime of shopping malls presents an opportunity to understand how different classes project different gendered performativities because the store as workplace is an interactive arena of workers, managers, and customers, all from diverse backgrounds and social positions (Benson 1987; Williams 2006). What the same gender regime communicates to someone depends not only on the person's gender but also on her class, as well as other components of her social identity including "race" and sexuality.[10]

Below, I will elaborate on the three main aspects of the ruling gender regime in shopping malls in Istanbul: women workers' emphasized femininity and the empowering subjectivity, men workers' disfigured and recalibrated masculinities, and queer workers' increasing visibility and encounters with straight people. Although I separated these components of the gender regime for analytical purposes, they work together in a compound fashion and generate a gendered and classed performativity that workers think and act upon in order to make sense of the workplace, shape their identities, and establish meaningful relations with others. Gender and sexuality dynamics operate at the same time for all people within this gender regime, and they create a peculiar culture that might differ from the outside—the mainstream web of sociability. One of my informants once said, "Here in the shopping mall working men are less manly and working women are more feminine than outside," to highlight how uncanny this gender regime actually is.[11]

The New Emphasized Femininity

I am looking at the available positions that the Spanish retailer Mango published on a job search website. They seek people who are "dynamic, keen, cheerful, communicative, caring how they look, and following fashion." The notice does not specify a gender but there is a photograph of a young, slim, and attractive woman right next to the text. It is difficult to say whether that photo is a regular Mango advertisement or has been put there on purpose to give the message to the reader, "This is what we look for." Either way, if I considered applying to Mango, I would think my chance was higher if I really looked like this young woman.

Regular visits to global brands' stores in one of the glitzy shopping malls in Istanbul will show that young, slim women who care how they look have a greater chance for employment in these workplaces. My work experiences also testify to this. Women workers in the classy shopping malls are mostly young (aged between 18 and 25 years old) and fit, even skinny, wear fashionable clothes or uniforms of late design and make-up, have their hair nicely done, and smile and have conversations with the customers in a kind, meek manner. In addition to this chic pretense, these are flexible workers, compliant with the rapidly changing demands of store management, not complaining about work conditions, not asking for their rights, and being extremely self-controlled when there is an argument with a customer. This pigeonholing portrayal matches more or less with how the female retail worker is imagined in the store. In this context, it is not enough to be "just a woman"; one needs to be an "extra-woman," as a co-worker of mine told me. Run-of-the-mill femininity is not satisfactory here.

Connell defines "emphasized femininity" as "the global subordination of women to men that provides an essential basis for differentiation [among femininities]. One form is defined around compliance with subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. I will call this emphasized femininity" (1987: 183). In the context of shopping malls in Istanbul the emphasized femininity that is esteemed, demanded, and promoted is the "extra" version, an advanced, exaggeratedly performed form of femininity. Femininity in shopping malls is performed through the two meanings of the word. Women may not feel that they wear the right make-up, pose exuberantly, wear nice clothes, or talk to people in a frisky manner, but they prepare themselves and act out this exaggerated femininity in a conscious, ostentatious, and fake way, as if they are on stage. Femininity is also performative in the sense that women repeatedly, consistently, and regularly enact these gendered displays and produce a context in which exaggerated femininity starts to look coherent, standardized, and normalized. The subordination of women here does not have to be to men but to the needs of the company, including working irregular hours or indulging pugnacious customers. While female workers are supposed to look and act highly feminine—soft, understanding, empathizing, nurturing, stylized, and well-mannered—they also have to deal with their own problems and navigate their lives without creating difficulty for the management.

Many stories I heard from my co-workers revealed that their lives were much more complicated than this stereotypical, emphasized femininity of the woman worker. Ozlem's experiences, for example, present a great vantage point to understand that trying to fulfill some requirements of the emphasized femininity might have different meanings in workers' lives. Ozlem graduated from primary school and did not resume her education afterwards. It is not common for a person with such a low level of education to be hired by most of the retail companies in Turkey, let alone the prestigious and better-paying ones. She is the seventh child of a Kurdish family that lives in an illegal squatter area in the Ümraniye district of Istanbul. Since she started working in 2002, she has spent three hours a day commuting from home to work by bus.

Ozlem's father hit her when he learnt that his daughter was working at Citron. He stopped beating her only when he got her first paycheck. Meanwhile, Ozlem was doing an extremely confusing job at the counter that required great arithmetic skills, and she was (and still is) earning the highest amount in her household. For years, she gave almost all the money she earned to her family and saved as much as she could. At lunch, she usually sat at a different table from the other workers because, unlike them, she did not eat from the food court in the shopping mall but brought her own food from home—mostly pasta, rice, or homemade pastry. She was ashamed of her enforced parsimony and other people were ashamed of her obvious poverty and otherness. One day she went to a hairstylist to get her hair cut. When her father heard about this, he hit her again, blaming her for wasting the family money on her hair like a prostitute. She rebelled and threatened him by calling the police. She says:

> It was a turning point in my life. For the first time I opposed him, I yelled back at him. I knew this was his nature; he did not even understand what I was talking about, but I was struggling in my own way. He did not have any idea how I had been coping with the managers, co-workers, and customers in the store for all these years. I have achieved becoming somebody; I have been successful at work. I am not an indignant person and he cannot act as if I were one. So, after that day, I became more liberated. Of course, I always help them; I am giving money to them but not all my salary, not any more. I am now eating from the restaurants with other people. I learnt how to be friends with people. I am not alone. I even have a boyfriend, which would have caused me to get killed in the past. Now, it is normal. I am a working woman; these are normal things for me now.

As is clear in Ozlem's narrative, some requirements of the emphasized femininity in shopping malls might be seen as superficial and trivial, but they can actually function as forms of resistance that serve to reshape the subjectivity of the independent, self-regulating young woman, who decides what is normal and within the realm of possibilities. Hence, it would be wrong to imagine shopping malls and their gender regime only as typecasting and constraining women through emphasized femininity. Women workers are not entirely powerless and vulnerable. They can also construct dissident self-making and create opportunities to arrange their lives according to their needs and desires by asserting their new empowerment through earning wages.

Shopping malls in Istanbul are harsh workplaces full of exploitation, injustice, contempt, and disappointment. Women workers, like men, encounter the difficulties that arise from working retail as uneducated, "disposable" employees. They are not certain about their futures and they often feel helpless and wretched. On the other hand, working retail gives them a set of circumstances in which they can realize their identity and independence from family control.

For these young women of modest origins, who live at home, home is not a "haven in a heartless world" (Lasch 1995). One day I was having lunch with two female co-workers. One of them asked the other how many days' rest she took between the two jobs she'd had. Knowing she had worked for five years at her previous job, I was expecting her to say "a couple of months." Instead, she said, "a week." While I was surprised, the first woman said, "Yes, that was enough." Later, I came to realize that home, for these young women, does not mean the same thing that it does to us. She probably did not enjoy her "free" time between the two jobs because of her responsibilities at home when she was available, for example doing housework or taking care of her siblings. Her trips to the outside might have been watched closely and limited in number. She most likely felt the lack of financial freedom to spend money on herself. In this sense, working was a form of independence from parental supervision for my female co-workers. It gave them a chance to be mobile within the city, experience the outside world, meet different people, share intimacy with friends and lovers, yearn for the managers' and customers' lifestyles, and think about whether, or when, they wanted to marry. In other words, I contend, despite making them slave away and try to embody an extra femininity, the gender regime in the shopping mall may pave the way for the female worker to become an active agent of her life, control the social relations she has, and exert forms of power over her body and the sequence of her life.

The New Masculinity

While the gender regime in shopping malls produces an emphasized femininity that on the surface may appear to enslave women and make them docile, but indeed may serve as a liberating force, hegemonic masculinity is challenged in this context and men, even more visibly and intensely than women, are interpellated to reform their conception of masculinity and adapt themselves to the contours of this new, "mall" masculinity. They are supposed to leave the conventional spectacles of rugged masculinity behind, be softer, more "civilized," and relaxed in manners, be open to dialogue and diversity, and take care of their bodies, clothes, and overall appearance.

The codes of the new masculinity sketched in shopping malls are not only about gender performance, but also involve class disposition. Hegemonic masculinity in Turkey is stabilized (and flaunted) through a series of bodily performances, speech acts, and gestures, as well as the values assigned to these (i.e. authority, respect, maturity, seriousness), that connect and align different social classes under this superficial "symbolic economy of manhood." The masculinity performance of the male sales assistant that is taken for granted is another way of embodying the "classless" manhood that is supposed to prevail across diverse social groups. Despite the implicit claim that the classes are linked through a unifying sense of masculinity, scholars have long documented that men from different backgrounds incorporate and perform distinct masculinities (Connell 1995; Morgan 2005). In other words, masculinity is classed.

When shopping mall managers do not promote, and indeed discourage, the ubiquitous manifestations of hegemonic masculinity (for example, by arguing with and being rude to impolite customers in order to demonstrate masculinity, instead of smiling and "taking it easy"), they are also calling upon male workers to leave an unwanted class affiliation behind.

Male retail workers are distancing themselves from the default gender codes and, at the same time, dissociating themselves from the class habitus in order to pass as the desired new male worker-subjects. In other words, while women workers renegotiate their class identities as they exaggerate their feminine performances in order to be regarded as middle-class, male workers have to mitigate their hegemonic masculinity displays to be accepted into the domain of new manhood, which implicitly but persistently excludes a lower class aura.

I argue that this encounter with a new form of masculinity triggers a deeper gender crisis in the lives of heterosexual male retail workers. In addition to the gendered character of this crisis, there are also structural factors, such as the de-industrialization process, the end of the construction of informal housing, and the effects of migration and cultural marginalization in Istanbul. Young men have to take the low-end service sector jobs, including sales assistantship, instead of the relatively well-paying, secure, unionized jobs that men of previous generations were able to get. In addition to that, despite their economically disadvantaged origins, the migrant parents were able to experience some economic mobility and security through building illegal and informal housing in the outskirts of the city. In most cases, young men do not have this opportunity any more. What they face now in shopping malls is the insecure, de-unionized, part-time, temporary jobs with low salaries, no respect, and no expectations for future promotion.

Transformations within the gender system itself, that is, the emergence of a new masculinity (in this case the "mall" masculinity or *the metrosexuality* per se), coincides with the macro-scale social change, that is, deindustrialization, and becomes clearer through the gendered subjectivities and experiences of these young men. Therefore, young male sales assistants in Istanbul undergo a double gender crisis. Their sense of hegemonic masculinity is rejected in the social environment of the shopping mall where women and gay men are greater in number and superior in power. Feminine conventions are also deemed finer and higher. Established characteristics of hegemonic masculinity in Turkish society, such as toughness, the suppression of feelings, and giving orders instead of taking care of others' needs, are devalued and young male workers are expected to adapt themselves. This is the symbolic end of the traditional "male-breadwinner" position for the new working-class members (McDowell 2003). They uncomfortably strive to unthink and unlearn their masculinity and renegotiate their intimate relations with women as equal partners and not inferior protégés.

Erkan was one of ZIP's window-dressers (*vitrinci*), the people who organize the windows in order to exhibit new collections and garments, twice a month on average. Whenever I saw him working in the store I noticed that he was somehow unsociable or everybody was avoiding him. He was not necessarily the kindest person in the store, but I was intrigued at how other workers excluded him. I thought maybe people were not treating him nicely because he came to the store very rarely (because he rotates among different stores). One of my co-workers warned me not to deal with him. She told me Erkan might be really aggressive and audacious toward other workers. I said okay to her, but did not take her words seriously. In the second ZIP store I worked in, I was able to observe what she meant. Erkan was working in the windows and a female sales assistant was helping him while I was folding garments near them. Either she did not understand what he said or he gave a wrong command and she put the wrong garment in the wrong place. It could have been corrected in two seconds. He just said, "You do not understand anything, you stupid bitch." She and I froze. She angrily asked him how could he dare talk to her like that and who did he think he was. He escalated and shouted, "I said what I said, why would I be scared of you? What are you going to do about that?" I was thinking of calling the store manager because Erkan seemed really furious and I sensed that he might have hit her if she had given him another vehement answer. She left the window and called the manager. The manager came in and talked to him in an assertive manner. He said, "You do this all the time. I have to inform the head office about your unacceptable behavior in the store. Now, take a break and cool down." Weeks later, through a mutual friend's help, I conducted an unrecorded interview with him. During the hour we spent together in a coffee shop, he kept complaining about the feminine character of the retail sector and the store workers. It seemed to me that he honestly did not think what he was doing, the way he talked to the workers and managers, was wrong. He said, "I am just a tough guy. I am not a criminal and I am not dealing with customers at all. I do not have to be *too nice* like them. When I am angry I just swear, but they act like this was the most important thing in the world, as if I killed somebody. What's wrong with saying "fuck off" to an idiot sales clerk? They want all of us to be weaklings [makes effeminate gestures], well, I am not. Seriously, I do not give a fuck; my job is to prepare the window. They can do whatever they want." His sense of genuine "tough masculinity" clearly conflicted with the hegemonic masculinity of the retail sector, which prioritizes kindness and proper conduct. After we talked, I guessed that the company would not let him go on like this. Although he was an extremely talented window-dresser, they fired him the following month.

Working as a sales assistant is often considered a feminine job in the popular wisdom—far from traditional manual working-class jobs—and the cultural milieu in a shopping mall generates a feminized gender regime, as I have pointed out. In addition, mall masculinity may also generate a gender crisis for men regarding their age. Male workers tend to see retail jobs as temporary, not suitable for men after a certain age, when they think they will become real men. This intersection of aging and gender can also be interpreted as another implication of the hauntings of the long-lost breadwinner position. As Michael Kimmel (2009) illustrates for young American adults, when men are younger, the fact that they don't have the ability to achieve breadwinner status does not really disturb them, since they are mostly looking for fun, delaying responsibility, and distancing themselves from seriousness (see also McDowell 2003). When they are more mature, masculinity begins operating as a system of commitments and practical wisdom.

Bulut is a former co-worker of mine. His story is one of the few cases in which the imagination of aging for male workers actually turned into action. He was different from anybody else I came to know in shopping malls. He was approximately 10 years older than the rest of us, but he was not a manager. Actually, he could not become a manager because he did not go to college and he could not speak either of the required foreign languages, English and Spanish. He started to work right after he graduated from high school and he says he did all kinds of jobs, including being a waiter and a driver. Then, he started to work at little shops and climbed the ladder and became a "responsible" (the second person in the hierarchy after the manager) at a Citron store. Normally, this would be a great job for most workers, yet it was not enough for Bulut because he was married and had a child. His wife was a store manager at a smaller chain and she was earning a little more than he was, which gradually made him unhappier with his job. When he talked to one of the company executives about becoming a store manager, he told me, “She did not say anything, but just looked at my face like a cold snake and nodded.” In the store, he played the role of “older brother” (*agabeylik*, someone who cares for you, protects you, and gives you advice about what is morally right or wrong). He developed a sense of patience, tolerance, and peace (*tevekkül*) due to his subordinate position and his feeling of emasculation, which was exacerbated by his wife’s seemingly better career, his failing as breadwinner at home, and his sense of being belittled at work, for instance when the manager shouted in his face. He was rather hopeless and melancholic. In 2009, I searched for him so I could conduct an interview, and found out that he had opened a little grocery store two years earlier. I visited him in his store. He told me that in terms of money he did not make much more than he was earning at Citron, but he was much happier at the new workplace, his own store:

> I am the boss here. I do not have to explain anything to anybody. I work harder and for longer hours. But, it does not matter. […] Being a sales assistant is a job only for a certain age, I mean for men. A woman can do it until she dies. But for a man, after a certain age, it looks weird, as if you have a problem with yourself. For men, this business is just for young people, unless you become a manager. Being a manager saves your life. I was between the two options: opening this store with the small amount of money I inherited from my father, or becoming a manager at a smaller store. I thought if somebody should do that job, he must work at Citron, it is the best company, and they did not promote me to become a manager. So, I left the retail sector and opened my own store. *As a man*, I believe this was the better way to follow.

Bulut’s life and his words corroborate the crisis of hegemonic masculinity in the feminized gender regime of the shopping mall. When Bulut’s and Erkan’s stories are considered together it becomes clear that for most male retail workers, these low-end jobs do not provide material and discursive opportunities to reclaim their masculine identities for multiple reasons, including the demands of mall masculinity that contradict their own masculine self-image, the castrating effects of low wages to the supposed breadwinner, and the dilemma of the aging man whose position in the store bureaucracy is inferior to that of the younger men and women. Queer people’s visibility and participation in store management poses another challenge to hegemonic masculinity.

A Queer Workplace?

In addition to the gendered dimensions, the gender regime at shopping malls also has effects in terms of sexuality. There are many out gay male sales assistants in stores in Istanbul.[12] This is another significant factor that helps define the framework of the feminized gender regime in the workplace, as well as being a major outcome of it. Regarding the numerous difficulties that out queer people encounter in Turkish society (Bereket and Adam, Özbay 2010b; Ozyegin 2012) it would not be wrong to claim that retail is one the queerest economic sectors, along with fashion and graphic design, advertisement, and higher education, in urban Turkey.[13] Unlike many other workplaces, in which an uncompromising homophobia reigns, shopping malls are diverse and flexible enough to allow workers who enact atypical and counter-normative gender performances and sexualized self-expression. To a certain extent this is desired by the management in order to make the store look “cooler” and “hipper.” When I was conducting an interview with a store manager she said,

> This is a small store. The number of workers seasonally shifts from seven to ten. But, I always demand a gay worker from the human resources [department]. Just like I insist somebody who can speak in English … I specifically ask for a gay worker because their visual talents are much better than normal men and women. I can leave the store to him and he would recreate all the design by himself. Also, when they deal with customers, especially with women, they are flawless … More than one gay would be too much for this small store, this is not a gay bar [laughs] but I think 10 per cent is a good ratio [of gay men in the store].

However, the embracing approach to queers by the management does not always work smoothly and queer workers, like other minority groups such as Kurds and overweight people, may come across antagonistic attitudes and verbal attacks. In most cases, with the help of managers’ encouragement and the institutional support, queers are able to deal with such conflicts in interactional settings and move along their careers. Boran’s narrative constitutes a great example. When Boran was at college he needed an easy, part-time job. So, he started to work at a ZIP store as a sales assistant. Then, he came out as gay in the store. After finishing school, he stayed in retail and became a store manager, then was promoted to a vice-directorship at the center office.

At the beginning of his career, while Boran was a student and a part-time worker, a new male worker started in the store.

> He was playing the tough guy. He changed his voice when he was talking to women, he was always really solemn and when he accidentally smiled he did it in a way as if he did something shameful. His body and gestures, everything he did was very masculine. And he was like, asking ‘What am I doing here?’ When a straight guy talked to him he was relieved a little bit because he was naturally his buddy. He was totally avoiding me. It was okay for me. I could live without him. At first, I thought he was attractive, but then I changed my mind. One day we were having lunch all together. I guess we were eight people at that moment: six girls from the store, he, and I. Of course, he was sitting at the other corner, the most distant place from me, as if I would jump up and kiss him all of a sudden. Then he made a comment about gay people. Honestly, I cannot recall it right now. But, it was something like, “Gay people should be cured. They are not normal, they are sick.” Or, something like that. I was not paying attention because I was familiar with this kind of talk and I had learnt not to listen to this bullshit. However, the girls at the table, my co-workers, stood up with their food trays and moved to another table. All together, without saying a single word. I froze for a second, did not really understand what was going on, and then I also left the table and sat at the other table with them. Within half a minute he was left alone. He also froze. He did not say anything, he did not ask anything, not even a single word. We immediately started to talk as usual. The other day, he did not come to work. We talked to our manager and explained to her what happened. She said we did the right thing and if he could not fit in at the store, he should quit. I am a vice-coordinator for the same company today and I never forget this memory. It reminds me how difficult it might be for a gay person to survive at work, even in this business, and how we need open-minded, respectful, and courageous people to work with.

Boran’s narrative demonstrates that the glorifying tags about the upscale retail industry, such as “the most comfortable job for gays” or “the queer sector,” does not actually pop up automatically, without contestation, in the everyday life of the workplace; they are achieved through constant struggle, collective effort, and proliferating solidarity between out queers and non-homophobic heterosexual workers. Such a tolerant atmosphere, where young queer people feel safe and can work in peace, and the endeavor to sustain it also means a potential gender crisis for homophobic men and women.

Conclusion

Istanbul's urban geography has been marked by shopping malls in the last 20 years. The national economy in Turkey is under transition from an import-substitution based, local industrialism to an export-oriented, globally connected assemblage and manufacture organization (Pamuk 2008). Istanbul has a distinct place in this process as the ultimate center of the new economy (i.e. fields like tourism, finance, services, advertisement, media, and communication) and the only candidate to achieve "world city" status via its historical, symbolic, cultural, and logistical linkages. One hundred-something shopping malls scattered in Istanbul, juxtaposed with skyscrapers and gated communities, showcase the neo-liberal transformation not only in spatial but also in economic and cultural senses.

In this chapter, I have examined shopping malls as workplaces through a gender and sexualities lens. The gender regime in these workplaces has been feminized because there are more women than men, both as customers and workers, women are positioned higher in managerial hierarchies, female values and feminine perspectives are appreciated, incompatible and uncooperative hegemonic masculinity is rejected, and queer people have relative freedom to express themselves. Women and men who work at shopping malls experience a "gender crisis." They rethink and remake their gender identities for adaptation, while the gender regime in the institution is in conflict with the gender order of Turkish society, in which men dominate women and masculine traits reign. I have argued that the context of shopping malls in Istanbul can be considered as one of the "crisis tendencies" that Connell (2002) mentions regarding the possibilities and implications of change on the gender order.

As societies transmogrify, their economic and cultural structures shift; and inevitably, new configurations in time, space, sociability, and labor process produce new openings for subjects as they move along opportunities for empowerment and self-actualization, or cul-de-sacs of disenfranchisement and subordination. Neoliberalism generates new forms of work with a set of novel circumstances, logics, and strategies. As Christine Williams recently recounted, "the traditional model of work is increasingly anachronistic" (2013: 619) and former values that guided workers in the past, such as loyalty and status-seeking hard work, lost ground. Instead, a new work culture that prioritizes employee flexibility and "boundaryless" careers (2013: 620) prevails while leaving many underprivileged workers around the world at the bottom of the hierarchy with low-end jobs and no ladder to climb. Williams discusses that researchers who observe the dynamic relations between the world of work and the web of gender and sexualities ought to develop new concepts and methods to realize the effects of social change and the shifting forms of social inequality.

Williams also contends that the neo-liberal economy has its own gender (and sexual) asymmetries. Locating gender and sexualities and the meaning-making practices of workers in the context of shopping malls, which in part represents the new urban economy of Istanbul, can provide an opportunity to better grasp and formulate new questions about the route and silhouette of social change in Turkish society. Furthermore, the transformation in the workplace organization from a manufacturing setting to a services economy and the emergence of the new retail subjectivity alongside, for example, "the middle class manager," "the globally connected head-office professional," and the "appropriate consumer" entail a re-exploration of previous categories and formulations. In this chapter, I have utilized Raewyn Connell's concepts, such as the gender regime and the emphasized femininity, to display how these terms are dynamic and open to renegotiation as in the stories of Ozlem, Bulut, Boran, and others. These individuals' narratives and the broad picture of the stores as workplaces underline at least two points. First, the gender crisis, which operates through the feminized gender regime, the rejection of hegemonic masculinity, and the queer presence, is positioned at the very center of the experiences of the new, neo-liberal economy and the workplace. Thus, gender and sexuality are not indirect and tangential forces in the social and physical milieu of the new economy. And, second, the new gender and sexual asymmetries that were electrified by the gender crisis pave the way for retail workers with different dispositions to undergo a questioning and reconfiguration of their subjectivities, "lives," and futures.

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[1] The study presented here is based on my doctoral dissertation (Ozbay 2010a), which greatly benefited from comments and criticisms from Mike Messner, Macarena Gomez-Barris, Nancy Lutkehaus, Alper Tumbal, Ayfer Bartu Candan, Ferhunde Özbay, and Nukhet Sirman. I conducted followup interviews in 2011 and 2013. Gul Ozyegin encouraged me to write this chapter, read it, and gave invaluable feedback. I am deeply grateful to her. MERC (Middle East Research Competition, Paris) and the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences at the University of Southern California provided financial support during the research and writing processes.

[2] All private names, including those of companies, shopping malls, and people, are pseudonyms.

[3] I was both a sales assistant and a cashier, like all other workers at ZIP. I worked at ZIP for 17 weeks in two stores in two different shopping malls as a full-time, and then a part-time worker. After completing the participant observation part of my research in these two ZIP stores, I conducted 50 interviews with retail workers, former workers, store managers and human resources coordinators. My research concentrated on the organization of the workplace, social inequality and governmentality in the store, neoliberalism, and workers' subjectivity, as well as gendered and sexualized aspects of their lives.

[4] While shopping malls are endorsed as the new public spaces in the city, "gated residential communities" (*site*) for desires of middle class sociability and leisure have become mainstreamed (Ayata 2002; Bartu Candan and Kolluoglu 2008). Also, a rising Islamist middle class is forming, which is expressed and strengthened by consumption patterns as well and concentrated in certain parts of the city. This religious, conservative, and pro-government middle class visits modern shopping malls as well as ubiquitous "pious shops" where Islamically covered young women are employed (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Gokariksel 2012). Current urban dynamics in Istanbul trigger forces of segregation and juxtaposition of different social classes and political groups (such as Islamists, Kurds, and the modern secular middle classes, among others) through new project developments, mass displacement, ongoing mobility, and the creation of novel forms of public spaces, including the Gezi Park resistance in Taksim Square in the summer months of 2013.

[5] This sociological prototype, "the retail worker," hides the existing diversity among people who have jobs in the services industry. First of all, despite being the minority, there are indeed some older workers. Among the young women and men, some are college students who have part-time jobs in the stores. Their social backgrounds, as well as the incentives for working retail, show a great amount of variety. More significantly, these student-workers are constructing another narrative for their future expectations and plans than those of the retail worker. If they are going to continue working retail after their graduation from college, they most probably will be promoted and advance their careers as store managers or head-office employees. In other words, they are more likely to become middle-class professionals in the future.

[6] Saying this, I do not mean that retail workers start working in the stores through a series of serendipitous events. Instead, as I underlined above, there are certain structural factors that shape and limit options that are available to young adults in Istanbul. However, the instantaneous decision to start at a particular store happens quickly and, in most cases, without consideration. When the retail worker is able to take a moment to be sure if she really wants to work at a store, she cannot find another alternative and feels herself compelled to apply because "it just seems something to do." Therefore, it is noteworthy to grasp the relation between what is "organic" (relatively permanent) and what is "conjunctural" (accidental and immediate) in Antonio Gramsci's (2000 [1971]) words.

[7] This can also be interpreted as an "exposed waiting" (Auyero and Swiston 2009) through which subjects live in the midst of confusion, error, and the unknowing of the social and physical environment around them. Open to a number of unidentifiable risks and dangers, they are paused and immobile, waiting for something that they cannot really envision. My co-workers and informants were lost in the same sense, waiting while they did not really understand what they were waiting for, and did not exactly know what to do in order to navigate through difficulties they encountered. As Pierre Bourdieu says, "waiting implies submission" (quoted in Auyero and Swiston 2009: 109); retail workers in Istanbul wait without the required knowledge or strategies to cope and remake the lives as they long to.

[8] Women workers in the stores are not deemed "secondary," "inferior," or "complementary," as they might be in other business fields. When a male and a female worker have a conflict, the manager does not automatically believe or support the man. The male privilege does not practically exist in the stores. Moreover, I have witnessed that female managers and workers have alliances with gay male managers and workers as well as with the head-office personnel to resist the implicit norms of heteromasculinity. The usual masculine hegemony does not operate upon relations at shopping malls, and even receiving orders from a female (or from a gay man) could be dislocating for the masculine self-esteem of the male heterosexual retail worker.

[9] Such a feminized gender regime might be prevalent in workplaces and businesses belonging to or serving only women, such as hair studios, beauty centers, or women's clubs. However, when it comes to contexts where both genders participate in the line of work, such as more conventional sectors of the economy, the gender regime tends to strengthen and stabilize male power and hegemonic masculinity. Women in the economy, as in most other realms, are *the second sex* in Turkey. Shopping malls challenge this gendered economy.

[10] Aesthetic labor ("the requirement that service workers 'look good and sound right' for the job") can also be conceptualized as a mediation between retail workers' class identities, their own consumption habits and practices, and companies' high-end and "cool" public image (Williams, Connell 2010: 371).

[11] The sociologist Ferhunde Özbay also recounted that a retail worker she knew once told her, "This job makes women

more feminine and men less masculine.” I heard these or similar words many times from workers in retail businesses. I believe these verbal expressions demonstrate that retail work constitutes a gendered habitus through which subjects constantly watch and redefine themselves, give meaning to their actions, and narrate what they have (or have not) in a coherent frame.

12 Although one can notice a few lesbians and bisexual women who have jobs in shopping malls, the dynamics of visibility obviously work differently for queer women. A previous study I conducted more than a decade ago also showed that lesbians in Istanbul did not work in the retail sector as much as gay men (Özbay and Soydan 2003). Transgender people are not employed by the global brands in shopping malls.

13 What determines these privileged economic fields is not the trends in gay culture or a mythical “queer people’s creativity” as an essential element in their personalities; instead, it is the employer’s opinion about the “the rotten report” that the military issues for gay men (Basaran 2007). Military service is compulsory for all male citizens in Turkey. Gays can waive the service if they can prove through overwhelming psychological and physiological tests that they are “feminine” gays. Meanwhile, they are saved in the state records as gay, in the official terms “having advanced psycho-sexual disorders,” and this process marks them, paralyzes their coming-out strategies, and excludes them from being employed by the public sector in the future. Hence, gay men’s job preferences are not shaped by what they feel or fancy but by the institutional procedures of the state and the level of homophobia of the employers.

Chapter 5

Between Ideals and Enactments: The Experience of “New Fatherhood” among Middle-Class Men in Turkey

Fatma Umut Beşpınar[1]

Introduction

As a mother of a two-year-old, I have had an increasing interest in conversations about children and parenting in the last few years. I have participated in more conversations of this sort than I can count; and it was thus that I noticed a distinct pattern in my circle of friends, mostly people in their late 30s, which is that men tend to sincerely express the desire not to be to their children what their fathers were to them. These men want to be something “new,” “different” from what they have experienced. The difference is not something they can precisely express, but they feel it as a necessity. This chapter casts light on “new fatherhood” and the middle class in contemporary Turkey. The two factors of our thematic—“fatherhood” and “the middle class”—signal the fact that this study contextualizes fatherhood in the dynamic that enfolds class and gender, as well as places fathers in their social and cultural background. I discuss the construction of fatherhood by taking local, regional, and global levels into consideration.

Although I am aware that neither middle-class fathers nor the secular fragment of middle-class fathers compose a strictly homogenous group, but they do constitute a distinct social phenomenon, with enough similarities in their lifestyles, expectations, and opinions to make the examination of a secular[2] version of middle-class fatherhood in Turkey valuable. This group plays a significant role in the society, since their values and practices are emulated by other classes.

The main questions guiding this chapter are as follows: Which values do middle-class fathers attach to fatherhood? How do they experience fatherhood? What global and local dynamics influence the construction of fatherhood? Can “new fatherhood” be a means of altering traditional forms of masculinity and changing male privilege in the gender order?

I argue that the central gesture of new fatherhood is to distance itself from the “old version” of fatherhood, in which the father’s involvement with his offspring was mainly limited to a breadwinner role in the family. The male children of these fathers, grown to be fathers themselves, are experiencing a *new hegemonic ideal* that opens up a space for the expressions and enactment of emotions and care. The newness of their fatherhood perceptions and experiences are articulated as part of three larger existential conditions: their detachment from their fathers, their disengagement from local traditional religious values in their construction of fatherhood, and their adhesion to westernized, global values and lifestyles. Although there is an emphasis on being different and a firm sense of the newness of their fatherhood practice, there are constant tensions between ideals and enactments for this segment of fathers, who often find themselves unable to achieve their ideals about masculinity, including fatherhood, due to local factors such as the lack of gender egalitarian policy implementations in the labor market and the burdens of child care. In other words, the conundrum of competing ideals and enactments has been shaped by intertwining global, local, and individual factors.

I start the discussion with a presentation of my methodology, followed by a literature review examining values, perceptions, and experiences surrounding the “new” fatherhood of middle-class men. Next, I examine the main aspects of new fatherhood among middle-class professionals. Then, I discuss how social values, economic dynamics, policy, and ideology intertwine with class positions in shaping their fatherhood perceptions and experiences. Lastly, I question whether this construction goes beyond a new hegemonic middle-class ideal of masculinity in Turkey.

Methodology

I rely on an ethnographic study, which I conducted in Ankara and Istanbul, Turkey, in 2013, in order to get a close-up understanding of fatherhood practices among middle-class men. The field study encompassed 15 in-depth interviews with middle-class fathers, whom I reached by using the snowball technique in the two cities I chose for the study, Ankara and İstanbul, which complement each other in many different ways and are especially important sites in the large picture of professional, middle-class lifestyles in Turkey.

I reached all the fathers through my key informants: an engineer in Istanbul and an academician in Ankara.[3] To be chosen, the fathers had to have at least one child under seven years old and they had to be college-educated. The professionals range from engineers to architects to academics who teach in different departments of universities. All of them are married to the biological mothers of their children. Only one of the mothers works full time as an academic, while three of them work part-time in their homes. The rest are stay-at-home mothers. Although some fathers in my group expressed more traditional gender values than others, none of them referred to religious beliefs and customs when they were talking about how they raise their children. From this fact I believe one can fairly infer that this group of fathers is composed of a more secular fragment of the Turkish middle class. Here, based on the 15 interviews, I do not aim to make totalizing conclusions about secular middle-class fatherhood. I would rather initiate a discussion of the main tendencies and dynamics of this “new” secular fragment of the Turkish middle class.

I used the semi-structured interview format, designed to reveal such themes as the meaning the fathers attached to fatherhood before and after becoming a father, their understanding of the links between manhood and fatherhood, their perception of their fatherhood experience, the comparison between their fathers’ fatherhood practices and their own, their everyday routines with their child(ren), and the activities they are involved in with their child(ren). The ethnographic aspect of my fieldwork with this cohort of professional men was very enriching. My respondents and I had certain similarities and differences that made our communication more interesting for both sides. Our similarities on education, class position, and lifestyles made it easier to establish a link between my respondents and myself. However, talking about masculinity and fatherhood was difficult for these men. Especially when they talked about their childhood injuries, the conversation gave way to long, difficult silences. But, at the same time, I felt that being a woman researcher was an advantage, since men are not really talkative about their emotions in Turkish society and are especially unwilling to share such intimate memories with other men. However, "ready to listen" women, such as their sisters, good friends, and wives, are exceptions to this rule. In the case of the interviews conducted by the research assistant—a young, single woman—the more didactic tone of the respondents about middle-aged adulthood, marriage, and parenthood were noteworthy.

All but one of the interviews were conducted in my subjects' workplaces, mostly during their lunch breaks, due to their lack of a more preferable time. I also had informal meetings with a group of respondents who were more willing to have less structured but more detailed conversation. We talked about their everyday lives and the difficulties they experience in juggling fatherhood and breadwinner roles. These informal meetings were very helpful in supplementing my understanding of their values and perceptions about fatherhood. I also made observations in the places respondents indicated during the interviews, such as the malls, stores, or recreational areas, in order to obtain a better idea of respondents' environments. For some of the respondents, certain blogs and websites were significant in their fatherhood experience, and these too I researched. My reflections on respondents' physical and virtual sites helped me to contextualize the daily routines and experiences the participants indicated during the interviews.

"New" Fatherhood: An Old Wine in a New Bottle?

In this chapter I use the term "new" fatherhood, which has already gained currency in the literature on contemporary family patterns, to refer to a kind of fathering that is explicitly perceived as different from that legitimated in traditional patriarchal hegemony. In my research, aspects of "new" fatherhood are examined with reference to the transformation of the values, perceptions, and experiences of men in the last decades. However, it should be noted that there is an ongoing discussion about the "newness" of "actual" fathering conduct. While some scholars argue that there is not only a cultural shift in expectations and perceptions surrounding fathering, but also a change in actual fathering conduct (Rotundo 1985; Pleck 1987, McMahon 1999), others (LaRossa 1988; Craig 2006; Wall and Arnold 2007) argue that there is a disconnect between the real conduct of fathers and the discursive transformations undergone by fathering, which have emphasized the father's greater involvement and commitment in child-rearing. Starting in the 1980s, there has been a celebration of the transformation of fatherhood in the social literature. Pleck (1987: 93) is one of the scholars who first celebrated the transformation of men from "distant breadwinner" to "new father"—a father who is a part of his children's lives, starting from birth, by participating in the day-to-day task of childcare. The social changes that bring about this new paternal closeness are the increase of women's participation in the labor market (Coltrane 1995; Ranson 2001), increasing awareness of the father’s role in the child’s well-being (Craig 2006), the change in gender roles from the hierarchical model to the egalitarian model (Wall and Arnold 2007), and the transformation and de-legitimation of hegemonic masculinity (Shows and Gerstel 2009). Moreover, fatherhood is also an experience that is shaped by gender roles embedded in the local, social, cultural, and policy dynamics of communities, nations, and regions (Johansson and Klinth 2008).

In the literature, the “newness” of middle-class fatherhood is more deeply examined than the fatherhood experience in other social classes. There are two main reasons for privileging the middle class. First, middle classes tend to be the first to embody “new” social ideals in their everyday lives on a large scale. The image of the nurturing, close father has been disseminated widely in popular cultural representations through movies, advertising, and magazines (Wall and Arnold, 2007; Sunderland 2006). Second, the overemphasis on investment in the professional career track in the middle class may produce more difficulties and tensions in the experience of the new fatherhood in this class, giving rise to more reports about the success or failure of this new set of parenting practices. There are hosts of scholars who portray the tensions that middle-class fathers experience as they are torn between involvement in child-rearing and paying the price in their advancement along their career tracks. Cooper (2000) shows that most of the fathers who work as information technology professionals in Silicon Valley pay a tremendous price to meet expectations both in the workplace and at home, developing certain strategies such as sacrificing all their personal interests and time while disguising the care they perform in the masculine work environment. Similarly, Ranson (2001) underlines the overt conflict between the good worker and the involved father. He adds that an eight-hour working day is regarded as an unchangeable fact, and all life—including parental involvement—is organized accordingly. Henwood and Procter (2003) show that fathers value their fatherhood and the qualities of the new model of fatherhood, such as presence, involvement, and approachability, but that they also experience tensions and difficulties in striving to enact the “new father” ideal.

The newness of fatherhood has also become a significant topic in studies of men and masculinity: its significance comes mostly from the question of whether it can contribute to a social transformation for a more gender-egalitarian society. Cultural and academic perspectives on “new fatherhood” have staged a debate about whether a more caring paternal figure would contribute to a gender-egalitarian transformation. In this regard, Lazar (2000: 396) argues that the new man or new father does not offer “the antithesis of conservative masculinity,” but “a hybridized form of masculinity that gets the best of both worlds with little significant cost to men.” He calls this “a politically correct (PC) masculinity, which is geared to appeal to modern women without sacrificing the benefits that accrue to conservative masculinity.”

Turkish literature on fatherhood mainly differs from international literature in two ways. First, research on fatherhood conducted in Turkey predominantly adopts a psychological approach: the main themes discussed are the impact of the father’s role on the child/adolescent’s well-being (Yılmazçetin 2003; Kuzucu 2011; Kocayörük 2012) and the impact of the dominant father on family relations (Bradburn 1963; Schönpflug 2001). Scholars of social psychology and sociology have indirectly approached the issue by examining the changing dynamics in the family, the value of child[4] and new practices of parenthood in Turkey (Kandiyoti 1985; Kıray 1985; Kağıtçıbaşı 2002; Sunar 2002; Aycan and Eskin 2005; Kağıtçıbaşı and Ataca 2005; Sunar and Fişek 2005; Kağıtçıbaşı 2012; Onur 2012), and the intergenerational instrumental and cultural transfer between generations (Kalaycıoğlu and Rittersberger-Tılıç 2000; Schönpflug 2001). Second, the focus in Turkish literature is on changing value of child for parents, not on parenthood experiences. This related, but not fatherhood-focused, body of literature emphasizes the transformation of the value of child for parents in the last decades in Turkey. Due to, on the one hand, the declining value of using children as unpaid or cheap labor in family businesses and farming, and, on the other hand, increases in retirement and healthcare safety nets provided by the state, there is a decrease in the utilitarian value and an increase in the emotional value attributed not only in the metropolitan areas, but also in rural Turkey. According to one well-known Model of Family Change (Kağıtçıbaşı 1990), this transformation expresses itself not only in changes in parenthood practices and the relationships between parents and children, but also in the intergenerational dependencies in the family.

In the 2000s, work on different forms of masculinity has obliquely referenced fatherhood in the works of Atay (2004), Onur and Koyuncu (2004), and Selek (2008). Sancar's (2009) book on masculinity, especially her chapter entitled "Fathers and Sons: Masculinity from One Generation to Another," goes further and examines the continuities and changes of masculinities across generations. She argues that although sons observe and experience the "pains" of hegemonic masculinities in their relations with their fathers and intra-family relations, they also model and reproduce similar practices of masculinities. The "coldness" of the father-son relation functions as an instrument for establishing male authority. Except for Sancar's (2009) pioneering chapter, however, work done on fatherhood and class in Turkey is very limited.

The theoretical framework of this chapter is mainly based on Connell and Messerschmidt's reformulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. In their formulation (2005:836), they argue that masculinities are "configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and therefore can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting." I believe Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005:849) rethinking of the concept of hegemonic masculinity shows the significance of three levels in the empirical analysis of the existing hegemonic masculinities, namely local, regional, and global masculinities. The local level is constructed in the face-to-face interaction of families, organizations, and immediate communities; the regional level is constructed at the level of the culture or the nation-state; and finally, the global level is constructed in transnational arenas such as world politics and transnational business and media. It is crucial to highlight the existing links between these three levels. Connell and Messerschmidt added that there is a continuous cycle in the operation of these levels. In other words, "global institutions pressure regional and local gender orders, while regional gender orders provide cultural materials adopted or reworked in global arenas and provide models of masculinity that may be important in local gender dynamics."

Individual, Local, and Global Sources of "New" Middle-Class Fatherhood

in Turkey

Middle-class fathers do not form a homogenous group in the sense that they come from different backgrounds, they hold diverse political views, and they harbor individual differences in their approaches and positions about fathering. Yet they still share certain common values, ideals, and sensitivities. As Sunar (2002), Sunar and Okman Fişek (2005), and Sancar (2009) argue, educated men from urban middle-class families marry wives having similar social backgrounds and values and attempt to form modern middle-class families based on more egalitarian relations and westernized lifestyle. Egalitarian gender relations which redefine gender roles and expectations are regarded, by those men who perceive themselves to be adhering to them, as the opposite of the traditional way of life; therefore they are seen as crucial elements of a westernized life style. To be traditional or western is a discursive construction that operates as a distinguishing mark in Turkish society. For this social cohort, religious conservatism connotes traditionalism and “backwardness.” Their “modern” lifestyle based on western ideals and values is consciously detached from religious conservatism.

The new fatherhood ideals such as presence, involvement, prioritizing children’s needs, approachability, and nurturing are constructed based on certain common experiences throughout the life span. Based on my research, I argue that men develop different ideals about fatherhood, starting from their childhood, as a very intimate thought in which questioning their own experiences and suffering from certain incidents having to do with their own fathers plays a major part. This ambient dissatisfaction is catalyzed by familiarizing themselves with certain ideas and values, which can reach them through other people’s experience or the media. The constantly recurring motif of disappointment is one of the reasons behind their yearning for a “new” practice of fatherhood. They want to be different from their fathers. Another aspect of this lifestyle that is equally important in this quest for new fatherhood in the Turkish context concerns the detachment of these fathers from traditional values in Turkish society, which they associate with the religious lifestyle. Their acquaintance with globalized values of family-oriented self-identification involving fatherhood as a middle-class norm are also the main source of the new fatherhood. In this chapter, I aim to understand how these values shape fatherhood discourses and practices of this specific segment of the middle class. It is fair to say, then, that the new fatherhood is a product of individual, local, and global dynamics which impinge on this secular segment of the middle class.

Individual Dynamics: “Never like my father!”

Starting from the decision-making process of being a parent, all the interviewees share the same feeling: they are different from their fathers and do not want to be like them. This is a very strong feeling, which seems to steer not only their ideals and experience about parenting. The main differences they indicate are “being a father as an individual choice,” “to have a child as the main motivation of marriage,” and “to be a hands-on, emotionally expressive and democratic father.” All these differences outlined by fathers are outcomes of the increasing focus on expressive individualism, which values self-fulfillment and liberation from traditional social norms.

These fathers do not develop ideals in synchrony with the birth of their children; instead they have shaped an idea of the ideal father starting from their childhood, particularly throughout their vehement relations with their fathers. All the fathers intensely value being a father, while at the same time being highly conscious of the difference between their experience of fatherhood and their fathers' ways of parenting, starting from the decision of timing. For most of the men, the birth of their children was an issue they cared about, took seriously, and planned for. For them, to be a father is not a normal stage of life that all men experience, it is instead a choice. Ayhan, who is a 40-year-old civil engineer with a 4-year-old daughter, reflected on the radical difference between the previous generation's experience and his own experience:

> Mine is not like my father's. My parents have become parents when they felt like it is time because of things like pressure from society, everyone else having a child. We did not do so, we really wanted it. We said let's have a baby. We made plans to decide when it will be the best to have a child.

This experience in their narratives sounds like a project that they consciously invest in. They are ready to "sacrifice labor, time, and money if it necessitates more effort than the natural way," says Ayhan, one of the three fathers who experienced in-vitro fertilization.

Expressive individualism based on self-fulfillment and liberation from traditional social norms operates as a factor which changes the meaning of marriage and fatherhood. Some marriages are contracted on the basis of both partners' wish to become parents. Most of my interviewees indicated that they decided to marry to become a father; otherwise they would have chosen to cohabitate with their partners. All the men had children in their late thirties,[5] and they express their awareness of the life-altering changes following fatherhood. The responsibilities attached to fatherhood may be one of the reasons that all seem to be anxious about it. One of the fathers, Gökhan, who is a financial advisor, shares his feelings:

> Even if you marry, you can continue the bachelor lifestyle or fun times with your wife until you have a child. Actually, I realized that it is not exactly so but still our life changed considerably. Our life gained a whole new dimension. We have to first and foremost think of and make arrangements for the kids before we can have fun or spare some time for ourselves.

The affective realm functions as a constitutive force in the development of new aspirations and ideals about fatherhood. The common theme behind these unmet expectations is the remoteness of their fathers. Although these men are in their late 30s and 40s, the hurt that stems from the distance they felt as children and adolescents still resonates. A common image was mentioned in many of the interviews: "a father who kisses his children only when they are sleeping." This sums up their negative image of the previous generation's enactment of fatherhood. Showing emotions is regarded as the entrance to an uncanny world of closeness and warmth that threatens the masculine authority. Onur (2012) indicates the frequency in contemporary Turkey of having a father who kisses his children only when they are sleeping by linking it to the form of masculinity that is socially accepted. This reticence and emotional distance play a crucial role in the construction of masculine authority for their fathers. However, the pain these men experience as sons because of this reticence and distance is crucial in the construction of their fatherhood ideals. Orhan, a 43-year-old finance expert who has two children, aged 7 and 11, explains how he developed his ideas about being “something different than his grandparents and father”:

> In the end, father was the one who sustained the outside life. He was a figure who took care of outside business and took all of us under his wing. Also a disciplinary figure …. What I saw from my dad and his dad is not to show your feelings, whether it be crying or happiness. Dad is someone immune from all this …. When something about the family was decided, it was dictated and conveyed to us by our parents, at least in my family.… I decided that I will share such things with my kids. Be more democratic …. I had a dream or thoughts to be such a dad, more than just what I saw from my dad, taking my family under my wing, also sharing my feelings, asking others for their opinions. This is how I wanted to be ever since my teens, early twenties ….

It is not only emotional distance or authoritarian attitudes that soured this generation of males on the patriarchal father figure, but also abusive behavior. Wounds opened by the father’s violence toward the mother and/or children may negatively shape the way certain men identify themselves as men and their experience of masculinity. The most traumatic experience in a father-son relationship among interviewees was expressed by Engin, a 44-year-old textile engineer with a 3-year-old child. Here is his story:

> Now I don’t have any connection with my father, but he is still trying to act close to me. But I know that I don’t want his closeness …. I am telling why I did not want my dad, because he used to beat my mother. And I hated this. I could not help my mom or prevent it from happening. I was 11 years old when I stood in front of him and said, “OK, that is enough.” Because of this, I went to a psychiatrist for two years. I got married late because of this as well. I was scared of marriage. It took me two and half years to realize this—to realize that I existed in that house while my mom was being beaten and to realize my feeling of terror. I could not stand it. My mom forgave my dad. I still can’t forgive him or myself.

Most men with experiences like Engin’s will admit that although they do not want to be like their fathers, they do not know how to be different, which is one of the main difficulties. Sancar (2009: 125) suggests that middle-class educated men having an urban background often have conflicted, cold, and distant relations with their fathers. She adds that young men may experience a crisis of manhood values, since they do not want to accept and internalize the values transmitted from their fathers. Since their fathers are not their role models, their wives undertake the role of guiding them in the realm of emotions. In the words of Selim, a 41-year-old academician at a state university who has a 4-year-old daughter:

> The way I understand marriage and family is totally different from my father’s. But I did not have anyone who could teach me how to be a good husband and dad; my wife pushes me to learn.

Fathers learn from their wives how to express feelings, care, and love. As Engin points out, to have an emotionally intimate couple relation is a very important condition for being able to be a good father. Engin wants not only to be a good father, different from his own, but also a good husband who shares his emotions and all domestic chores with his wife. Yet because of long working hours, there is no way he can be both an ideal spouse and an ideal father, as Engin came to realize:

> I had a similar relationship with my daughter as my father did with me. The pedagogue asked me, “What do you do when you get home?” Because of chore sharing, I used to run to the dishwasher before my daughter. Then I did laundry if there was any. Then picking up the table, my wife leaves salads to me. Once these were finished, it was my daughter’s turn. But she did not want me. She wouldn’t even let me in her room.… I absolutely did not want this to

> happen but didn't know how to do it. The pedagogue said, "Your daughter is a child who is fully aware of things around her. She is aware that she is at the bottom of your list and she is reacting to it. From now on, when you get home, wash your hands first and your daughter should be next."

Men argue that they do their best by "helping" their wives at home, sharing chores, and giving their spouses an opportunity to have a break on weekends by taking the responsibility of the child(ren). It is noteworthy to see the rhetoric of "help" which goes hand in hand with the emphasis of shared responsibilities between the couple. Structural constraints, such as a masculine work culture based on long working hours, out-of-town business meetings, and demanding working conditions, are individualized by fathers. This individualization results in the development of individual solutions.

Local Dynamics: "Enduring Struggle for our Values"

The absence of religious references when they talked about their parenting styles or fatherhood experiences is the second source of "new" fatherhood, which is embedded in local dynamics. According to a World Values Survey conducted in Turkey in 2012, the 45 percent of men who have children state that they consider religious faith an especially important quality that children can be encouraged to learn at home. The fathers I interviewed disagree. These men do not intend to bow to traditional practices, which they associate with religion. They believe that religious traditional values and, more important, policies developed based on these values pose a threat to these ideals and their lifestyles. Most of them express their anxiety about the future of their children by referring to the conservative policies of the governing party (the Justice and Development party). The rising emphasis on religion and moral values in social institutions, such as kindergartens and schools, through the education policies implemented over the last decade has increased the anxiety these men feel. In their narratives, the struggle of values between pious and secular groups is noteworthy. Defense of these values is a significant part of the fight against rising conservatism in all social domains and institutions. In Engin's words:

> My daughter had a graduation ceremony from kindergarten. She was part of a show and they asked fathers how they would like their kid to be. All those who were asked the question on the microphone said, "I would like my child to have morality, behave well." Nobody said, "I would like him or her to be open-minded, have a clear conscience, be a scholar." Kids are nowadays loved ideologically. They teach praying in kindergarten, the prophet's life, religion seeps through all the way into the readings, puzzles …. Kids are loved because they can become such Islamists.

For most of the fathers, to find the "appropriate school," guided by secular and universal values, is one of the main and challenging parenthood responsibilities. "To provoke a child's curiosity" is regarded as one of the goals most appreciated in a school. Ayhan, an engineer, indicates that he is anxious about what the future holds for his son. He thinks that he and his wife do their best to encourage their four-year-old son's curiosity by doing many activities and playing with him at home and sending him to an expensive, high-quality kindergarten. He expresses his wish to send his son to the best college. However, he believes that his son's curiosity, creativity, and ability to question do not fit in with "the changing reality of Turkish society."

Another local dynamic reflected in Turkey’s social policies is the common understanding of women as the main caregivers. As Buğra (2012:27) argues, state policies posit the family as the primary unit of care by reinforcing the position of women as care providers. This fact, along with the inadequacy of state childcare and services for early childhood development and the lack of good-quality childcare services in Turkey, leads to the existence of non-institutionalized childcare services that are very low in quality. Usually these services are supplied by middle-aged, uneducated women from the country.[6] Most of the men believe that children should not be left in a caretaker’s charge, since they believe that caretakers are not sufficiently educated to encourage and further the development of their children. In addition, some of them argue that they do not or cannot trust caretakers, because for them their babies are invaluable. The traditional support and labor provided by grandmothers that was used by past generations are also not to the taste of this class, since the reliability and quality of this support are questioned.

The common solution is the wife’s withdrawal from the labor market. Only one of these men’s wives was working (as an academic at a state university), although all of them have professional training, like their husbands. They were also civil, electrical, and industrial engineers, executive managers who worked at one time in the banking sector, accountants, or academics. After having their babies, they left their jobs in order to provide “the best care for the children.” Some of them also work at home. Since a man’s work and breadwinner role is accepted as unchangeable, the price of the best care for the children is paid by the sacrifice of the mother’s career. Men are aware of this tremendous sacrifice, but accept it as a necessary family strategy. Men adjust to these conservative local policies at the expense of their wives’ professional lives.

Global Dynamics: We are World Citizens!

Globalized values of family-oriented self-identification and family-involved fathering as a middle-class norm are both present in the individual and local dynamics affecting the project of constructing “new” fatherhood. The global dissemination of new ideas and values about parenthood have been locally interpreted and adopted by middle-class fathers. The convergence of values and lifestyles in the middle classes is the main reason behind the emergence of similarities that span many different societies.

Increasing concern with the self is a globally significant dimension of middle-class life. Rising fixation with the self not only valorizes but also pathologizes the self (Wright 2008). All the experiences of these middle-class fathers are valorized and reinterpreted using a therapeutic language. To rely on expert knowledge and therapeutic culture emphasizing emotional expressiveness and help-seeking is another part of this global cultural convergence (Wright 2008). Most of these fathers receive psychological and/or pedagogical guidance from experts whenever they feel it is necessary. Individual or couples therapy is a very common experience to “improve” themselves and their relations. Moreover, fatherhood is regarded as a process to be learned, and expert knowledge is welcomed in this learning process.

Another source of expert knowledge used in their everyday lives can be traced to the dissemination of guidebooks on parenting in English. Different parenting suggestions from developmental psychologists and pediatricians are closely followed by middle-class families. Not only are there now best-selling books translated from English and classes based on this guidance during the pregnancy period, but blogs and websites have also sprung up to give diverse suggestions about how to be “good” parents. Gökhan’s response to one of our questions about this illustrates the significance of these sources in their everyday lives:

> I read about something called natural parenting[7] when my child was young. I read that it was correct for children to sleep between their parents until they are two years old. And I felt this to be appropriate. My son slept with us until he was two. Now my daughter will do the same for another year.

Local dynamics such as rising conservatism in the social and political realms, resulting in a feeling of being out of place, affect these parents in two ways: approaching their families and close circle of friends as a refuge in a “hostile” society and raising “world citizens” as a future strategy. The increasing polarization between religious and secular lifestyles is inducing a withdrawal from society, and in this process the nuclear family becomes a refuge. As a result, the central role of the family has increased for these individuals. These middle-class families spend time only with their close circle of friends, who all share similar values and ideas. The emphasis on “common language” based on values and perspectives has been underlined by most of the fathers.

Most of them indicate that they are raising well-rounded “world citizens” who can survive in any part of the world. This is possible because of the investment made in children’s education and overall personal development, which is an important defining component of the middle class. The best college education, which provides a second, sometimes third language, violin and piano lessons, ballet classes, and sports are regarded as the symbolic capital that can open the door to cosmopolitanism. Koray, a 39-year-old manager with two kids, aged 6 and 9, says:

> My child should be able to live not just here but everywhere. I understand fatherhood to be about providing for them everything to reach this goal. Be it education, culture, travelling, having fun…the kid should travel the world, see and have a broader vision. Then they can realize what is missing or wrong here, question things. They come with us everywhere. We try to go abroad for all vacations so that our kids can experience things for themselves.

These men have high attachment to their professional identities. Moreover, work is the central dimension of their masculinity. Middle-class professionals in Turkey accept not only longer working hours, expanding the eight-hour-day, but also business travel and dinners as “part of the work package.” They do not question the demanding work conditions because breadwinning remains an integral component of their identity and is not open to renegotiation. One of my questions was about the changes they experience in their work lives after becoming fathers. Surprisingly, all my interviewees’ answers were the same. In the first year after the baby’s birth, the frequency of sleepless nights caused them certain problems, such as low concentration, headaches, and fatigue; however, except for this temporary problem, they indicated that they did not experience any change in their work lives. The workplace is regarded as the central and “untouchable” dimension of their masculinity. Not to bring any personal and/or family problem to work is an internalized value for them.

Not only the practices, but just as important, the discourse accompanying these practices have been altered. As Cooper (2000) argues, "market language," which emphasizes quality, efficiency, and strategic thinking, is used by middle-class fathers when they talk about their way of parenting. Turkish middle-class fathers typically use the same language: they are more concerned about "spending quality time with their children instead of long idle hours," being an "efficient father," and having a "strategic approach to the immediate parenting troubles."

After working long days, fathers mainly spend time playing with their children. This is the main father-child activity realized in the private sphere. Middle-class professionals do not take care of more routine tasks of daily parenting, but engage in public activities. Being a good father is chiefly about being an economically capable male subject who shares play, leisure, and consumer activities with his child in the public sphere, such as going to shopping malls. Even the urban space is organized to reflect the rising significance of shopping malls and child-friendly franchised restaurants as new sites of sociability and leisure. As in other countries, the parenthood experience has been widely commoditized for the middle class in the last decades in Turkey.

Conclusion

There is a new hegemonic ideal currently under construction, based on a shift away from the archetypal remote father, whose sole fathering function is providing economically for the family, and towards the caregiving, emotionally attached father. I believe the secular fragment of the middle-class fatherhood experience cannot be understood without first being "sensitive" to their perceptions, emotional injuries, and ideals of masculinities. These ideals, in turn, are continually being torn between their incomplete enactments and their frequent frustrations, leaving in their wake the multiple disappointments of unrealized ideals.

Newness is the key to how this ideal has been perceived and enacted, since it rests on a threefold rejection of the old and an embrace of the new at the individual, local, and global levels: the experience of detachment from their fathers that goes back to childhood; the rejection of local traditional religious values; and a corresponding attachment to westernized, global values and lifestyles. Fathers' feelings, perceptions, values, discourses, and practices related to fatherhood have been embedded in the links between these three levels of dynamics. For instance, this secular segment of the middle class focuses on family life as a pattern adopted through global middle-class lifestyles. Yet this focus is strengthened through the feeling of being "out-of-place" as an opposing minority group in the social and political atmosphere of Turkey. These three intertwining levels operate as battlegrounds in which both hegemonic and alternative masculinities are rooted. As Connell (2005:1804) argues, local gender orders and the gender order of the global arena are interconnected and interactive. Connected local and global gender orders operate discursively, ideologically, and politically in the legitimation for gender inequities. In spite of having ideals of being "new," fathers are facing individual and structural challenges throughout these three levels. The very economic conditions that make their lifestyles possible also contradict their desires: demanding work conditions eat up the time that they would like to have to realize their ideals. Most of these fathers are positioned as secondary parents whose parental responsibilities are bent to the necessities of their employment responsibilities. They maintain a strong emphasis on breadwinning and the hard worker role as an unquestionable dimension of masculinity. Although they believe in the credo of gender equality, the professional work experiences of their wives are almost invariably sacrificed for the well-being of the family when children are born. They prioritize being an able male subject who is a hard-working professional and a cosmopolitan consumer over their caregiving responsibilities.

In conclusion, due to the intertwining individual, local, and global factors, such as the lack of gender egalitarian developments at the policy implementations on the labor market and childcare and the ideological discourse on parenting and gender roles, the transformation of masculinity based on the "new" involved father is limited, since it has not been a corresponding transformation in the structural barriers that thrust the major portion of child-rearing onto women. This specific form of hegemonic masculinity is constructed in the enduring navigation between enactments and ideals of manhood as well as fatherhood.

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[2] In this chapter, when I refer to “middle-class father” I am referring to the secularly identified ones.

[3] Some of the interviews were conducted by a research assistant, Aylin Demir, in Istanbul. I am grateful to Aylin’s insightful fieldwork. After reviewing the interview transcripts, Aylin and I intensively discussed the meanings we attached to the answers and some of the quotations I have chosen.

[4] “Value of child” refers to “the sum total of psychological, social and economic costs and benefits” that parents attribute to their children (Kağıtçıbaşı and Ataca 2005: 318).

[5] Although there is no statistical data on the average age at which men become fathers, the average first marriage age was 26.7 for men in 2012 (TÜİK, http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=13662 retrieved September 2013).

[6] According to a Turkish Family Study conducted in 2011, childcare is provided by mothers in 87.5 percent of urban families. The rate of families who receive childcare from caretakers is 1.5 percent, while 2.6 percent in the same group receive childcare from kindergartens.

[7] He mentions Bill and Martha Sears’ approach of “attachment parenting.”

Chapter 6
The Janissaries and Their Bedfellows: Masculinity and Male Friendship in Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Istanbul

Serkan Delice

This chapter presents a preliminary discussion of how male same-sex intimacies were understood and represented by the Ottoman state in the eighteenth century. The concept of the state is not a coherent and static natural object that the historians must focus their gaze on in order to discern a certain practice. Drawing on Paul Veyne’s insightful reconsideration of Michel Foucault as the “completely positivist historian” of practice, relation, and exceptionality, I see the state itself as a mundane “objectivization” or a correlation of a certain determined practice that gives rise to its own corresponding object. This does not mean that the state does not regulate and dominate the lives of its subjects through its coercive institutions and police violence. Instead, it means that the state should not be mystified, as in most cases it is the relational, heterogeneous and exceptional character of elaborate forms of social practice that gives rise to the “objectivization” that is called the state. My real concern, in other words, is with the multiple ways in which Ottoman men experienced their relationships and enacted their masculinities.

Rather than offering an all-encompassing historicization of the eighteenth century, therefore, I will focus on the transgressive practices of a group of lower-class, beardless young bath attendants/shampooers, some of whom were affiliated with the Janissary Corps. The presence of these beardless young shampooers (*şâb-ı emred dellakları*) as prostitutes in the *hammams* of Istanbul was a persistent problem for the Ottoman state during the period under study. In a useful article on prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul, in which the emphasis is on female prostitution, Marinos Sariyannis has concluded that the networks and functions of male prostitution were similar to those of female prostitution. Both were seen, albeit with a certain uneasiness, as immoral, but also as unavoidable and commonplace fields of activity: “male prostitution clearly appears to be tolerated and accepted, inasmuch as it was functioning under certain ‘institutional’ rules.”[1] In this chapter, I will use the term “prostitution,” whilst noting the absence, in both archival and narrative sources concerning men, of the following rather derogatory terms that were used frequently to characterize cases of female prostitution: *fuhş* (prostitution, immorality, indecency), *fuhşiyat* (obscenities, immoralities, and prostitution), *fâhişe* (prostitute), *fevâhiş* (pl. of *fâhişe*, but also gross errors, shameful things), *kahbe* (whore, harlot, prostitute, but also deceitful and perfidious), and *orospu* (prostitute, whore, harlot).[2] The absence of these terms does not necessarily mean that the state was more tolerant or oblivious of male prostitutes. As will be shown later, the names of the boys who were found having consensual or coerced sex with other men were recorded by the *subaşı* (police superintendent), who, in one case, used the word *hîz* (catamite) to identify them. Whether the word *hîz* was used to refer generically to all male prostitutes or exclusively to a sexually passive or receiving pubescent boy who was raped or found prostituting himself is not clear. Furthermore, the use of the word in the two sections of an eighteenth-century Ottoman treatise, *Risâle-i Garîbe*, provides evidence neither of professional sex work nor of sexual passivity. The anonymous author of this treatise put a curse on those *hîz* who were "playing with their damned crotches before their lovers" (*yârân karşusında kuryacağın karışduran hîzler*)[3] and on those *hîz* who were "hanging out in several places and offering friendly attentions to countless other men when they were in companionship with a lover" (*bir yârân ile ayakdaş olup gider iken kırk yerde ilişüp elli âdeme aşinâlık eden hîzler*).[4] The Redhouse translation of the word *hîz* as "catamite" should, therefore, be taken with a grain of salt. The historical transformation of the word "catamite," a corrupt form of "Ganymede" referring to a young male receptor in anal intercourse[5] or "a boy hired to be abused contrary to nature,"[6] is outside the scope of this chapter. The key point here is that the use, in the Ottoman context, of different vocabularies with a comparatively limited range of ambiguous words to refer to male prostitutes implies that male and female "prostitution" were two separate yet related domains.

This chapter aims to open up a space for queer others of the Ottoman past whose voices, I believe, have been lost in the midst of a series of broad diachronic divisions taken for granted by the long-range, constructionist histories of sexuality in the Ottoman and Arab-Islamic Middle East:[7] the divisions between pre-modern sexual acts and modern sexual identities; between masculine, bearded adult men and effeminate, beardless boys; between the dominant male penetrator and the subordinate "female" penetrated; and between spiritual love and sexual lust. Elsewhere I have shown how such divisions naturalize what, in most cases, were either regulatory normative ideals imposed by medical, legal, and religious texts or representational strategies by which social commentators and writers of conduct literature reinforced an image for themselves of a self-restrained, moral manliness or simply literary tropes that were used to entertain an elite group of literate urban men of learning.[8] Let it suffice to say that the entire demarcation of sexual acts from sexual identities is simply wrong. David Halperin's argument that nothing in Foucault's work "prohibits us from inquiring into the connections that premodern people may have made between specific sexual acts and the particular ethos, or sexual style, or sexual subjectivity, or those who performed them"[9] is exceptionally useful here. In this chapter, therefore, I will not get into the tired nominalist debate of whether the category of homosexuality can be applied to the pre-modern Middle East or not. I will approach male homosexuality as a dissident and productive practice, relation, and way of life in order to place it in a wider social, cultural, and economic context of masculinity, violence, and male friendship.

* * *

The following presents a discussion of a series of documents that were located by the writer under the *Maliyeden Müdevver* classification of the Prime Ministry's Ottoman Archives in Istanbul. This classification includes registers mostly of the names, salaries, functions, and assignments of military units, provisioning and construction of military establishments, records of the taxes levied by the Ottoman government, and accounts of government expenditures.[10] The majority of Istanbul *hammams* were “revenue-generating components of charitable endowments” and they were “rented out to private persons who operated them independently as businesses for profit,”[11] which must be the reason why these apparently irrelevant documents are located under the *Maliyeden Müdevver* classification. Referring to Istanbul proper, the following, dated 29 August 1709, is the first of the four consecutive texts in the same classification, in which the same content, though with slight variations, is reiterated for different sections of the capital, namely, Eyüp, Galata, and Üsküdar:

> The said five managers of baths located in the city of Istanbul have each declared in front of the Sharia court “we have all expelled from our baths the beardless shampooers whose expulsion has been ordered by an imperial edict and we have unanimously agreed that from this day on we would not let any of these beardless shampooers work in our baths and we have all acted as surety for each other in this matter” and in order to keep the record of this on the twentieth day of the month of Jumada’l-Akhira of the year 1121 a court document was given to this effect, signed and sealed by Ebu İshak İsmail Efendi, the kadı of Istanbul, and as an imperial decree was issued to the effect that it be kept and recorded in the head office of accounting, it was accordingly recorded and kept on the 22 of J[umada’l-Akhira] of the year 1121.[12]

Each text provides a confirmation from the owners/managers of the baths based in a specific district that they all dismissed from their baths the young, beardless shampooers (*şâb-ı emred dellakları*) whose eviction had been ordered by an imperial edict,[13] and that they collectively agreed and stood surety for each other that from that day on they would not allow any of these young, beardless shampooers to work in their baths. Overall, the owners of 58 baths in Istanbul proper, 8 baths in Eyüp, 25 baths in Galata, and 8 baths in Üsküdar confirmed their commitment to the stipulations of the court document. This is a relatively small number compared to the total of 408 baths in Istanbul given by Derviş İsmail in 1686, 23 years before the issuance of these documents.

What is striking at the end of the text for Eyüp is not only the use of the word *makule*, which means “kind” or “sort” but which may also be working, in this context, to refer to the young, beardless shampooers as a particularly “contemptible”[14] group, but also the specific order that these young, beardless shampooers should be “dealt with” as soon as possible: “This sort of (contemptible) beardless shampooers should not be employed in the baths and they should be dealt with if they can be located.”[15]

The Galata document, on the other hand, uses the somewhat generic condemnatory category *fısk u fücûr*, which provides the reader with further evidence as to why the state commanded the eviction and chastisement of young, beardless shampooers. In his analysis of seventeenth-century Ottoman social vocabulary, Marinos Sariyannis places the compound term *fısk u fücûr* under the category of “‘mob’ and rebellion,” arguing that these words did not only connote a type of marginalized behavior at odds with moral and social standards; they also implied openly antinomian behavior: “Among them were *ehl-i fısk*, ‘people of immorality, sinners,’ whose second word can be replaced by or combined with *fücûr*, ‘lewdness, dissoluteness; wickedness, unbelief’ to make *fısk u fücûr*, meaning ‘indulgence of the fleshly lusts, debauchery.’”[16] The Galata document also states that the owners of the baths had expelled, and would not again employ young, beardless shampooers and attendants; they were aware of the imperial decree that all the servants of the baths should be solid, reliable, and trustworthy persons and there should be no impious, depraved, or dissolute man among them. All the bath servants now had people standing surety for them so that those working in the baths would be decent and devout people.[17]

The extent to which all these systematic and stringent beginning-of-the-eighteenth-century measures to stop young, beardless shampooers from working in the baths were actually successful is highly dubious. A confirmation response from the Grand Vizier to a previous imperial decree issued by Sultan Selim III in 1790 shows that the "problem" was persistent. The Ottoman authorities were tackling the problem together with a series of other mundane social issues:

> … the taverns must be shut; the brothels must be investigated and reported and the people associated with them should be chastised; *and amongst the baths, those suspected of [accommodating] shameful acts should be investigated and the insides of those places should be rendered free from that sort of [contemptible] infamous beardless boys;* and the issue of the expulsion of female prostitutes should be taken care of with due care and attention, as is required … And to command belongs unto him to whom all commanding belongs.[18]

This late-eighteenth-century document uses two specific words, namely *fazahat*, which means "shameful act" or "ignominy" and refers to what was allegedly (*mazanne-i)* happening in certain baths, and *müftazih*, which means "exposed," "disgraced for evil deeds," and "infamous" and refers to the *emred*, that is to say, the beardless boys working in those "shady" baths. There is no specific reference in this document to the age of beardless boys, whereas the early eighteenth-century documents investigated above used the word şab, meaning "young, youthful," with the Üsküdar document using the word *taze*, meaning "young without facial hair," to characterize beardless shampooers. Neither is there a particular indication of what these so-called infamous beardless boys were actually doing in the baths, whereas the above-mentioned documents identified them as shampooers, with the Galata document referring even more specifically to attendants (*natır*) alongside shampooers.

This lack of specificity may be the product of generic brevity. However, the fact that the expulsion of disreputable beardless boys was referred to almost in a routine fashion along with a series of other long-standing, if not chronic, Ottoman social problems, including alcohol consumption, taverns, brothels, and prostitution, especially in the Galata district, may also be taken to imply that the presence of these so-called dishonorable beardless boys in the baths, where shameful acts took place, was now a familiar issue. As such, it was perceived as one element in a wider social and cultural context of corruption and debauchery. It is also evident that in each of its declarations, the Ottoman state did identify these beardless youths working in the baths as a specific sort, placing them within the same overarching framework as a series of other subversive acts of depravity.

The point here is not to say that there was something extraordinary in the way in which the state identified and pursued these infamous beardless shampooers. It is not that there was a shift, break, or rupture in state discourses and policing of sexual morality. This was by no means a discursive explosion, which, from the eighteenth century onwards, led to the classification, medicalization, and legalization of sexuality in the West. Revisiting Veyne's reading of Foucault's conceptualization of the state as a correlation of a certain determined practice that gives rise to its own corresponding object, I argue that it was the dissident, disruptive, and persistent relationality of the practices of these infamous beardless shampooers that led to the specific ways in which the state represented them—dissident in the sense of generating unease, relational in the sense of forming “new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force.” Both definitions stem from Foucault’s exploration of identity as a “procedure to have relations, social and sexual”[19] and of homosexuality as a “mode of life” and a means of reopening “affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the ‘slantwise’ position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light.”[20]

The description of beardless shampooers in Ottoman state documents as “dissolute,” “lewd,” and “contemptible” “infamous” types as opposed to the “reliable,” “trustworthy,” “righteous,” and “devout” points towards the emergence of a “sexual” subculture “manifested but not exclusively defined by sexual acts.”[21] Such representation also indicates a tacit knowledge of, and intense hostility towards, “that sort of infamous beardless youth” appearing as a dissident type, coterie, and identity. But who were these beardless shampooers, where had they come from, with whom were they forming alliances, and under what conditions?

In his *Istanbul Encyclopaedia*, Reşat Ekrem Koçu points out that a large majority of the shampooers working in the baths of Istanbul had consisted of Albanian men until the 1730 Patrona Halil Revolt that replaced Sultan Ahmed III with Sultan Mahmud I and ended the Tulip Period. Post-war economic grievances were the chief reason behind the 1703 and 1730 rebellions in Istanbul, potentially a highly “inflammatory” city where a large number of Janissaries were concentrated: “One frequently expressed grievance was the government’s inability to pay Janissary salaries on time. But other grievances had to do with post-war food shortages and the levying of extraordinary war taxes that amounted to 360,000 *akçe* in 1730.”[22] Following the rebellion and the restoration of order, Patrona Halil and his comrades were executed; coffee houses[23] and public baths where Albanians congregated were closed down. “All the Albanian, Laz and non-Muslim bandits and rebels who gathered in public baths, *hans* (guesthouses) and bachelors’ rooms”[24] were banished from the city. Furthermore, the employment of Albanian men as shampooers and attendants was strictly forbidden by the state. From that time on, only Turkish boys from Anatolia and Muslim and Christian boys from Istanbul (*şehri uşak*) were to be employed in the baths. Reşat Ekrem Koçu published a list of the twelve shampooers working in the Kılıç Ali Paşa Bathhouse in Tophane, Istanbul, which he had found attached to an imperial decree by Mahmud I dated 1734. This document provides the reader with detailed information about the shampooers’ physical characteristics, ethnic backgrounds, and occupational profiles:

> Hüseyin bin İbrahim, 17. Artillery Company (*topçu bölüğü*), dark beard, one-eyed, from Vlore, Albania
> İsa bin İbrahim, 24. Artillery Company, brown moustache, from Vlore, Albania
> İbrahim bin İsmail, has recently shaved (*henüz traş*), blonde, from Vlore, Albania
> Hüseyin bin Ali, youth without facial hair (*taze oğlan*), from Vlore, Albania
> Salih bin Mehmed, dark moustache, one-eyed, from Vlore, Albania
> Hasan bin Murad, 17. Artillery Company, dark moustache, from Vlore, Albania
> Süleyman bin Ali, 59. Artillery Company, thin dark moustache, from Vlore, Albania
> Osman bin İbrahim, 69. Artillery Company, dark beard, from Vlore, Albania
> Yusuf bin Osman, youth without facial hair, from Vlore, Albania

Ali bin Osman, youth without facial hair, from Vlore, Albania
Seyyid bin Ali, old, from Tophane (Istanbul)
İbrahim bin Süleyman, dark, youth without facial hair, from Akşehir[25]

Thus, by the year 1734, twelve shampooers were working in this bath: ten from Albania, one from Istanbul, and one from Central Anatolia. Five shampooers also had positions in the imperial Artillery Corps.

An Ottoman bathhouse register from the year 1752, recently published and analyzed by Nina Ergin, shows that a large majority of male employees of Tahtakale Bath in *intra muros* Istanbul were from the Kastamonu province in the Black Sea region, although there was still a significant presence of those from the cities of Vlore and Pogradec in Albania. Ergin points out that the reason why the Ottoman administration felt so threatened by the Albanian bathhouse employees was that the latter “by dint of their profession came into contact with a large number of people,” and thus were able to exchange political ideas and opinions with their customers, which turned bathhouses into potential hotbeds of revolt and dissention: “Even though access to bathhouses was a religious necessity for the canonical full-body ablution (*abdest*), the authorities considered this institution so dangerous to the social order that they deserved to be treated in the same manner as taverns and brothels.”[26]

In the 1709 documents analyzed in this chapter, there is no mention of the ethnic backgrounds of the infamous beardless shampooers. This implies that in 1709, the Albanian origins of the beardless shampooers were taken for granted by the Ottoman administration and the main problem was not that they were of Albanian extraction, but that they were carrying out morally dubious acts. The use, in the 1709 Üsküdar reiteration, of the word “*tâze*” to refer to the beardless shampooers *without facial hair* is an indication in this direction. The detailed description, in the 1734 and 1752 registers, of physical distinctions with respect to the existence and quality of facial hair, such as “old,” “elderly,” “mature,” “youth without facial hair,” “youth with slight facial hair,” “who has recently shaved,” and “young boy,”[27] demonstrates two things: first, despite the aforementioned 1709 documents, in which the owners of the baths had confirmed that they would not employ beardless shampooers in their baths, some large bathhouses, including Tahtakale and Kılıç Ali Paşa, were still employing “youths without facial hair.” One may argue that the categories of “young, beardless shampooers” in the 1709 documents and “infamous beardless boys” in the 1790 document were negatively loaded categories referring to a particularly dissident group, whereas the term “*tâze*,” meaning “youth without facial hair,” was a broader and more neutral term used by the state for classification purposes.

Second, different gendered life-cycle stages were identified and documented by the Ottoman state. This corroborates Leslie Peirce’s point that the transition of boys into adult masculinity was considered a problematic process. It was important to be able to determine “when the physically maturing youth was no longer a potential disruptive stimulus to adult males in his vicinity and could therefore be safely admitted into their company.”[28] Nina Ergin’s brief characterization of young, beardless shampooers as a “third gender”[29] relies on Irvin C. Schick’s argument that young boys without facial hair were reflected in Ottoman divan poetry as a third gender alongside adult men and adult women.[30] It is my contention that the entire application of the category of “third gender” to the Ottoman context is problematic, as it assumes a binary gender system. It is worth revisiting the useful point made by Judith Butler that the alternative to the binary system of gender should not necessarily be a quantification or multiplication of genders: “a restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption.”[31] In the second section of this chapter, I will show how in the lives of the beardless shampooers, gender served as a disruptive apparatus that deconstructed and denaturalized notions of masculine and feminine.

* * *

This section presents an analysis of *Dellaknâme-i Dilküşâ* or “The Book of Shampooers that Opens the Soul,” an Ottoman treatise dated 1686, which was written by Derviş İsmail, the Istanbul-based *kethüda-yı hamamcıyân* or Chief of the Bath Keepers. The first reference to this narrative was made by the twentieth-century historian Reşat Ekrem Koçu, who, in his *Istanbul Encyclopaedia*, provided a short history of the circulation of this text.[32] The version I will be analyzing here is a copy of the manuscript, which was bought in an auction in Istanbul in 1985 by Murat Bardakçı, who transcribed the text into modern Turkish and published it in 1993.[33] Bardakçı confirms that both the manuscript he bought in 1985 and the transcription he provided in 1993 are complete and unabridged.[34] Several large sections of the manuscript reproduced in the authoritative *Istanbul Encyclopaedia* by Koçu and the transcription of the manuscript provided by Bardakçı completely correspond with each other.[35]

The treatise describes the lives and relationships of the eleven late-seventeenth-century Istanbul-based shampooers who worked in the *hammams*, not only as shampooers, but also as prostitutes serving the needs of their male customers. Derviş İsmail recounts that by the year 1686, there were overall 408 baths and 2,321 shampooers in Istanbul (including Istanbul proper, Eyüp, Galata, and Üsküdar). Derviş İsmail decided to compose this “heart-warming” treatise because Yemenici Bâlî, one of the eleven shampooers/prostitutes and, subsequently, the servant and “bedfellow” (*döşek yoldaşı*) of Derviş İsmail himself, asked the latter to write a biographical memoir so that his name and fame would live on forever. The treatise provides detailed information about how each shampooer began working as a shampooer and sex worker in a bath, the *hammam* in which he worked, and the prices he and the owner of the bath charged for different sexual acts, consisting, mainly but not exclusively, of receptive and insertive anal sex between men.

Yemenici[36] Bâlî was “a gorgeous fifteen-year-old boy in the service of the Janissaries (*civelek acemisi*) in the 59. Regiment of the Janissary Corps.” The term *civelek*, from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, referred to a “Janissary candidate.” As the traditional *devşirme* (collecting) method declined and the Muslim-born city folk and “rabbles” gained access to the Janissary Corps, the high number of applications exceeded the actual demand. Therefore, the young “applicants” were registered on a waiting list. They were not paid an *ulûfe* (a sum paid to a soldier), but they were allowed to stay and eat in the Janissary barracks. Young and inexperienced novices on the verge of puberty (*mürâhik*), they took shelter under the protection of a powerful fellow Janissary, stayed with him and served his needs until they grew up and were able to "twist the moustache." Reşat Ekrem uses the phrase *ayak takımı*, which means the rabble, great unwashed, or riffraff, to point to the lower-class background of these Janissary candidates. When they went out together, Koçu recounts, the senior "protector" Janissary, would put a tasselled veil over the face of his *civelek* so that his beardless face was not exposed to the desiring gaze of other men. Not all the Janissary novices wore the veil, however: "those who put on the veil were beautiful beloveds; the fact that they walked with a veil on their faces was regarded as yet another spectacle of villainy in a period when the Janissaries were nothing but a source of brigandage and mischief in the city."[37]

In Koçu's aforementioned list of shampooers at the Kılıç Ali Paşa Bath in 1734, there was no shampooer associated with the Janissaries. In another list (dated 1734) providing the names of the ten shampooers working in the Çömlekçiler Bath in the Eyyub district of Istanbul, however, there is a certain "Ahmed bin Mehmed from the 27th Janissary Regiment with blond beard," as well as a "Mehmed bin İbrahim from the 46th Janissary Regiment with grizzled beard."[38] The fact that the Janissaries and Janissary-affiliated *civelek*s were allowed to work as shampooers, Koçu suggests, was an indication of the worsening corruption of the Janissary corps in the eighteenth century. The Janissaries were now indeed a "locus of disorder"[39] within the empire: a loose, unmanageable, dispersed, and highly seditious force that had decentralized and diffused through society and controlled almost all the professions and trades in cities. Most urban artisans "were said to be Janissary-affiliated in the eighteenth century while most Janissaries were said to be artisans."[40] The muster rolls of the army and Janissary entitlements were now "public instruments of exchange, traded on the open market to whoever had the wherewithal to invest."[41] "The blending of 'soldiers' into the commercial and artisanal life of the city"[42] was not the only problem. While some Janissaries exploited and benefited a great deal from commercial, entrepreneurial venues and institutional ties by resorting to coercive means, some other Janissaries had to move down the economic ladder.[43] In 1703, for example, the average daily wage of a Janissary was 10 *akçe* and this pay was "low compared with the salaries of other government employees and skilled workers."[44] What forced Yemenici Bâlî and other Janissary affiliates or apprentice Janissaries to first attach themselves to the Janissary corps and then to end up in a bathhouse as shampooers/prostitutes was not only intra-male power relations and sexual violence; it was also predominantly an economic necessity.

Yemenici Bâlî was caught whilst being raped by a şahbaz *yoldaş* in a *kulluk* (guardhouse or police station[45]). Şahbaz referred to a fine, handsome man and/or a rough, daredevil bully, whereas *yoldaş* meant a fellow Janissary. Here is Derviş İsmail's rather graphic account of what happened to Yemenici Bâlî:

> Beauty, coquetry, good manners, politeness and loyalty are his virtues. He [Yemenici Bâlî] is a budding rose blossoming on the branches of love, a young nightingale in the cage of the chest. If hair is called hyacinth, dimple rose, gaze executioner, stature Turkish boxwood, dagger steel, bottom crystal bowl, belly drop of light, calves silver pillar, feet silver bullion and locks of hair silk thread, it is only because of [the mesmerizing beauty of] Bâlî the shampooer. Sauntering like a peacock in the garden of the *hammam*, this chaste youth was the recruit of the 59th Regiment as well as the apprentice of a master shoe maker in Tophane … One evening, a villain called Darıcalı Gümüş Ali from the 59th Regiment, who ran a coffee house in the caulking wharf, hedged round Yemenici, pulled him into the police station and, together with Kıçlevendi Zehir Ahmet, a sailor, and Kurt Halil, one of Tophane's demons of hell, swarmed his bowl of honey like wasps and buggered him again and again all night long, took off his clothes and made him dance buck naked.

> When the police superintendent found out that a drinking party was taking place in the police station, he raided the place, saw Yemenici being buggered, took him away, disgraced him by adding his highly esteemed name to the list, and to crown it all, imprinted the word “catamite” on his calves … Bâlî thought enough was enough and he would be sorted out [now only] in a joy-giving bath. Thus he headed to the Kaptan-ı Derya Kılıç Ali Paşa Bath in Tophane, kissed the hand of a master shampooer, undressed himself and joined [in order to start working in] the bath. Making a name for himself before long, he charged 70 *akçe* for a single fuck … If he served as a bedfellow overnight, he charged 300 *akçe*. Depending on the strength of the sodomite, Bâlî could allow himself to be fucked as many times as possible, which would be included in the price but when the shampooer on guard shouted “it is morning time!” and if the sodomite wanted to fuck Bâlî one more time, he had to pay an extra 90 *akçe*. Bâlî did not allow himself to be fucked more than three times a day. He was a clean, robust [boy], a nightingale [lying] on the chest, a lamb tinged with henna … When I became the Chief of the Bath Keepers in September 1685, this Bâlî got in touch with me, cried his eyes out, and exclaimed that he now was absolutely sick of getting fucked. He asked for deliverance from the bath and wanted his name to be deleted from the police superintendent’s list. He besought me to work as a servant in my place. What I was looking for, I had found [unexpectedly] in the bosom of love! After saving the poor boy from the claws of the police superintendent and the proprietor of the bath, I took him in, put him, outwardly, in charge of smoking pipes,[46] but [in reality] I [finally] attained my desire by having him as a bedfellow in my private room.

One of the most significant characteristics of this narrative is the way in which Derviş İsmail described, and clearly took pleasure in describing, the graphic details of how these youths, *not* all of them without facial hair, were raped and penetrated by older, physically stronger, well-endowed Janissaries, sailors, bandits, and brigands, i.e. all sorts of sexually predatory and socially disruptive men. The use of various vulgar literary figures of speech to describe the moments of both forced and consensual anal penetrative sexual intercourse, however, was obviously a narrative strategy by which the author aimed to entertain himself and his potential audience by simply “selling porn.” The author, more important, purported to secure his *own* dominant masculinity, class-based privilege and morality, and omniscient narratorial voice by clearly identifying the penetrator and the penetrated, objectifying and detaching himself from such sleazy sexual encounters, and associating himself with the less obscene, more ambiguous, and affectionate “bedfellow” status. Male control, that is to say, had to hinge on a clear identification of sexual identity, even when there was no such stable and decisive sexual identification. It was the very slippery boundaries between masculinity and femininity that forced the Ottoman legal authorities into preventing the sort of gender transformation from masculine to feminine which would undermine the gendered hierarchy.[47] In order to give maleness “a sense of privilege and a sense of visible differentiation,” the author tried to administer patriarchy based on a clear identification of sexual identity.[48]

One may also argue that both the *subaşı* (police superintendent) and the author gained from what R.W. Connell dubs “hegemonic masculinity”: the *subaşı* added Yemenici Bâlî’s name to his list/register of prostitutes and stamped the word *hîz* (catamite) on his calf, which, the author adds, was a humiliating, stigmatizing experience for Bâlî. The author, on the other hand, presented a hierarchizing, classificatory account of rape and sodomy in order to clearly distinguish the dominant and submissive parties. Hegemonic masculinity, Connell emphasizes, is not a fixed character type, but a “configuration of gender practice” in specific situations in a mobile structure of relationships. It is a configuration embodying “the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.”[49] From this perspective, the author might be seen to have a relationship of “complicity” with normative cultural ideals and institutional power: he benefited from the patriarchal dividend “without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy."[50]

Beneath this seemingly, and strategically, hierarchical and polarizing surface of the narrative, however, one discerns dissident gender practices and sexual relationships that did not fit within the normative gender and sexual boundaries. These practices, I submit, require a different framework of masculinity than the one suggested by Connell, namely, a different framework of a *non-dichotomous* gender relationality. Such a framework should valorize what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls "the middle ranges of agency." Sedgwick critiques the reimposition, in gender and queer studies, of Foucault's analysis of the pseudodichotomy between repression and liberation as the reified binary of "the hegemonic *versus* the subversive." The problem with this binary is its "gradual evacuation of substance, as a kind of Gramscian-Foucauldian contagion turns 'hegemonic' into another name for the status quo (i.e. everything that *is*) and defines 'subversive' in, increasingly, a purely negative relation to that." Sedgwick argues that this unhelpful binary neglects the significance of "the middle ranges of agency that offer space for effectual creativity and change."[51]

Let's consider, for example, the description of Yemenici Bâlî: at the age of fifteen, and thus presumably with a face not totally without facial hair, Bâlî attached himself to a bath in order to avoid sexual harassment and stigmatization, the latter caused by the police adding Bâlî's name to the register and stamping the word "catamite" on his calf. The text makes it clear that Bâlî worked in the bath mostly as a sexually "penetrated" sex worker. He was "a budding rose blossoming on the branches of love," with "his hair like hyacinth," "his locks of hair like a silk thread," "his dimple like a rose," and "his bottom like a crystal bowl of honey." However, he also had a "stature like a Turkish boxwood," a "calf like a silver pillar," a "dagger like steel" (a metaphor for his penis), and a "gaze like that of an executioner." The description, in the narrative, of the sexually "penetrated" shampooers/sex workers always brings together what would be seen today as "masculine" and "feminine" qualities. It is evident that neither the author nor the shampooers and their clients assumed an incompatibility between these qualities, or between masculinity and sexual passivity. We see Keşmîr Mustafa, for instance, another sexually penetrated shampooer, walking "in a stately and roistering manner" (*levendane reftar ile*), greeting people with a "lively and coquettish attitude," but also in "a polite and gentlemanly fashion." Sipahi Mustafa Bey, a "fairy-faced little boy" at the age of fifteen, is praised not only for his "good manners and decency," but also for his "coquettishness" and "generosity in giving his fruit of union" (i.e. allowing himself to be penetrated).

Drawing on the useful distinction made by Judith Butler between a norm, a rule, and a law, I see masculinity as a norm operating within these social practices and "always and *only tenuously* embodied by any particular social actor." The norm, Butler maintains, "governs the social intelligibility of action, but it is *not* the same as the action that it governs."[52] The ideality of gender as a norm is the "reinstituted effect" of the practices that it governs. That is to say, gender is a norm by which the gender binary is produced and naturalized. Yet at the same time, the relation between practices and the idealizations under which these practices work is contingent. One might argue that the beardless shampooers/sex workers were contesting the idealizations by taking advantage of this contingency and the distance between "gender and its naturalized instantiations" or between "a norm and its incorporations."[53] Butler's idea of keeping the term “gender” apart from masculine/feminine, man/woman, male/female is, therefore, so crucial in terms of being able to see how gender may also have been a means for the subjects of history to deconstruct and denaturalize the very notions of masculine and feminine.

Kalyoncu Süleyman (Suleiman the Sailor), a shampooer/sex worker based at the Piyalepaşa Bath, provides yet another example of the way in which gender was used as a disruptive apparatus. Süleyman was a very popular, sexually “active,” mighty, and valiant young man serving (i.e. penetrating) nobles and upper class customers. What is particularly revealing in the description of Süleyman is the fact that he desired and penetrated older and, status-wise, superior adult male customers. There is no indication in the text that the latter were effeminate as opposed to the manly Süleyman. Neither is there any sort of evidence that they were considered aberrant or pathological because they allowed themselves to be penetrated. More important, the way in which Süleyman, despite being a masculine, sexually penetrating, bearded young man, was depicted as an object of the desiring gaze of other *penetrating* sodomites/pederasts (*şehrî kulampara*) does complicate binary understandings of gender, sexuality, and masculinity in early modern Ottoman society:

> One day Kalyoncu Süleyman was sitting in the Ali Paşa Coffee House in the Hasköy Pier in a free and easy, roistering manner, with his bare feet and open chest, firing the hearts of city pederasts [who were wondering] what was the length and size of this sailor boy’s steel dagger … Hasan Ağa, the proprietor of the Piyalepaşa Bath and one of the brave and manly bath keepers of our city, happened to be in the same Coffee House, watching the boy’s hunky bare feet and hanging bulge. “All right, what I need is such a brave, handsome, gallant, penetrating agile shampooer and clean, skilful and superior young man,” said he; and showing friendship to the boy, having a chat with him, tempting and persuading him, he took him to his bath, undressed him, wrapped the bath waist cloth [used by the shampooers] around his waist, and Süleyman [started receiving] clients after a few days’ training in the hands of a master.

Hamlacı İbrahim, a sexually penetrated shampooer/sex worker, on the other hand, was a beardless (*taze*), “graceful and faithful companion serving gratuitously as a bedfellow without charging a price.” İbrahim had moved from a town in the Black Sea region to Istanbul to visit his uncle, a *hamlacı*, a rower/boatman in a big boat serving the Imperial Guards protecting the sultan’s palace and its premises. İbrahim himself was accepted as a *hamlacı* recruited to the Imperial Guard Corps and as an apprentice to a barber. When it was discovered that he had had (consensual) anal sex with a certain *Kürt Haso Ağa*, İbrahim was rejected by his uncle and expelled from both the barracks of the Imperial Guards’ boatmen and the barber where he had worked as an apprentice. As a result, he had to start working in the Yeşildirekli Bath in Azapkapısı. What makes İbrahim such a striking figure in the narrative is the description of how he allowed himself to be penetrated by his clients in the private room of the bathhouse. The author presents İbrahim’s easy manner, agility, and patience in being penetrated itself as a *sign of masculinity*, a result of İbrahim’s “youthful perseverance” (*gayret-i nev-civânî*). Finally, at the end of the narrative, Derviş İsmail, the author of the treatise and the Chief of the Bath Keepers, lets the reader know that he also accepted İbrahim into his home, and thus saved him from the apparently difficult working conditions at the bathhouse. Derviş İsmail adds that he fixed Hamlacı İbrahim up with Yemenici Bâlî as a bedfellow, and the versatile way the two had sex, taking turns to be on top in anal sex was “such a spectacle to be seen.”

The point in giving these examples is not simply to say that versatile sexual desire and practices, too, existed in early modern Ottoman society. Neither is it to claim that the categories of, and hierarchical boundaries between, masculinity and femininity, and the “penetrator” and the “penetrated,” were totally irrelevant. After all, one does not know the extent to which the author’s idiosyncratic desires and fantasies contributed to his final portrayal of the versatile sex scene between the two young men who had been working in the bathhouse as sexually penetrated prostitutes. The wider context of immigration, poverty, lower-class status, sexual violence, and exploitation, combined with the stigmatization by the author of certain ethnic groups, such as the Greeks and Copts, also raises questions about the extent of consent and agency on the part of the shampooers. The fact that Bâlî asked Derviş İsmail to have his name deleted from the register kept by the *subaşı* reveals the existence of a network of coerced sex, labor trafficking, and violence. Derviş İsmail’s account of how he had saved Bâlî “from the claws of the police superintendent and the proprietor of the bath” implies that this network was operated by the *subaşı* and the proprietors of the baths in question.

On the other hand, however, the relationships that these young shampooers established with each other, with their clients, and with other young men outside of the baths often went beyond this coercive network of sex work based on age, class, ethnicity, gender, and sex role stratifications. Peremeci Benli Kara Davud, a boatman and a sexually “active” shampooer/sex worker freelancing between several *hammams*, for instance, was a very poor youth with a slight moustache (çar’ebru) who wandered around barefoot and in rags. The reason for this, the author adds, was that he was a “destitute, poverty-stricken lover wasting all of his money on a coquettish gentleman” who was working in Saraçhane (the saddlery), where he was known as “the shampooer’s saddler” (*dellâk saracı*). One of the reasons why the Ottoman state asked the owners to expel beardless shampooers from their baths in 1709, some two decades after the composition of the treatise by Derviş İsmail, then, might be the uncontrollable formation of such networks of both coerced sex work and consensual associations and intimacies between men from inside and outside the baths.

More importantly, though, there is no indication in this narrative, or in the aforementioned state archival documents, that these beardless and bearded shampooers/sex workers, or their both “penetrating” and “penetrated” adult male clients, were seen by the community as gender failures or as “lesser” men who failed to be fully masculine. The association of “passiveness” with effeminacy and “activeness” with hypermasculinity within a gender spectrum is itself a product of the modernist heterosexualization of love.[54] As such, it is a regulatory operation that reconsolidates the power of heteronormativity. In other words, a linear and progressive understanding of gender relationality as an asymmetrical relationship of difference and complementarity, or as an overlapping between masculinity/domination and femininity/submission, is inadequate. For one thing, neither Derviş İsmail’s treatise nor the above-mentioned state documents placed these Janissary-affiliated beardless shampooers within a developmental narrative of “intermediate status,”[55] “transitional states,” or “transformation,” in which the hierarchical difference between those eligible for transformation (males) and those who are not eligible (females)[56] would have mattered. On the contrary, one sees, especially in the “upgrading” of some of the shampooers to the curious “bedfellow” status, not a sign of eligibility for transformation into mature, “penetrative” adulthood at the expense of females, but a sign of the formation of an established, independent, and self-contained subculture: a male homosexual mode of life with its own internal yet permeable structures of inequality organized along the lines of gender, age, class, race, and ethnicity. Homosexuality was not an inward means to "discover in oneself the truth of one's sex," but an outward means to "arrive at a multiplicity of relations," to reach a productive relational system through dissident practices and affective intensities.[57]

In his seminal work on homosexuality and male friendship in Elizabethan England, Alan Bray identifies two separate yet potentially related images of male same-sex relationships: the image of the abominable and feared sodomite associated with treason and heresy and the image of the universally admired masculine friend, or the "bedfellow." Bray explains what it meant in early modern England to be someone's bedfellow:

> This was a society where most people slept with someone else and where the rooms of a house led casually one into the other and servants mingled with their masters. Such a lack of privacy usually made who shared a bed with whom into a public fact. It was also a potentially meaningful one, for beds are not only places where people sleep: they are also places where people talk. To be someone's "bedfellow" suggested that one had influence and could be the making of a fortune.[58]

According to *The Book of Shampooers that Opens the Soul* by Derviş İsmail, ending up as someone's bedfellow (*döşek yoldaşı*) pointed towards a similar protective network of patrons, clients, and suitors in Ottoman society. This was a network through which the three of the eleven shampooers described in the book, Yemenici Bâlî, Sipahi Mustafa Bey, and Hamlacı İbrahim, were "saved" by their patrons from the stigma associated with their names being on the register kept by the *subaşı*. The bedfellow status, however, was a less accessible and less affordable status. It did not exclude sex, but it definitely involved something more than sex. The proof is that the shampooers described by Derviş İsmail charged the highest rates when it came to spending the entire night with a client as the latter's bedfellow. When Hamlacı İbrahim delivered this "service" without charging a fee, he was praised by the author for his generous act of "faithful companionship."

In the Ottoman context, the image of the *hîz* or "catamite" shampooer/prostitute was not "tolerated," though it was never vilified to the extent of being associated with treason and heresy. Yet neither was the figure of the bedfellow an accepted or idealized one, either. In some ways, being someone's bedfellow was even a more insecure and precarious position. This is evidenced by the author's significant note that he housed Yemenici Bâlî outwardly as a çubukdar, a servant in charge of smoking pipes, while in reality he had him as a bedfellow in his private room (*halvette*). The spatial arrangement of urban homes before the nineteenth century, Donald Quataert explains, was conducive to separate gendered spaces: "in many urban homes, there was a *selamlık* section, the predominantly male space, at the front while the *haremlik*, the female space, was located elsewhere … Urban homes often held the *selamlık* room, which the oldest male had the prerogative to use, in the centre with independent rooms off of it but without corridors linking these to each other."[59] The fact that in many urban, upper-class homes, males and females socialized in separate spaces must have facilitated relationships between the "men of importance" (*ricâl*) and their bedfellows. Still, these relationships necessitated considerable secrecy, discretion, negotiation, and commitment. It is, therefore, not a coincidence that when he referred to the bedfellows, Derviş İsmail extolled their faithfulness and fidelity. The bedfellows and their patrons, in other words, used the "middle ranges of agency," enacting "a form of relationality that deals in negotiations (including win-win negotiations), the exchange of affect, and other small differentials."[60] Their exceptional practices and dissident relationships created a "disturbing" homosexual mode of life. They also anticipated the truth of what Foucault said in 1981: "*Ce vers quoi vont les développements du problème de l'homosexualité, c'est le problème de l'amitié*,"[61] or "the development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship."[62]

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4 Ibid., 37.

5 Rictor Norton, “Lovely Lad and Shame-Faced Catamite,” *The Homosexual Pastoral Tradition*, 20 June 2008. Accessed 21 June 2014. http://rictornorton.co.uk/pastor05.htm.

6 David L. Orvis, “Queer Subjectivities in Early Modern England” (D.Phil., The University of Arizona, 2008), 16.

7 I am referring to the otherwise highly innovative and insightful books *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) by Khaled El-Rouayheb, and *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006) by Dror Ze’evi.

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analysis, though.

36 Yemenici refers to an artisan who produces light shoes worn by peasants and/or colored cotton handkerchiefs and headkerchiefs.

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61 Michel Foucault, "De l'amitié comme mode de vie," *Gai Pied* 25 (1981): 38.

62 Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," 136. I would like to thank Sibel Yardımcı for pointing me towards Veyne's work on Foucault. I also wish to thank Professor Edhem Eldem for his help in deciphering the documents from the Prime Ministry Ottoman Archives. That said, all mistakes and misunderstandings are mine alone. Special thanks go to Gul Ozyegin for her incredible patience, understanding, and encouragement.

PART 2

Producing Muslim Femininities, Sexualities, and Gender Relations

Chapter 7
The Continuous Making of Pure Womanhood among Muslim Women in Cairo: Cooking, Depilating, and Circumcising

Maria Frederika Malmström

As we knock on the door, my assistant and I hear a rumbling noise from inside, like the sound of a vacuum cleaner. Abu Mahmood opens the door and greets us with the usual *is-salâmu ‘alêkum* (peace be upon you). We respond, appropriately, *wi ‘alêkum is-salâm* (and peace be upon you). Inside the apartment smoke is belching out from two steaming pots on two gas stoves in the middle of the living room. Um Mahmood is cooking couscous in large quantities today as a gift to her close neighbors and friends. She is sitting on the floor and her face is dripping with sweat. She is dressed in an unbuttoned soft *gallabiyya*, with her slip underneath. She wears a matching veil, tied in a rural style, and it complements her clothing. Um Mahmood is a large, robust woman who looks older than she is. She has a warm and generous smiling face, despite the absence of her front teeth. The steamy activity makes the hot room feel like a small factory. Um Mahmood is working hard, together with one of her husband’s and co-wife’s two adult daughters. The women are pouring out the couscous, which has already been steamed. We are invited to join them with the preparations, so we wash our hands and sit down on the floor with them. The steamed couscous is now piled on a larger tray to cool. After a while it is time to pour some into a colander. Um Mahmood tells us to work faster. Then she starts kneading the couscous through the colander to make it finer before it is steamed again. The procedure is repeated three times. Um stresses how important it is to repeat this procedure. Like other women, she says it is necessary to work the couscous into a soft and smooth dish. After the couscous has been steamed a third and last time, Um Mahmood adds a large amount of clarified butter. The couscous is now ready, shining with fat and of perfect consistency—namely, soft and smooth. Um Mahmood, who seems just as hot and steamy as the couscous, peeks at me and exclaims: “If you make *tâhara* you will be clean, just like you are when you make sweets. It is the same thing. You will be just as *qiśta* [cream/beautiful]. Fat and sweet and soft, just like couscous.”

The relationship between home-cooked food and constructions of femininity is particularly strong among the urban poor in Cairo. Values are imbued through the preparation of food and through its texture, aroma, and flavour—“sensory experiences [are] socially made and mediated” (Hsu 2008: 433). Food figured constantly in the thoughts, talk, and actions of the women I met in Cairo. Women of all ages agreed that being able to cook was an essential skill for an Egyptian woman (Malmström 2004). This chapter explores how a correct moral and feminine Muslim self is created through mundane and repeated bodily practices, images, ideas, speech acts, and the social relations these imply. It is through practice that the body is literally and metaphorically sculpted into a form deemed to be moral and feminine; this process makes use of the senses and is mediated by the consistency, aroma, flavor, and sound of food and its preparation.

The actors in this chapter are those of different generations of Muslim women from two lower income neighbourhoods of Cairo. I was inspired by Marcus's (1998) arguments for a "multi-sited research imaginary." This way of conducting research implies thinking with and through several places and perspectives at the same time. The method gave me the chance to describe complex cultural processes. Constructions of identities are always in a state of flux and are globally interconnected through networks at different levels. Despite long distances between them, the people I met were interconnected through marriage, work, or better economic possibilities, but also due to state-forced relocations that sometimes separated families (cf. Ghannam 2002). In-depth interviews with key informants were of vital importance in helping me understand the meaning of female circumcision. I also used conventional anthropological methods, such as daily conversations, participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussions. We communicated not only verbally but also with gesticulations, eye contact, silence, sorrow, laughter, crying, and expressions of anger. I also participated in practices such as cooking, eating, depilation of body hair, wearing clothing, and hairstyling, and by practicing correct, "feminine" behavior (cf. Hsu 2008). I shared my informants' experiences of scratching louse bites, dancing through the night to the accompaniment of saucepan drumming, weeping over life's troubles, perspiring as we baked bread in the heat of the summer. I worked with 21 extended families in Cairo and their relatives, and my work included visits to families living in rural areas. The first area, located in the center of the city, consists of classical Islamic districts. The second area is in the suburbs of Cairo, where there are newer buildings. For ethical reasons, I have chosen not to identify the neighborhoods by name. The women I spent time with lived in low-income areas of Cairo but their lifestyles were not strictly associated with economic class or consumption (cf. Early 1993 for a further discussion about class categories in Egypt). The group included women from various socioeconomic and educational backgrounds as well as women of different generations, marital status, and sexual preferences.

Theoretical Approaches: Performativity, Agency, and Senses

Among the women and men I met, the view of sex and gender is that women and men are similar before God. By God they have been given different and complementary roles in society. In local gender ideology this view is reflected in a pervasive set of tropes, outlined below, that constitute men and women as innately distinct social categories with different qualities and domains of influence. Thus, while my informants take an essentializing view of the sexes as biologically fixed, different, and complementary, they continuously mold and re-create these identities. Femininity is thus shaped and perfected, not only by "carving it" into proper shape (cf. Broch-Due et al. 1993), but also through a variety of other forms of body modification and through the practical tasks in which women engage on a daily basis. This repetitive process resonates with Butler's (1990; 1993) notion of reiteration as a means of constructing gender. Through the repetition of specific acts, and through what words do in linguistic interactions, the feminine subject is continuously made through, for example, tropes, greetings, explanations, and apologies. Thus, gender is what one does rather than what one is.[1] Since no two reiterations are identical, reiteration has the capacity to destabilize and transform social norms (Malmström 2009a).

Furthermore, we are embodied selves, in a complex interplay of body and mind, constrained and enabled by our historical and social environment. Mahmood's (2005) practice-oriented embodied approach develops the poststructuralist and feminist liberal notions of subjectivity formation by bringing embodiment into the analysis. Mahmood followed the women's mosque movement in Cairo from 1995 to 1997, focusing on how female agency is formed by the conscious subject in a specific historical context with the help of bodily practices. This approach offers valuable tools for understanding agency. Mahmood uses the Aristotelian concept of *habitus*. In contrast to Bourdieu's focus on the unconscious power of *habitus*,[2] Mahmood uses the concept to cover the formation of self as a conscious process and the bodily procedures whereby a moral self is shaped. She describes the Aristotelian model of moral cultivation in the following way:

> Habitus in this older Aristotelian tradition is understood to be an acquired excellence at either a moral or a practical craft, learned through repeated practice until that practice leaves a permanent mark on the character of the person. Thus, moral virtues (such as modesty, honesty, and fortitude) are acquired through a coordination of outward behaviours (e.g. bodily acts, social demeanour) with inward dispositions (e.g. emotional states, thoughts, intentions) through the repeated performance of acts that entail those particular virtues. (Mahmood 2005: 136)

Mahmood's ethnography illustrates how women consciously educated themselves in Islamic "feminine" virtues in order to approximate their ideals. For example, women who were not naturally shy would try to make themselves shy. After a period of practice, both shyness and modesty became imprinted upon them (ibid., 156f). Mahmood's notions of embodied agency are useful for parts of my analysis, though her focus is different from mine. The women in Mahmood's study were all active members of an Egyptian mosque movement, while the majority of the women I met, although they used some of the political Islamists' services, were not. Women do not impose female circumcision upon their own bodies; they are subjected to it as girls on account of decisions made by their mothers. The physical pain of circumcision instructs girls in how to respond as women in culturally appropriate ways. Young girls and women grow to value circumcision, since it is a prerequisite in the lifelong fashioning of the ideal female subject. However, circumcision is only a part of this ongoing creative process and it is integrated into the broader spectrum of gendering practices through which women make themselves (Malmström 2009a, 2009b).

The body may be said to have agency in other ways besides through the deliberate making of self as described by Mahmood. I am referring to unreflected, sensory memories and responses and to the way in which women unreflectively learn about femininity and re-create themselves as women through sight, hearing, touch, scent, and flavor. My material suggests that discourses can be incorporated and lessons can be learnt through a range of everyday activities in which women engage. Thus, women employ agency in becoming and maintaining themselves as feminine selves. Agency is both a universal human capacity for action and also a socioculturally mediated capacity (Ahearn 2001; Ortner 2006a, 2006b), that is, it is locally defined in social worlds (cf. Malmström 2011).

Engendering Tropes: Sweet, Soft, and Pure Bodies

The women make use of certain tropes to orient themselves and create order in their world. The local tropes of “sweet,” “soft,” “smooth,” and “pure” are associated with femininity. Together with other tropes, such as clean-unclean and hot-cold, they are ever-present in the women’s daily activities and dialogues. The term for the opposite of smooth (rough) is seldom used. However, the surface of a man’s body is supposed to be rough and it acquires this quality through shaving with a razor. Similarly, the term for the opposite of sweet (sour) is not used in daily conversations. However, lemon is used in the sugar-and-water mixture with which women depilate their bodies to make them smooth and soft. Um Mahmood explains:

> A woman should always be soft towards a man. A woman should always be soft towards her mother-in-law. She should never accuse her husband of anything or argue with him. A woman should be strong and never show her true feelings. A woman must be beautiful. A woman will win through beauty, softness, and through cooking. A woman should be beautiful, cook good food, never become stressed or angry or talk about marital problems. A woman should not show her sadness because of him, since she turns ugly, loses her health and eventually, her husband. She should be even softer towards him and give him everything in life.

Sweet food or words such as *hilu* (sweet), *sukkar* (sugar), and *‘asal* (honey) were very common compliments used to say that a girl or woman was beautiful or good. Honey has many connotations and can be used to refer to sweet food, to female bodies, and as a compliment for a beautiful woman. Um Mahmood recited a proverb that likens the vagina to honey:

> When a woman is giving birth to a child the hole is very big, but the hole will close again. Just as when you take a spoon with honey from the honey jar, the honey will close again. The vagina is like honey.

Not only cooked food, but also sweet raw food like honey is associated with womanhood because of its sweetness, openness, and viscosity.

The maintenance of equilibrium between hot and cold is important locally. This is so not only in relation to health and sexuality but also in relation to food intake. An Egyptian woman is given special “hot” food, including meat and hot drinks, for seven days after her circumcision, after her wedding, and after giving birth. Typically this food includes *kibda* (liver) with homemade clarified butter, different dishes of *frâh* (chicken), *il-lahm il-bitillu* (veal), *hilba* (fenugreek) with *‘asal,* and the hot drink *moġât* (made of fenugreek, sesame, and clarified butter). Amira explained that it is also necessary for a girl to eat good “hot” food, including meat, for seven days after circumcision to compensate for the loss of blood and to her strength. After her wedding, a woman is given “hot” food since she has been “opened” and thus exposed to cold. The same explanation was used in relation to childbirth. The women told me of a proverb that was used after childbirth to stress the importance of eating “hot” meat: “Eat a chicken and place the chicken into the same place as your child.”

Generating Generous Femininity: The Girls Are Boiling Over

No woman without food. She is nothing without food. No woman can be a woman if she can't cook (Um Ali 2003).

Cooking and the kitchen area are clearly women's responsibility. The kitchen is treated as a special private space for women and it is conceptually linked to sexuality and procreation. Early on in my fieldwork, when the women were teaching me how to cook *bilâdi* food, they brought the cooking utensils into the living room instead of preparing the food in the kitchen as is normal. Later, when the women began to trust me, they let me cook with them in their kitchens. The women told me that the kitchen is like the bedroom. Both are equally private, "sensitive and very special." Introducing an unknown woman to the kitchen may be dangerous, they explained, because if she is jealous she may give the hostess the evil eye (cf. Sachs 1983). The kitchen is an emotionally charged space; it is feminine, "inner and private," but is also associated with the bedroom. The kitchen could even be seen as a metaphor for the ovum. Both are female and they are associated with reproduction, fertility, and procreation (cf. Boddy 1989). On the wedding night, the husband is supposed to feed his wife from a tray of food that the mother-in-law has prepared for the couple to consume on their first night together. When the wife accepts the food from her husband's hand, this indicates that she is ready and accepts the first sexual encounter and his fertile "food." He feeds her with life-giving food and sperm; both are gifts from God. I suggest that her womb may be understood as a container, just as the kitchen is a container for food. Food is made from raw material that grows and is then prepared in the kitchen, just as the baby is made from raw material, grows, and becomes ready in a woman's womb.

The older women spoke with pride of their competence in cooking and their status as *sitt bêt* (housewife, or woman who stays in the home). Many families struggled to uphold this gendered division of labor, with husbands sometimes working two or three jobs so that they could continue to be the sole breadwinner for their families. The married women were the heads of their households, while daughters prepared food, cleaned the home, and washed and ironed the clothes. The husbands were not supposed to do any cooking since it is so closely associated with female gender identity. Like many others, Um Mustapha was confident that she was a true *sitt bêt*. She explained to me that a "*sitt bêt* is a woman who can cook, talk with people, clean her home, wash …everything, and her door is always open."[3]

Among the urban dwellers, *karâma* generosity was often said to be a typical feature of a good housewife. *Karâma* refers not only to generosity but also to honor and respect: "Hospitality is a holy duty" and "caring for others and sharing what little one has is part of such self-respect" (Wikan 1996: 315). Hospitality and generosity are the particular responsibility of women. Her generosity towards relatives and guests generates honor, moral status, and religious merits. Homa explained that a man who wants to marry visits the family of the woman to taste and smell her cooking. The man is expected to ask who cooked the food and prepared the coffee, and ideally it should be the young woman. A cup of Egyptian coffee should have an intact and perfect foam on top, sometimes called the "face." This is a metaphorical reference to the girl's virginity, since the hymen is, as mentioned, also referred to as the face. Thus, accomplishment in cooking and generosity indicate proper womanhood and identity as a good Muslim. A woman's food nourishes all her family members and her cooking is proof of her patience. Through the cooking, sharing, and offering of food, married women display both generosity and sociality. It is dishonorable not to be sociable and generous and it is shameful for women if their homemade food is poorly prepared or unsavory. Food may be used to denigrate a woman within her family if her husband refuses to eat her food. Um Sami, who was a young second wife and mother of three children, was very upset because her husband always either ate his first wife's food or ate with his brother's family, who lived in the apartment next door. He never ate her meals even though he knew how fond she was of him.

Commensality is extremely important in Egypt and is what Bloch describes as "one of the most powerful operators of the social process" (Bloch 1999: 133). A guest becomes connected to the family through food. All of the families who agreed to let me work with them also invited me to eat with them. They would say: "Come and eat with us, bread and salt, to be in our family." When I asked Um Ibrahim about the meaning of this proverb, she told me: "Because then we are one and not two any longer." People should eat food together to be able to form closer ties and trusting relations. Um Mahmood, as well as other women, often used her own hand to put food into my mouth. In the Western context, this kind of hand feeding is only acceptable for feeding small children or as a sexually suggestive act between couples. For this reason I found these situations somewhat embarrassing even though I knew it was a friendly gesture and a way of establishing closeness.[4]

The following example illustrates the importance of sharing food to form close relations and even to create kinship. Hania often refused to prepare or share food with the other women in her extended family. By doing this, she also refused to engage in the daily conversations and affirmation of kinship. Her mother-in-law was very dissatisfied with her behavior. Finally, one day when I was visiting Hania's mother, the mother-in-law came in to discuss these problems. She told Hania's mother that if her daughter-in-law continued not eating with the other women, she would send her back home to her mother, which meant divorce. Shortly afterwards, Hania began taking her meals with the other women, thus re-establishing herself as a normal woman; by sharing substance she affirmed her membership of the family. This is an example of how relatedness is derived from sharing food (Carsten 1997), which also makes it difficult to refuse food when it is offered. To do so means jeopardizing fragile ties of trust and affection.

Another incident captures the ongoing negations between generations of women about generosity (cf. Goddard 2000). One day, two of Um Mahmood's daughters came to join in with the preparation of couscous. They began to quarrel and complain about the hard work and they criticized Um Mahmood for working too hard and giving away too much couscous to "strangers." Um Mahmood patiently responded that there are no pockets in the tomb. A good woman should not store anything, because she should be generous. She claimed that an Egyptian woman has only three things in life and these are her food, her laughter, and her words. A real woman should give them away to everyone and she should be buried with nothing. With these words, she began dividing the couscous and placing it into plastic bags. She gave one of her friends a large helping of smooth, soft, and shiny couscous on a tray. The friend had helped Um Mahmood many times and Um said it was time to reciprocate. The daughters intervened again and told her not to give any couscous to the family of one of the daughters-in-law because they would just laugh at such a gift—the daughter-in-law was in the room with us but she remained quiet. Later on, the daughters explained to me that this particular family had style—their women were good-looking and slim and were more beautiful and modern than Um Mahmood's family, and a gift of couscous would seem ridiculous to them. Their reasoning was typical of negotiations going on in many of these families today about feminine ideals, and it expresses the new gender ideals according to which the female body is a marker of sophistication and modernity.

Couscous: A Good Woman or a Cunt?

Couscous[5] is a particularly significant trope for feminine ideals. *Bilâdi* food like couscous has positive connotations, such as authenticity, purity, cleanliness, and quality. This kind of food is thought to be authentically Egyptian, in contrast to the "bad" and impure food from abroad, including Egyptian manufactured food (cf. Ghannam 2002). Home-cooked food represents cleanliness, sweetness, and purity and it resonates with ideologies of femininity, honor, and Islamic piety. The women treated purity and cleanness as synonyms. They said: "Soft and clean are the same things," which also has Islamic connotations. They insisted that their food, unlike ready-cooked food, restaurant food, or food from stalls, was clean, which implies pure. Um Loi and I were talking one day about cooking couscous, and I told her that couscous is quite common in Sweden too but that Swedes know nothing about the Egyptian methods of preparation and they just buy it from the supermarket. Um Loi looked appalled and said that bought couscous was often of poor quality and unclean. Purchased semi-prepared products like this are understood to be not only unclean but to belong to the outside, open, masculine world rather than to the respectable female sphere of the home.[6] Further, couscous refers not only to the dish but also to a pure, circumcised woman. It is also used as a vulgar slang word, as we will see below.

Everybody in Egypt is familiar with the ambiguous meaning of "couscous." If there are men in the room, girls and women prefer to use the word *moftal* ("to make something round") for a couscous dish, but some people say that the meaning is "to make it soft." I also learned that terms for couscous could also have a meaning similar to the English word "cunt"; the most common slang word for the vagina is *kos*. The first time I heard the term *kosi* used in this way was when I was walking in downtown Cairo at the beginning of my fieldwork. I had been taught to look straight ahead and not into men's eyes when I was walking around the streets of Cairo, but I could not avoid this middle-aged man, who whispered "kos" in my ear as he passed by me. Another example was during a quarrel between a taxi driver and a donkey rider (both men), in which the taxi driver shouted "*kos ummak*" ("your mother's cunt/couscous") to the donkey rider. These incidents provoked lively discussion between me and my assistant, Nuura. She affirmed my interpretation and explained that in such contexts the word couscous had a very different meaning from the dish. Only a few days earlier, a man had whispered to her on the street: "I want to place my dick in *kussik* [your cunt/couscous]." Women explained that the term *kos* is widespread in Egypt, especially among men. If a man shouts "*kos ummak*" to another it is highly insulting, and if a man accepts being spoken to like this he is not regarded as a real man; he should do everything to protect the reputation of the women of his family.[7]

Expressions such as *kos* are a kind of *mi'aksa,* which means harassment of women on the streets (cf. Abouzeid 2002). Women are expected to show modesty by walking fast and straight and avoiding looking into men's eyes or responding to their comments. Comments such as "Your figure is like that of a gazelle" and "I swear by God you are like the moon" are widespread. The people I talked to often complained that *mi'aksa* is becoming increasingly rude, rough, and degrading.

While they live up to expectations of male behavior, men's stealthy sexual comments both violate and affirm the moral idiom of food. The man who whispered *kosi* to me was making an indecent pass with the help of an ambiguous word referring to a dish and to the female sex. His comment expressed the local double gender perception among the lower income strata of Cairo: the moral woman is both elevated and associated with the risk of being sexually too "hot," that is, she is expected to be sexually "hot" but she may be seen as a slut if she shows it publicly. Some kinds of food, such as couscous and candies, have the potential to "spoil" or pollute women's purity, but also restore the balance. The smoothness and shape of couscous represents cultivated, pure femininity, and consequently it has a powerful symbolic charge. Thus, the making of couscous should be understood as the process of making a woman.

Challenging Ideals

It takes a long time to make couscous sweet, smooth, and soft, just as it takes a long time to transform a girl into a proper woman. My assistant, Nuura, reflected on the similarities between making womanhood and making food. She told me that the word *tefour* is derived from *four*, "cooking" (rather overflow, personal communication, Abd el Salam 28 October 2014). Nuura said that the Arabic prefix *bi* means "with" in relation to food. In relation to people, the prefix *te* is used to mean "soon" or "future." However, strictly grammatically, *bi* and *te* are used as present tense markers and to indicate general actions. *Te* is also used as a feminine pronoun in the second or third person (personal communication, Dahlgren 2009). When food is ready to be eaten it is common to say "*ṭ-tabaḫ bifour*," meaning that the food must immediately be removed from the stove, otherwise it will boil over/overflow. The meaning of *el-bint tefûr* is literally "mature" girl, but colloquially it implies that a girl will soon "boil over." The term *el-bint tefûr* is used for girls who are very mature or (too) ready for marriage. If they do not marry in time they are thought to be at risk of engaging in immoral sex. If food is not taken away from the fire it will be destroyed in the same way that a young woman will be damaged if she loses her honor. A "broken" hymen before marriage means that the girl is not only disgraced but she is also impure and unclean. Thus, she is "burned."

Girls help their mothers and other adult women to cook and thus they learn, through images, smells, and textures, the ideals not only of how to cook properly but also how to acquire feminine disposition and appearance. Eating large quantities of food is considered to help create the ideal feminine figure, at least among older women, who value the plump female form (Ghannam 1997; cf. Popenoe 2004). As with the Azawagh women in Niger, a plump woman is considered beautiful, sexually attractive, and marriageable (Popenoe 2004). However, body ideals are constantly changing. Some young women told me that they were not interested in cooking and eating like the older women. Many of these young women said that fatness in women is only considered to be beautiful among the poorest, and most of the young women I met wanted to embody “modernity and success,” which meant having a slim body. The new, slim body stands for modernity and the good life, and it has become a marker of class and superiority today (cf. Skeggs 1997). The young women’s struggle to keep slim may be understood as a challenge by subaltern groups to class inequality in Egypt. Hauwa complained that *śa‘b* girls in general only thought about food and cleaning, but that she was different, thanks to her left-wing radical older brother. Homa’s mother, in turn, complained about her daughter’s thin body while Homa herself thought she had “the perfect modern Egyptian middle-class body,” unlike many other young women in her neighborhood. Slim young women were constantly reprimanded by their mothers and also by other young, stockier women in their neighborhood—often those who had difficulty living up to the new image of feminine success.

Body Modifications and the Ideal Muslim Self

Like cooking, female circumcision and depilation are, for women, linked to Islam. The religious importance of purity and cleanliness in Islam are expressed and learnt in daily tasks, for example through the idiom of food or through the repeated depilation of the female body. When FGM campaigners argue that female circumcision “is not in your religion,” they misunderstand the way in which Egyptian women understand female circumcision to be religiously motivated. This requires a less literal understanding of religion.

The values of purity and cleanliness are central to ideas of the Muslim self and they are manifested through bodily modifications. Here, the trope of sweetness is significant. The term “sweet” is used not only to compliment a woman but also in relation to female circumcision and depilation. Both of these procedures are regarded as sweetening and purifying practices for making proper gender (cf. Ambjörnsson 2004). Women told me that female circumcision makes a girl clean and pure and it is sweet. They also said that depilation paste is called *ḥalâwa* (sweets). A woman with skin as smooth as a baby’s has a “pure body,” the women explained to me. The criteria for an acceptable female body concern not only the surface of the body, which should be smooth and soft, but also the inner parts. Her conduct is also embraced by this discourse. Egyptian women’s use of these tropes echoes the conceptualization of female circumcision in Sudan, where Boddy (1989) found that it was “intended to make women pure (*tahir*), clean (*nazif*), and smooth (*na’im*).”

The opposite of smooth, soft, and pure are uncircumcised women (and men). These people are considered unclean and impure and they are thought to have a foul, unhygienic smell. Um Loi explained: “If you do not do female circumcision, you are not clean and you will always have a bad smell, you will be dirty, just like the boys if they are not circumcised. The cleaning is very important.” Um Sami told me that three bad things will happen to a woman if she is not circumcised. First, she said, there is body odour—an uncircumcised woman has a bad smell when she has intercourse with her husband and “men hate women who aren’t circumcised.” Second, an uncircumcised woman’s cooking smells bad. Third, everyone will smell the woman’s body odor and they will talk about her and say: “This woman has a bad smell.” This is illustrated in the following story, told by Um Karim about her husband’s cousin. Um Karim’s relative Amina was not circumcised when she married. When she had invited her new kinsfolk for dinner they had told her: “We cannot eat your food because you are not circumcised … so you make bad food. It has a bad smell and a bad taste.” The relatives informed Amina that she had to become circumcised as soon as possible and that it was *ḥarâm* to delay it any longer. She did not want to but she finally gave in to their demands and was circumcised by the traditional birth attendant when she gave birth to her first child.[8]

I suggest that bad smells (cf. Almagor 1990) and the bad taste of an uncircumcised woman’s cooked food may be read as a trope for an incomplete woman. An uncircumcised woman is immoral, unclean, and impure and she is not considered a good Muslim. Her body does not have the required female attributes of softness and purity. These tropes are thus important for the socialization of correct womanhood. However, in the above cases it is not the food but the woman who is impure. In the Egyptian context it is clear that an uncircumcised woman is considered to spread odor and that this symbolic pollution is the basis for exclusion (cf. Dellenborg 2007).[9]

Female circumcision is therefore necessary for a woman to be considered clean, pure, and soft. This process is supported by other practices that must be carried out repeatedly, such as the depilation of all body hair. By continuously removing her body hair, a woman achieves purity, as she does through Islamic ablutions. An Egyptian married woman should have no hair on her body except for the hair on her head and her eyebrows, and the latter should be carefully plucked. Depilation of the body is performed with a paste made from lime, sugar, and water, which are boiled into a thick paste (cf. Abd el Salam 1997). To achieve the ideal of a hairless and smooth body surface, women used *fatla* (cotton thread) to pull out facial hair (ibid.).

Women of all ages were shocked when I told them that women in Sweden do not usually remove hair from their faces or arms. They asked if Swedish women at least depilated their pubic hair. I told them that some Swedish women do, but some women just trim the hair with a razor or do nothing to it. Once my assistant interrupted and told the women that I did not understand their question and that Swedish women in fact always used wax. Afterwards, when we were alone, she told me off and explained that the women would find me disgusting and unclean if I explained that Swedish women use razors to remove bodily hair. I was told that men should not have soft skin and that shaving their face, armpits, and pubic hair with a razor gave them a stubbly, masculine appearance. The idea of a woman using a razor was unthinkable because the skin of a woman should always be soft and smooth. When I had a conversation with Um Ali about femininity she immediately began to speak about the importance of being sweet and clean. She explained: “That is why men shave their pubic hair, armpit hair, and facial hair,” and she pointed out the religious dimension of purity and cleanness. When I asked her why men could not use sweet paste like the women, she looked straight at me, aghast, and said incredulously: “Because he is a man!”

Um Karim still remembered her first depilation on her henna night. After the guests had left the home at midnight, her sister depilated all her body hair with *ḥalâwa*. She kept using the word pain (*alam*) when she told me about it. She said it felt as if her whole body was on fire. She ended her narrative with the words: “Women take sadness and pain all their life.” Um Karim said that women had to put up with the pain because the *ḥalâwa* makes them clean and sweet. A woman who has skin as smooth as a baby's has a clean body, she said. Her daughter told me that her first depilation was so painful that she had to break off and continue a couple of days later. She had bled and had skin eruptions but she was nevertheless convinced that depilation was necessary. An elderly woman had taught her to reduce the pain by crumbling incense, mixing it with water, and then rubbing it onto the skin before depilation. After each depilation, she felt free and clean and she described it as the same feeling as one gets on the rare days of rain in Cairo.

Nowadays, it is common for teenagers, with the exception of pious young women, to begin depilation and eyebrow plucking long before marriage. This would have been inconceivable in the past, when unmarried girls were not allowed to remove body hair until their marriage. Um Karim explained that "[nowadays] we think this [depilation] is cleansing for girls," just as female circumcision makes girls clean, pure, and modest. I suggest that young women today are still trying to stay "pure" by incorporating purifying practices into a situation of rapid social change at the same time as they challenge old norms. The young tack between inculcating norms and rejecting them.

In contrast to body hair, a woman's head hair is expected to be long, shiny, and beautiful. Um Mustapha said: "Long hair is essential for a woman; it is to be a woman." Also, Rana told me:

> An Egyptian woman is more beautiful than any other woman in the world, because her face has the features of a Pharaoh. Long hair is important for her femininity and to make her feel different from men. Like cooking….

Long hair is thus understood as quintessentially feminine, just as cooking food is, and both are positively valued. Um Monzir told me the following joke:

> An Egyptian woman had worked as a cleaner for a foreign family. The woman helped the wife to depilate her pubic hair. But, when the woman's husband came home and discovered what had happened, he immediately called the police and shouted that the cleaner had stolen his garden. The police imprisoned the charwoman and asked her about the stolen garden. The woman did not understand anything but she told the police what she had done. The Egyptian police laughed heartily and told her that maybe the best thing for her was to stay in prison until the man's garden had grown up again.

Um Monzir burst out laughing after telling this story and explained that a hairy woman is considered ugly because "she looks like a man." Apart from the reference to correct female behavior, this also suggests the uncleanness of non-Muslims.

Depilation, Islam, and the Need for Purity

When she had finished giggling, Um Monzir became serious and clarified that there are religious aspects of depilation, cleanliness, and purification:

> In *sunnah*, you should be clean. Both men and women should remove their hair to take away the dirt and the smell, to be clean and to be able to pray. This is *sunnah*.

A young Egyptian woman will become an attractive Muslim woman only if she depilates and undergoes circumcision. Depilation also is a public sign that she is sexually active and married. Experiencing the pain of incision, and later, of depilation, reminds her through her senses of her gendered identity. The procedure of hair removal also sensorily recalls the preparation, cooking, and smelling of the sweet paste and the sound when it turns soft; there is the feeling of the paste as it is applied to the body, the sweet aroma, and the smooth and silky feeling of the depilated body. These practices teach women about morality and honor and about how to become pious, Muslim selves. The women are not passive recipients, but actively strive to achieve this highly esteemed identity. Their own will is crucial for excellence.

The women I met spontaneously referred to the Qur'an and to different *aḥadith* to legitimate these feminine ideals. Um Gamal recalled two *aḥadith* about bodily hair to emphasize the importance of depilation for purity and womanhood. The first was about Prophet Mohammed, who met a woman who was completely covered in hair. The Prophet was not sure if the person was a woman or a man, but when she said she was a woman he instructed her to remove her hair. The other *ḥadith* I heard about concerned a woman who did not depilate her bodily hair for 40 days, with the result that God did not accept her prayers because she was not considered clean. These two *aḥadith* show how depilation of body hair is given religious and symbolic significance in relation to the creation of moral womanhood. Um Mohammed explained that the cleanliness achieved through circumcision is the same sort as that achieved through the removal of body hair. Muslims who consider female circumcision to be necessary often legitimate it by referring to religious instructions. Um Loi put it in the following way:

> We have to follow Prophet Mohammed. To take only a little … to be a woman. Not to be cold, not to be hot, to be in the middle. If you cut away everything, you will be cold and maybe your husband will choose a new woman. If you follow Prophet Mohammed, you must go to the doctor, because the doctor cuts moderately.

Women usually referred to various *aḥadith* when they spoke of female circumcision. One such woman was Mama Rawan. She was in her mid-sixties, a divorced mother of one daughter, and she lived in a poor area in a Cairo suburb. She had recently bought religious booklets and *aḥadith*, and one of them dealt with female circumcision and its connection to ablutions, purification, and Islam. Um Mustapha also noted that female circumcision was part of Islam and she referred to an uncommon *aḥadith*:

> A man came to Prophet Mohammed. He was extremely unhappy, since he had huge problems in his life. His wife was not sexually satisfied and he was not able to please her. Prophet Mohammed told him to let him circumcise his wife and thereafter he would always be able to make her happy.

During that time when Lila—a newly married woman in her early twenties, university educated and a member of the political Islamic movement—explained why she understood female circumcision to be an Islamic practice she gave me a book of instructions (Iqraa Charitable Society 1999), which she said would give me a basic knowledge of Islam. The sections on purity and cleanliness are of particular importance to understand female circumcision as purification and as Islamic practice in Egypt. Most Muslims refer to the need for ritual purity/cleanliness before ablutions in relation to male circumcision only. As Popenoe (2004) notes, the body is supposed to be pure, clean, and emptied of all unclean contents before ablutions. Both the inside and the outside should be clean according to the "purifying force of adhering to Islamic rule” (Popenoe 2004: 60) rather than to the Western perception of hygiene. One section, called *ṭâhara*, states:

> Allâh orders us to purify ourselves.
> Tahârah is a necessity for Muslims.
> Allâh loves those who are pure and clean.
> Tahârah is both mental and physical.
> We are to purify our bodies and dresses.
> We are to purify our hearts and souls.
> No prayer is accepted without Tahârah.
> Tahârah can be done in these ways:
> 1. Wudhû’ [ablution]
> 2. Ghusl [bath].
> Tayammum [purification with soil] is done when water is not available. (Iqraa Charitable Society 1999: 12)

The instructions are followed by a quotation from the Qur’an: “If you are unclean, purify yourselves” (Qur’an:5:6). Another section is called *Naẓâfah* (cleanliness):

> Cleanliness is a half of the Imân (Faith).
> A Muslim should keep himself clean at all times.
> He should clean his body and clothes.
> He should keep his house clean.
> He should sleep in a clean bed.
> Islâm teaches us to be clean.
> Islâm teaches us to keep our hearts clean.
> (Iqraa Charitable Society 1999:13)

This lesson also ends with a quotation from the Qur’an: “Truly, Allâh loves those who turn unto Him in repentance and loves those who purify themselves” (Qur’an:2:222). Popenoe clarifies:

> Islam is a highly embodied faith in the bodily obedience it demands of adherents—prostration and fasting; it is also a faith that speaks to the body in the implied meanings it bestows upon the body’s forms, particularly female forms. By requiring ablutions, the emptying of all bodily wastes, and the cleaning of all sexual fluids from the body’s surfaces before every prayer, Islam sends a strong message to its faithful: that the body as the physical icon of the person is most holy and most valued by Allah when uncontaminated by the flows, accretions, and processes of regular physical life. (Popenoe 2004: 60)

Um Mustapha explained the relationship between cleanliness and the degree of excision in circumcision: “You will be extra clean if you cut deep. The *dâya* took away everything. I am very, very clean.” There is strong emphasis on the control and modification of the body in Islam. The women I met extend this religious notion to include female circumcision and depilation. In her construction of a pious self, a woman has to repeatedly perform these practices in order to learn how to behave. Ultimately, the values they instantiate become engraved on the “mind”:

> Islam is a constant attention paid to one’s body. A Muslim upbringing is a training that makes one permanently aware of the physiological side of life. Eating, drinking, urinating, farting, defecating, having sexual intercourse, vomiting, bleeding, shaving, cutting one’s nails. All of this is the object of meticulous prescriptions … of formulas to be recited before, during and after each act. There are ways in which the acts are to be performed, certain gestures to be carried out ….

> (Bouhdiba 1985: 55 in Delaney 1991: 25)

Young Women, Islam, and Female Circumcision

The majority of younger women I spoke to did not connect female circumcision with Islam. Many young women compared female circumcision to plastic surgery, a body modification that enhances beauty. Their views are echoed by many physicians. Salma, for example, told me that female circumcision is essentially a cosmetic operation, but her mother interrupted and said it is an Islamic practice:

> Our Islam tells us to take a little, but not everything. Foreigners refuse to do male or female circumcision, but we do it here because our Islam tells us that we must do it.

Exceptions among young women were those who were strict followers of the Islamic movement, such as Miriam. Miriam regarded female circumcision as an Islamic practice and judged those who did not perform it as *ḥarâm*. Lila, as mentioned earlier, a member of the political Islamic movement, regarded female circumcision as *ḥalâl*, and as a desirable but voluntary act that was weaker than *farḍ* (a must for a Muslim). However, younger women readily shifted position on the relationship between female circumcision and Islam as they explored different attitudes and identities in their pursuit of adult selfhood. Even young women who were close friends could take radically different positions on the issue, thus reflecting different ideas about the direction they felt that modern Egyptian society should take. This makes it difficult to predict the role that female circumcision will play in women's lives and identities in the years to come.

Um Karim's youngest daughter, Nuura, met her friend Lila at university. They became very close despite their different interpretations of Islam and views on life. Female circumcision was an issue on which the friends clearly did not agree. Lila had recently married and she was working through her local mosque as a private religious teacher for women in their homes. Lila was a pious Muslim and she complained that because she dressed in *niqâb*, the state/police did not allow her to work in government offices or institutions despite the fact that she had a university education (cf. Ghannam 2002). Neither she nor her husband came from orthodox religious backgrounds, but both of the families respected the young couple's choices. Lila described her alienation:

> I am not different from other Muslims. Look, I am sitting here with you and I do want to meet people from outside. There is no problem. Many foreigners suppose that people like me are terrorists, but this is totally wrong. How can I kill anybody? I cannot hurt anybody. They do not understand us and do not know us. The only important things for us are the prayers and to be as close as possible to God. The relation is only between you and God.

Lila explained that she dressed in *niqâb* to be as close as possible to God, but also to protect men from the temptation to behave badly; she believed that if men see an unveiled woman they cannot think of anything other than the woman's beauty and they are unable to resist their sexual desire. Nuura countered that she was sure that God could see inside people and she did not worry about the surface of her body as Lila did, although she respected her friend's choice.

Nuura admired Lila, who did not criticize her for taking off her *ḥimâr* a couple of years ago but remained a close friend. Nuura told me that she had been strictly religious for a couple of years and that she had almost married a young orthodox man, but she never told me why she had later abandoned the orthodox path. Nuura had been unaware of the campaigns against female circumcision until some of her university friends told her about free booklets being distributed by an NGO about three years ago. She had read some of these and then begun to reflect on the negative aspects of female circumcision. Nuura talked about her own experience of circumcision:

> I forgot those bad memories. It was a bad experience. But I have not forgotten the shock, not even today. Female circumcision is not useful. I grew up and then I realized it. God created me this way. They did not have to cut me. I do not know why they cut me.

For Nuura, the experience was negative and it left her wondering why her family had inflicted pain on her. Lila, by contrast, was convinced of the religious significance of female circumcision:

> *Ṭâhara* is very important. I do not know why the state is against it; this is not their business. It is the people who should decide…. The prophet said that *ṭâhara* is good for women and necessary for men, but you should not cut too much, because then you cannot enjoy marital life. In order to pray you have to have been circumcised, look in *el kitab el mutaharen* [the book of the purification] for instance.

Making and Resisting Ideal Muslim Womanhood

This chapter has explored different ways of acquiring proficiency in feminine Muslim conduct and appearance. These include education in implicit knowledge, not least through the handling of food. As we have seen, norms are both internalized and reflected upon. Egyptian girls interact daily with their mothers and other older women inside and outside of the household. They are expected to prepare food but they are also supposed to be able to talk about food and "to be like" and "to behave like" well-cooked, sweet, soft, smooth, and pure food. Food preparation is a central practice for making the female body and feminine identity; the body is not simply the passive object of external determining factors. When women talk about and prepare food they are also implicitly referring to female circumcision. *Bilâdi* food communicates ideals of femininity in which morality and purity are integral. Circumcision dramatically inscribes these ideals on a woman's body, as does the depilation that must be repeated throughout life. These practices mean that ideals of feminine beauty and conduct are internalized via the senses and the burden of pain. In the kitchen, women also learn generosity and the importance of being a good housewife for the creation of feminine identity. A woman's body is thus constantly being re-created into a feminine body, and reiterated bodily practices remind and teach her how she should conduct herself and appear. Equally significant in this are the scents, flavors, and consistencies of food, which help inculcate in a woman notions of being as pure as *bilâdi* food.

As Potter (2008) notes, a sense of belonging and social relationships may be forged through shared experiences of various bodily practices. She shows how touch and taste are socialized senses and how the sharing of objects of touch and taste cultivates group identity, including constructions of gender, class, and ethnicity. Couscous is a good example of such an object; the women treat, speak of, and smell the couscous in ways that reiterate feminine bodily ideals. Potter proposes that it is through our senses that we enact, mold, and express ourselves in social relations. Social ties are made between and through our bodies, not only as a means of fitting into a group. Thus, the lifelong molding of femininity is perpetuated via taste, hearing, smell, touch, and bodily movement. In Popenoe's words, we "make our lives meaningful, not only with language, rituals, and works, but also in and on our very bodies" (Popenoe 2004:137).

The young women in my study are becoming increasingly conscious of what they are doing and they deliberately try to improve their skills in achieving what they consider to be female "essence." Um Mohammed often said that if I began to cook more (she meant *bilâdi* food), then I would eventually be transformed into a real Egyptian woman, which recalls Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990). However, as elaborated in the introduction, Mahmood's (2005) reading of the Aristotelian notion of *habitus* as *consciously* embodied practices is more appropriate than Bourdieu's in this context. The women I studied are determined to live up to ideals of femininity and they strive for excellence by repeatedly making, talking, sensing, being, and behaving in ways that cultivate qualities of femininity and Muslim selfhood. The repetitive bodily practices, which begin in early childhood, inculcate dispositions appropriate for womanhood. This echoes Popenoe's (2004) findings in Niger, where both women and men among the Asawagh are aware that they must adopt a particular *habitus* in order to become proper Asawagh Arabs. These are all conscious practices. I suggest that the Egyptian women I worked with treat the body as a medium for the self; the senses both enable awareness of the inner self and mediate its relations to others.

However, gender ideals are not only consciously reproduced, but they are also subjected to negotiation. In this chapter, I have shown the cultural processes whereby meaning and subjectivities are continuously made through processes that are embedded in a social and political world. These processes include the way in which the subject both internalizes and reflects upon prevailing norms (Ortner 2006a, 2006b). These women are certainly active agents in the process of becoming ideal, feminine women. Norms are both internalized and refined. The women want to mold their bodies to approximate "perfection," and if it was not for their own desire it would not happen. However, many young women in today's Cairo are challenging ideals expressed so clearly through the idiom of food—the ideal of the fat female body and the epitomization of femininity as soft, pure, and smooth.

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1 Butler argues that social norms limit but also make possible the rendering of selfhood. However, since each reiteration of gender creation is slightly different, the process may destabilize and transform norms. This enables gender discourses to change through resistance, subversion, or emancipation. The shifts in norms may be minor or major, quite independently of external social change (Butler 1990; 1993; cf. Rosenberg 2005).

2 See also Mauss (1979 [1934]).

3 An open door here symbolizes feminine generosity and social competence, but the women told me that in other contexts it may also symbolize a broken hymen.

4 In conformity with Bloch (1999) I suggest that eating and sharing the same food fuses the bodies together, but eating different kinds of food distances them. Lévi-Strauss (1966) too, discusses the importance of sharing different types of food in forming relationships. Boiled, fried, or unprepared food may be eaten together to form closer ties, while other dishes create more distant social relationships.

5 Couscous is usually served together with milk and icing sugar, and sometimes with raisins, at weddings and at *môlid* (a popular festival celebrating the birthday of a saint or holy man). It may also be served at the *subû*.

6 Boddy (1989: 69) discusses a similar gender division in relation to food in the Sudanese context.

7 In this context, it should be mentioned that the famous Egyptian poet and social critic Naguib Surur wrote a collection of poems that was named *Kos ummak*. This poem was soon heavily criticized and then forbidden.

8 Amina had told Um Karim that she did not feel any change in her sexual relations with her husband after the circumcision was done.

9 Homa told me that the opposite of a good woman is also a *midakkara*. This word suggests a masculine woman, who has a loud voice, beats her brother or husband, walks like a man, and does not depilate her face or care about her clothes, hair, and nails. She has a mustache, thick eyebrows, and hair on her chin: “You are simply not feminine.” Homa told me that she was called *midakkara* by her mother when she was a small girl, since she did not want to behave like a girl.

Chapter 8
Introduction to “In Conversation on Female Genital Cutting”: A Pedagogical Perspective

Victoria A. Castillo

As the following interview with Faith Barton, Goran A. Sabir Zangana, and Maria Frederika Malmström will make clear, female genital cutting (FGC) is a very complex issue for international and local actors, scholars, and activists engaged in addressing that practice. Teaching about FGC in a western classroom presents its own challenges, particularly to students who often only have a superficial knowledge of the issue, if any. In this introduction to Faith Barton’s interview with Goran A. Sabir Zangana and Maria Frederika Malmström, I approach the issue of FGC from a pedagogical perspective and offer some strategies that I have used for teaching about FGC to undergraduate students in gender studies classes in the United States.

I include the topic of FGC in upper-level courses on transnational feminist issues because it provides an opportunity to reveal some of the tensions between international and local approaches to an issue that affects girls and women. I am less likely to address FGC in introductory or lower-level courses because it is a topic that needs more than just a cursory examination, and it is also understood better once students have a strong foundation in gender, sexuality, and feminist issues. In these courses on transnational feminisms, my three main objectives for teaching about FGC are to provide detailed information about the practice, highlight how both international and local actors are addressing the issue, and expose students to debates and conflicts on the issue, particularly among feminists. At the very least, I want students to be familiarized with the topic so that if they encounter the issue again in a different context they will be able to think critically about how it is being presented.

As with any topic taught in a classroom, one of the most important goals of a teacher is to provide accurate and detailed information to the students. Thus, in the case of FGC, I begin with presenting some context on the issue, such as who engages in the practice of FGC, where it occurs, what are the different types of FGC, and the various histories and reasons for the practice. Sources such as UN reports can provide basic facts and useful statistical information on the prevalence of the practice and how it has changed over time. For example, a 2013 UNICEF publication shows that approximately 125 million women worldwide have undergone a form of FGC (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2013, 22). In the case of Egypt, where Maria Frederika Malmström does her anthropological research, 91 percent of Egyptian women have experienced FGC (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2013, 22, 26). These statistical reports can also reveal differences in support for FGC based on education level, wealth, gender, age, religion, and ethnicity. In Egypt, approximately 54 percent of women support the continuation of FGC compared to 58 percent of men, while 56 percent of Muslim women and 22 percent of

Christian women support the practice. In the Kurdistan area of Iraq, where Goran A. Sabir Zangana works, this UNICEF report states that 8 percent of women have undergone the procedure, with 5 percent in favor of continuing FGC. However, in both countries, as women's educational level and wealth increases, support for the practice decreases (United Nations Children's Fund, 2013, 174–80). I take time to discuss with students the value of sources such as UN reports, but also raise questions about what this data exclude or overlook. Students are generally able to recognize that these types of reports are less successful at showing personal stories and explanations about the practice in more localized settings. Therefore, to complement this statistical information, it is important to provide writings or memoirs by local actors as well as examples of histories or anthropological studies, such as Malmström's chapter in this book. These sources can better illustrate the personal and social significance of FGC among individuals in specific communities. In Malmström's essay on Muslim women in Cairo, for example, she shows that the women expressed ideas about how cleanliness, purity, and appropriate femininity play important roles in the practice of FGC (Malmström, 2015). Another value of these types of more nuanced sources is that they can reveal differences in opinion among local actors and how individuals negotiate the social norms around FGC in multiple ways.

When I teach about FGC, I also want to expose my students to the significant debates and conflicts about FGC. One of first issues I discuss is the politics of naming the practice. As the following interview on FGC reveals, there are real political implications to using terms such as "mutilation" or "circumcision" rather than local terms or a more neutral term, such as "cutting." In addition to the conflict over the naming of FGC, I also have students debate the potential implications of using particular frameworks to try to reduce the prevalence of FGC, such as human rights, women's sexual rights, children's rights, legislative, and medical or public health frameworks. For example, one result of a public health approach in certain regions has been the increase in medical professionals performing FGC, which has not coincided with a significant decrease in the practice. This is most obvious in Egypt, where recent studies show medical professionals perform 77 percent of FGC procedures (United Nations Children's Fund, 2013, 7–8, 43–4). On the other hand, a women's rights or human rights framework that conceptualizes "female genital mutilation" as a form of violence against women or even as a human rights violation, as was discussed during the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, can result in some local resistance by groups who do not view the practice of FGC as equivalent to other forms of violence (United Nations Children's Fund, 2013, 8). When international actors rather than local actors emphasize these types of frameworks, tensions can emerge along with accusations of Western imperialism. Thus, one of the most significant debates that I discuss in my class is the critique made by some activists and scholars who are concerned about the ways in which FGC has been sensationalized in the media and in the international community, which has helped to reinforce an ethnocentric and western imperialist perspective on FGC. Many transnational and postcolonial feminist scholars have echoed this concern, not just about FGC, but about other issues as well, such as the use of the veil by Muslim women and dowry murders in India (Mohanty, 1991; Abu-Lughod, 2012; Narayan, 1997). They have argued that many well-intentioned western activists and feminists end up reinforcing a sense of western superiority in their discussions of FGC and other issues when women affected by these cultural practices are represented as complete victims without agency, or as a monolithic group without the recognition of differences. Moreover, they worry that international campaigns often politicize FGC and other sensationalized issues over other concerns, such as poverty or war, that locals may deem more pressing (Mohanty, 1991; Narayan, 1997; Abu-Lughod, 2012).

In order to address these postcolonial feminist concerns in regards to FGC, I have used two main teaching strategies. The first strategy is to discuss how FGC compares to other bodily modification procedures that are more common in the U.S.—breast implants and other cosmetic surgeries, male circumcision, and genital surgeries on transgender and intersex individuals. As the students compare these practices, they are able to examine how culture, gender, and other social norms influence these practices both in the U.S. and abroad. They also consider the role of agency and individual choice, and what choice means in these contexts. A second strategy I use is to show Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar's documentary *Warrior Marks* to give students an example of an early feminist attempt to raise awareness about the issue of FGC. I utilize this documentary in part because most students in the U.S. are familiar with Alice Walker as an author, specifically her book *The Color Purple,* and they assume that because she is an African-American writer and activist, Walker's film will represent an effective form of transnational feminist activism. After we watch the film and talk about some of the positive and negative aspects of the documentary, I then have them read a short critique of the documentary by Seble Dawit and Salem Mekuria, who are African-born activists and scholars working to end FGC. In their op-ed, they accuse Walker of acting like a "heroine-savior" who "portrays the [African] continent as a monolith" and "female genital mutilation as the gender oppression to end all oppressions" (Dawit and Mekuria, 1993, A27). In general, most students are surprised by Dawit and Mekuria's strong critiques, but this provides an opportunity to revisit our discussion of the film in light of these new insights. As we go through each of their critiques of the way in which Walker represents FGC, the students become more aware of some of the tensions and conflicts in transnational feminist activism and the importance of providing a more nuanced and careful representation of FGC and the women and communities affected by it.

Faith Barton's interview with Goran A. Sabir Zangana and Maria Frederika Malmström can also serve as an effective teaching tool because it documents a conversation among individuals involved in FGC research and activism who approach the issue from different disciplinary perspectives, medical and anthropological, and different locations, the Kurdistan region of Iraq and Egypt. In their conversation they discuss some of the important debates on FGC raised above, in particular the politics of naming FGC and the discrepancies between international and local understandings and approaches.

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Chapter 9
In Conversation on Female Genital Cutting

Goran A. Sabir Zangana, Maria Frederika Malmström, and Faith Barton

> Internationally, female genital mutilation has long been the most viable term. It was coined in the 1970s by the American feminist and journalist Patricia Hosken to arouse public opinion. Western and African feminists felt that "circumcision" was a mitigating concept that brought to mind male circumcision and concealed it as gender-based sexual violence against women."
>
> —from Liselott Dellenborg and Maria Frederika Malmström's chapter Kvinnlig omskärelse/könsstympning och mänskliga rättigheter: Att äga sin förändring in Internationella relationer—könskritiska perspektiv (Dellenborg and Malmström, 2013)

> FGM/C is deeply embedded in social norm—woven into all aspects of social, cultural, and political life. Although the practice is a violation of human rights and causes untold harm to the health and well-being of women and girls, it has long been viewed as a cultural necessity.
>
> —from Maria Frederika Malmström et al., UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation-Cutting: Accelerating Change Annual Report 2010

Faith Barton: I'd like to thank both of you for joining me in this dialogue and start the discussion with the question of terminology. Maria, you've written in your work about the conflict surrounding the use of the term "female genital mutilation" as being part of the Western interventionist discourse, one that doesn't necessarily reflect how the practice is viewed at the local level. Ergo, for this discussion here, what do you think would be the appropriate term to use? Female genital mutilation (FGM)? Female circumcision?

Maria Frederika Malmström: I think the term female genital mutilation is very problematic since parents are not intending to mutilate their children; this is something that parents were really upset about in Egypt. It is difficult to find an appropriate term for such a politicized practice as female circumcision, the meaning of which is in such a state of flux. In the field I chose to use their terms, such as *ṭahâra* (purity). The culturally sensitive choice in Egypt is otherwise *ḫitân el-banât* (girl's circumcision), but is at the same time a concept used by activists and policymakers that not all Egyptians are aware of. Female genital cutting (FGC) is better and can be used when talking about it to another audience; it has less stigmatizing connotations.

Goran A. Sabir Zangana: The point that Maria raises in her paper is very interesting. We had a heated debate in Kurdistan about what should the appropriate term be when we started working on the issue. Some people were not happy with "female circumcision" for a few reasons; first, they were arguing that it would be confused with male circumcision, which they regarded as more appropriate and "normal" according to Islamic teachings. Second, they were also indicating that the term "circumcision" would convey a religious connotation that could further enhance the practice. So probably "cutting" is more neutral and better used.

FB: Yes, Maria—to a Western audience, "female circumcision" might signify the same meanings as male circumcision, which occurs under different circumstances and has very different political meanings. So we will use "female genital cutting," FGC for short.

GZ: I agree!

MM: Yes, at the same time male circumcision is also painful and problematic on several levels. It is something that adults are doing against children. In Sweden there is a very interesting debate. Female circumcision is not only considered a mutilation, but is a practice that subordinates women and is totally forbidden, with prison sentences for parents if they decide to let their daughters be circumcised, whereas male circumcision by the vast majority (including state authority/the legal system) is seen as traditional and [part of the] culture.

GZ: True, a similar law was passed in Kurdistan forbidding the practice. The debate in Germany about male circumcision is also very interesting. In June 2012 a court in Cologne banned circumcision for boys following the fact that the procedure resulted in profuse bleeding in a four-year-old boy. Consequently, the public prosecutor filed charges against the doctor who conducted the procedure. So probably the situation with male circumcision is changing as well, where safety and harm prevention will perhaps take precedence over tradition and culture.

MM: The Islamic connotation is very sensitive when you talk to activists and at the policy level. They strongly reject the idea that the practice is religiously motivated. The political argument is that it is not an Islamic practice. But the Muslims in Egypt that I spoke to in lower-income neighborhoods—for them the practice is certainly Islamic.

FB: In your work and experience, how has the conversation around male circumcision influenced understandings of FGC?

GZ: It greatly did in Kurdistan. The immediate mental and cognitive reference by males discussing FGC is to male circumcision; I am not sure about females. But, again, people perceive different functions for the practice in the two genders.

FB: Goran, you mentioned that male circumcision is considered more appropriate and "normal" according to Islamic teachings—do any of the discussions in Kurdistan focus on the experiences of pain in boys and men who have been circumcised as opposed to women and girls?

GZ: I think what Maria has written about tolerating pain is informative here: when male circumcision happens (although sometimes it occurs very early in infancy) it is part of becoming a "man," including tolerating pain.

FB: So would it be correct to say that males interpret FGC using their experiences and understandings of male circumcision as a source of meaning?

GZ: Yes, I think so—males "should" tolerate pain in male circumcision, and some families deliberately do not use anesthesia, though it's becoming more available.

FB: Maria, did you encounter comparisons between male circumcision and FGC in Cairo?

MM: In Egypt it is very interesting—activists and policymakers, or people in general who are against FGC, are not against male circumcision. It is unthinkable. There are a few exceptions, such as the feminists and scholars Nawal el Sadaawi and Seham Saneya Abd el Salam, for example. Also, people within the United Nations (UN) are much more ambivalent—the same problem exists in relation to "designer vaginas" in Europe and the U.S., where FGC is seen as mutilation and designer vaginas are perceived as something that the individual decides. In Sweden, for example, cosmetic vaginal surgery is not forbidden by law; at the same time we have legislation against FGC that says that it is totally forbidden. This is something that my colleagues Birgitta Essén and Sara Johnsdotter have written about—genitals and ethnicity, the politics of genital modification—very important work, where we can see how we, in the diaspora and in global interventions, are *producing* we and them. As they point out: "This is not necessarily an issue of either permitting or banning all forms of genital cutting, but about identifying a consistent and coherent stance in which key social values—including protection of children, bodily integrity, bodily autonomy, and equality before the law—are upheld" (Johnsdotter and Essén 2010: 29).

FB: Maria, your work focuses on the cultural meanings of pain, the embodied experience of individuals, and how hegemonic global powers influence and shape these things. Goran, you've worked with trauma and torture victims.

GZ: Correct.

MM: Yes, I think this is crucial to understand the embodied part of the practice—specifically, body memory. Women could begin to feel and also speak (to me and to elder sisters, but not to mothers, since it is not appropriate) about a pain coming in the lower abdomen years after the practice, and they connected the experience of FGC with childbirth and defloration suddenly only when we began to speak about one pain. This was a surprise for both them and me.

GZ: I agree. Victims of torture reconstruct the meaning of their suffering differently; you do not see a consistent meaning across all victims. Even PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) cannot function as a general umbrella term for all of the sufferings.

FB: In both instances, cultural meanings influence the lived experience of pain—either how FGC is interpreted by those who've undergone the practice, or how torture victims deal with the cultural impact of what they've experienced, often considering it a sacrifice.

MM: If the pain is meaningless in relation to dominant discourses—global interventions, for example—something will also happen with the individual embodied experience and meaning.

> "We believe that work against circumcision needs to be based on 1) knowledge of what the practice does for the people who practice it, 2) an understanding that this group is heterogeneous, and 3) these people's participation. The circumcision has to be understood in its dynamic cultural and political context, which is characterized by internal conflicts that in various manners cooperate with global events." (Dellenborg and Malmström, 2012)

FB: In regards to FGC and this conversation, I'd like to talk about what each of you intend to accomplish with this dialogue—or what aspects you'd like to discuss. We've talked a bit about pain and how women in Cairo experience it, as well as Iraqi people.

GZ: I am very interested in what Maria is working on. My experience with FGC in Iraq/Kurdistan was through international actors rather than local ones; I became aware of the situation through an article in the *Washington Post* when I was in the U.S. as part of a Fulbright program. I started working with a German NGO who conducted surveys and awareness campaigns and I established a group (Doctors Against FGM)—all these shared the single feature of a western-based view of the issue. Even the doctors' group was based entirely on a biomedical model. I am interested in how to explore the complexities that are more rooted in the culture, history, and religion of the society.

MM: I think it is important to see the complexity, to listen to the concerned—not just the local meanings but also how meanings are constantly changing because of global politics and other dynamics. For me, it is extremely important to analyze from the level of the individual body—the embodied experience and the influence of discourses—to all the levels, from local to global: the inculcations of discourses on the body together with lived (relational) experiences. I think it is so, so important that anthropologists and medical doctors are working together for a better understanding of the practice.

FB: Maria, I agree. Power shapes bodies and lived experiences, and hearing the voices of those concerned is vital to informing future actions around the issue. One of the greatest failings of western feminism or western activism abroad is the imperialist/colonialist approach taken. What kind of work has your group done so far in Kurdistan, Goran? Do you provide treatment to girls and women who have undergone FGC?

GZ: We focus on three themes: advocacy, awareness, and research. We were able to pass a law in the parliament to forbid and punish those who do it, media campaigns and other forms of awareness were conducted, and surveys were done in the region.

FB: What about your work with the Joint Programme, Maria? I noted in the report that the Joint Programme made a point of emphasizing the "culturally sensitive" nature of implementation, and I was wondering how this was experienced by the people living in the target countries. Did they also feel it was "culturally sensitive," or were their experiences more similar to the women in Cairo you worked with, who felt that the western interventions were an attack on

Egyptian culture? Goran, what kind of oppositions or conflicts have you encountered in Iraq/Kurdistan?

MM: Yes, this was a difficult one, since I could not control the program; I wrote their annual report and tried to emphasize my analysis of how to work with the practice, how to understand the practice and the various meanings in relation to global dynamics, etc., as well as adding my fieldwork experience and many years of research. I can see their will to use a more holistic approach in relation to the practice, and that they wanted people to own their own change. At the same time, UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) and UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) cannot do what they want in relation to the concerned states where the national elites and politicians may have a totally different approach, or in relation to donors. This is global politics on a very high level, which in the end also means that even if you let the actors in the concerned countries act by themselves without intervention, they may not approach it in a holistic or "culturally sensitive" way but instead ignore local levels of meanings. This relates, of course, to other intricate problems within a country with big gaps between rich and poor, and different understandings of human rights and implementation.

GZ: Of course there are more complex issues around the cultural sensitivity dimension, but I will give you a simple example. When FGC is done in the villages of Kurdistan, they are private "ceremonies" where nobody (at least not the male members) is allowed to participate, and they are usually done secretly. But when campaigners and civil society activists visit those same villages to raise awareness, they are doing it very publicly with photos that have been taken. You can clearly see the shame associated with such an open and public intervention; this, I think, is aggravating the situation rather than helping.

FB: I can understand why. Are the campaigners and activists from Iraq/Kurdistan or other countries?

GZ: Mainly from Kurdistan, but they are going there as the members of a German NGO with an outfit that is different from the local ones. You can clearly see the difference.

FB: So they are familiar with the culture but not known within the local context as such.

GZ: Yes. Maria, I am interested in the plurality of the terminologies you found in Egypt. Was there an explanation for that?

MM: Do you mean, for example, that the "people targeted" used *ṭahâra* and activists used *al khitan*, something many of the people I talked to did not know about? Since many are illiterate and therefore could not read the message on the TV screen or didn't know the concept…it is all about power and different audiences—national and international various messages. It was a mystery to both me and the women why the state presented the practice so indistinctly and why they used such a politically correct but unfamiliar concept if their ambition was to change people's behavior patterns. The state has total control of what is broadcasted—discourses of the state are brought into the homes of people. My questions then and my questions today are: Was the campaign a deliberate action that solely communicates with and seeks to appease different actors in the western arena? Or was it national rhetoric among the Egyptian upper classes? Or was it an attempt to promote "cultural and sensitive upbringing" among people living in lower-income urban areas? Or was it an effort to conceal the unpopular message? Perhaps it was all of these—an attempt to please everybody and balance the interests of the West, the national "big" opposition—political Islamists and Egypt's population? What is clear is that through the film, the Egyptian state further alienated the decision-makers from the people.

FB: That's an interesting point, Goran—is there only one term used in Iraq/Kurdistan?

GZ: The most common is *Khatan* (circumcision).

MM: Interesting—and no one uses *al ginzy*? It is an uncommon term, *et-taświîh el-ginsi* —meaning sexual mutilation.

GZ: No. In Kurdish it is *Khatani Meena* (*Khatan Al-Nisaa'*) or female circumcision. Now the German NGO is introducing the mutilation terminology, and it is becoming increasingly common.

MM: Sigh.

FB: How is that changing relations between the NGO and the villages? You mentioned there is already shame being produced around the topic because of the publicity of their campaign about a very private topic.

GZ: There is a complicated relationship between NGOs (international) and the communities. Traditionally they were regarded as spies—more of the rhetoric used by Saddam Hussein's regime during the 1990s. At that time Iraq was under an international sanction and the health, nutrition, and other services were deteriorating. This represented a magnet for an influx of international organizations into the country. The regime of Saddam Hussein was trying to use them as a source of services and at the same time disseminate the view that they were spies of foreign countries. This description is one of the easiest attack lines against what international organizations do in Kurdistan when someone is not happy with what they do. For instance, one of the arguments against activism with regard to FGC is that the "whole story is fabricated by international organizations to stain the reputation of our nation in the world"!

> The lawyer and human rights activist An-Na'im (1992) argues that without dialogue and understanding of what drives people to violate human rights they cannot be incorporated. (Dellenborg and Malmström, 2012)

FB: My interest keeps coming back to the issue of the women who are experiencing feelings of sexual mutilation and what actions need to be taken to reduce these instances within activist and interventionist work around FGC; also I’m wondering if Goran’s work with Clinical Processing Therapy (CPT) in treating trauma would be appropriate here.

MM: I think it is important to be extremely sensitive when interfering into the intimate bodies of women and men. These women became mutilated not through the practice itself but through the discourses. How to reduce the production of trauma in activist work? That is why I said yes to working with UNFPA and UNICEF. CPT is very interesting, but it needs to be connected to dominant discourses inflicting on the body itself.

FB: Yes! And how to do that, when trauma is inflicted not just through physical practices (or it is not interpreted as being inflicted through physical practices) but through language? That was one of the points I saw possibly connecting in both of your works—though I am not too familiar with psychology and don’t know if an adaptation of any kind of therapy would be appropriate in different cultural contexts.

GZ: I think one of the areas that is often neglected is the sense of shame and guilt in the victim. Some have used CPT with FGC as well. We wrote an article about how to adapt those kinds of interventions to local cultures, but it is more about trauma.

FB: Since language is intimately connected to reproducing and shaping power relations, and since the term FGM is having such an big impact, not just on the political level but on the very personal as well, how to shift the global discourse to be more appropriate and less invasive? For instance, using FGC instead of FGM, as we have done in this conversation.

GZ: Sure, but also trying to put the survivor in the center of the relationship is important—for example, trying to listen to the stories told by the victim and then recognizing those areas in the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of the victim that may need recognition or potentially help. I know this is too psychological but it is important!

MM: Interesting and important point. FGC is better, but at the same time it says nothing if you are talking to people on the local level who are using *ṭahâra* (purification), for instance. If your aim is to change the practice—in contrast to research that is trying to understand the practice in a holistic way and from listening to the multifaceted meanings of the practice (please emphasize research thereafter can be used by activists and policymakers to be able to conduct better work—what I wanted to underscore is that this is not the primary research goal)—local terms may not be useful. At the same time, using the term FGM is very offensive to local people. Goran, you are so right. This is what I tried to do in my research as well—listen to the less dominant voices. But this is something other than working with interventions and campaigns against the practice. I am trying to use different terms in different contexts, but always trying to avoid FGM.

FB: Then the question is how to reconcile the two areas?

GZ: Or maybe see what the victim is calling it and why.

MM: Exactly.

FB: Do you think that this kind of approach needs to be incorporated into interventions and campaigns against the practice?

GZ: Not only that, but also maybe in research (action research).

FB: Maria, you accomplished this in part by working with UNICEF/UNFPA. Goran, you were working with the German NGO and also created the Doctors Against FGM group.

MM: Yes, I think it is a failure from the beginning to use international political terms on the local level. This is what Merry [Sally Engle Merry, author of *Human Rights and Gender Violence*] talks about in relation to human rights. What we call human rights means something on the UN level, but in the implementation activists should use local terms. Translation is key.

GZ: It was interesting what Maria was saying about how different people use different terms. I thought that might also be utilized for “implementation research” or “action research,” where you test those approaches as part of a research project.

FB: Which brings me back to the question—how to do this? It seems the conversation between you two is enabling a dialogue from different fields and practices, but with similar focuses on the individual within the cultural and political context, prioritizing the voice of the victim or individual.

MM: Yes, I think we all need to be aware about translation and movements of political terms.

GZ: I think what is happening is a transfer rather than translation.

MM: Aha! How?

GZ: You are taking the term as it is from one context and applying it to another. I can give you an example. In medicine you have transfer or diffusion, that is a molecule or a subject moving as it is, in its entirety, to another location. Translation is different. There should be some adaptation.

MM: But it can be a slightly different meaning or have another source.

FB: Is that what you are seeing with the human rights language being applied to the local levels of meaning?

GZ: Exactly. It is a diffusion or transfer of ideas. Those ideas do not interact with local context. There as well you have certain power dynamics that derive the diffusion and prevent a translation.

FB: Maria, what do you think? How does this relate to using cultural relativism as you wrote about in your Swedish article?

MM: It is interesting, but I still think that we need to pay attention to both the mediation and the transformation of "universal" concepts.

FB: So going beyond the idea of transfer and focusing on translation is what should be happening? In both cases power is influencing the language.

MM: In the translation process things are happening. For example, in the context of Egyptian feminists whom I have been working with recently, they are using different strategies (for instance, to adapt their work to get funds *and* trying to translate "universal" concepts on the local level), but at the same time these feminists are being produced by the same forces. They are navigating between the global donor community, people targeted, and the new government in different ways, as well as their understandings of so-called universal concepts are constantly being affected and (re-)created by various discourses on different levels. I argue, in line with Lila Abu-Lughod (2010), that the human rights perspective—and other so-called universal concepts—must be tracked in various locals in order to understand how women's and men's rights are exceedingly differentially in play, "paying particular attention to their mediations and transformations" (Abu-Lughod 2010: 2). An elaboration of these concepts, human rights for example, as a social fact includes an analysis of "the way both practices and talk of rights organize social and political fields, producing organizations, projects, and forms of governing as much as being produced by them" (Abu-Lughod 2010: 32–3). This is the same process on every level—if we are going back to the local level of FGC as well. From my recent research, some of the women expressed: "We do not need to say these concepts are from the UN. We need to say: It is right! It is religious! I cannot use CEDAW as a concept when I talk to women."

FB: So your view is that translation is what's happening because meanings are being shaped simultaneously as they are shaping? Goran's idea of transfer implies disconnect—which may be his experience with activist work and campaigns in Kurdistan.

MM: Yes, and the movements of universal concepts mean constant processes of translation that alter, create, and re-create meanings. As Abu-Lughod (2010) points out, we need to ask how human rights [and other universal concepts] make and remake the world. For example, from my recent research: how Egyptian "elite" feminist demands have quickly transformed and how they are trying to navigate in relation to new situations after the uprising/s. They cannot talk only about the status and situation of women, but they have to use another terminology. It is a movement from a woman's issue to "see things from a gender perspective" and an explicit focus on citizenship, which implies equality and rights for all Egyptians.

GZ: I was focusing more on the terms and languages used rather than adaptation of tactics to get funds, for example. The latter is very interesting and may be a better focus to explore the translation process. But again, it is interesting to see who sets the agenda and how the terms are defined. I do not think it is a symmetrical process that does not involve power dynamics.

FB: Indeed—and it seems to me your idea of transfer comes through in the UNICEF/UNFPA report.

MM: For sure, and how even activists are being produced by political forces as well as the receivers on the local level. Think Foucault.

FB: Yes, all the actors involved have influence on each other—for instance, between activists and local it is bidirectional even if it is not equal.

GZ: Or multidirectional.

FB: Yes!

GZ: In the translation concept, there may be no origin or end. You cannot tell who is influencing whom—or at least that is the assumption.

MM: Correct, but some have more power and more money.

FB: Interesting—so for future actions, campaigns, and research on FGC you would recommend a greater concentration on this idea of movement and translation (depending on context, perhaps?) in forming a dialogue and using language?

MM: Yes, that would be fantastic! But I do not think international organizations are at all interested.

GZ: Right, but since we are talking about a process here (a dialectical relationship), don’t you think that it is difficult to say who is more powerful than the other?

FB: Why do you think that is?

MM: Because the international organizations have a certain agenda from the very beginning. They do not want any grey nuances but right and wrong, to be able to implement their campaigns/work, and they depend on donors who want one thing and no dialogue about seeing things from different perspectives. This was one experience I had with UNFPA. I wrote a piece about sexuality in relation to the practice but they could not publish it because it was too sensitive in relation to donors! And also too academic—that is to say, too many nuances, too multifaceted, and no black and white solutions.

FB: But could you say that locals (as opposed to political groups or activists) also have an agenda: keeping their cultural traditions intact? Though I don't believe it would be understood as an agenda on the local level but rather as their way of life (and understanding it's important to listen to local meanings). Perhaps holding onto their culture isn't influencing politics in the same way politics have a definite impact on lived experience, but by continuing to practice cultural traditions like FGC in secret, they are creating sites of resistance to the state. I'm thinking Foucault, and how power produces both docile and resistant bodies.

GZ: Exactly. I do not think that the power relationship is one-directional; the power dynamic here is fluid.

MM: For sure it can be local resistance; from my previous research, these Cairo women of all ages considered the practice to be part of something greater; it represented a sense of belonging. The global politics of female genital mutilation reinforced the practice as a marker, not only of womanhood in Cairo, but also of class, national, regional, and Muslim identity. Hence, female genital cutting becomes a symbol of resistance for the women who oppose the state's politics and western interventions, while it is also important for the formation of national identity and the feminine self. But again, cultures are also in a state of flux. People told me about the difference between the state campaigns of FGC and defloration, for example. They told me that they have, *themselves*, changed the practice on the wedding night to be something private between wife and husband, and not something public—but FGC was something that the state and the world outside did—intervened in intimate private matters, in family life—which they perceived as totally wrong. In Egypt during the Iraq war, FGC became a national symbol among the people I spoke to against the outside world, against what they perceived as cultural imperialism.

FB: To elaborate further, and this I think might connect to Maria's point—the lived experiences of those power dynamics do indeed differ based on social power, money, and political power at the global level. By erasing the voices of local actors from the global discourse, or not allowing them a space, in forming international intervention efforts the power differential is certainly skewed.

Thank you both for speaking with me; I think to conclude, it is important to emphasize the importance of bringing these two perspectives together.

MM: Yes; despite our different disciplines and regional competence we have the same point of departure—connecting the individual body to the global body, and the need for multifaceted analysis and policywork—policywork that has *many* nuances, not like policywork today.

Chapter 10

"I've Had to Be the Man in This Marriage": Claims about Gender Roles and Sexual Practices during Judicial Divorce Cases in Damascus *Shari'a* Court One in 2005–2006

Jessica Carlisle

Nisreen, who is heavily pregnant, has been sitting quietly in Faisal's office for over 20 minutes. She's waiting to begin the second of four scheduled arbitration sessions (*tahkim*) after her husband, Ziad, recently requested a judicial divorce from the Damascus Shari'a (Muslim personal status, or family) court.[1] Faisal and Nasser, the two arbiters appointed by the court to oversee the case, come in and out of the room to check that she's comfortable. I've been chatting with her a bit, but she's understandably tense. Nisreen is 18, but she is already in her third marriage. Faisal and Nasser saw her during the breakdown of her last marriage, which ended in a mutually agreed divorce (through *mukhala'a*). Her first husband repudiated her by *talaq* before their marriage was consummated. Now she is the defendant in a case that is likely to lead to her being divorced for a third time.

Eventually Ziad arrives, half an hour overdue. He ignores Nisreen when he enters the office. She rolls her eyes at me. Last week Ziad explained that he strongly suspects that the child Nisreen is carrying is not his. Faisal and Nasser dismissed this accusation, but Ziad now insists that at the very least Nisreen married him illegally. Following any form of divorce from a consummated marriage, a wife is obliged to observe a waiting period (*'idda*) during which she is legally prohibited from remarrying. This usually lasts for three months. Ziad claims that although he and Nisreen married in court after the completion of her *'idda*, they contracted a customary (ᶜ*urfi*) marriage 30 to 40 days after her second divorce. Furthermore, he claims that he kissed her and held her hand while they were left alone on the same day.

Nisreen retaliates by claiming that what Ziad is describing is the occasion on which they became engaged. She insists that although her father was present, he and Ziad only discussed the prospect and practicalities of marriage. She persists that nothing more was said. Moreover, she and Ziad were never left alone together before their court-contracted marriage.

Angrily, Ziad perseveres with his principal complaint that Nisreen is immoral. Faisal assures him that kissing and holding hands are not that serious a matter. However, Ziad adds that after they married she threw kisses at his brother-in-law. He also says that he was misled in being reassured that she was a virgin before they married. He asks rhetorically: "I just have one question. If someone has been married three times, is it possible that they are not at fault? Can it be true that the first [husband] was a liar, the second a cheat, and the third … I don't know what?"

Marriage and Divorce under Syrian Personal Status Law: Legislation and Practice

Sitting in on judicial divorce sessions in Damascus in 2005–2006, I often observed spouses making claims about their husbands' and wives' inappropriate gender and sexual behaviors in the hope of winning court-appointed arbiters over to their side of their marital dispute. What was at stake as spouses told these stories was not the divorce itself—which the court issued routinely when presented with persistent claims—but the burden of the financial cost of ending the marriage, which was set by the arbiters at the end of the process.

The legislation of personal status (broadly family) matters in Syria is organized along sectarian lines.[2] Law 59/1953 (amended by Law 34/1975) sets down the basic legal parameters of a Muslim marriage. This legislation is described in its preamble as having been drafted in order to simplify the application of the Shari'a in the courts and codifies a selection of Islamic legal interpretations on matters such as the age of marital consent, polygamy, child custody and guardianship, and inheritance.

Law 59/1953 obliges husbands to agree to pay their wives a dower (*mahr*). The amount of *mahr* is negotiated between the spouses (in reality, usually between their families) and, in 2005–2006, was usually divided into two portions: one paid, or owing, at the start of married life and the other part due in the event that a husband dies or divorces his wife.[3] The law allows marriages to be ended in three ways: through the husband pronouncing *talaq* (repudiation), which, when it becomes final, automatically entitles the wife to the full amount of her as-yet-unpaid *mahr*; by a *mukhala'a* agreement between the couple, which has immediate effect and in which the wife usually gives up her claim to *mahr*; or, through the granting of a judicial divorce, predominantly on the grounds of *shiqaq* (discord), in which the allocation of the *mahr* is left up to the court.[4]

Articles 112–15 of Law 59/1953 empower the court to issue a judicial divorce if the claimant can show that there is discord (*shiqaq*) in the marriage.[5] In practice, this simply requires a claimant to persistently insist that the marriage is intolerable. The law further states that if the husband is solely or mostly at "fault," then an irrevocable divorce should be issued (with the assumption that the wife will receive her *mahr*);[6] if the wife is fully or partly to blame, the arbiters should decide on her return of her *mahr* "in full or in part."[7] There is consequently an incentive for spouses not to be found most at fault for a judicial divorce, so they can avoid too much of the financial burden in the settlement imposed by the arbiters.

The ease with which the Damascus court issued judicial divorces in reference to this legislation was unusual in the MENA at the start of the millennium, given the additional factor that divorcing wives were receiving at least some of their *mahr*.[8] Similar legislation was passed in Morocco under the reformed Mudawwanat al-Usra (2004), although it is not clear to which spouse's financial benefit the courts have been implementing it in individual cases; legal reform in Egypt under Law 1 (2000) enabled wives to demand a divorce from the court, but on the condition that they returned all of their *mahr*, no matter the circumstances of their married life.[9] In other legal systems, wives faced considerable difficulties gaining judicially ordered divorces from the courts.[10]

As a result, while *talaq* and *mukhala'a* divorces during my fieldwork were effected directly between spouses or their lawyers and were invariably rubber-stamped by the court, claims for judicial divorce made considerable demands on the legal system. Based on allegations of discord in the marriage, these cases had to be assessed by professional arbiters. The arbiters, who were always experienced male lawyers, usually described the process to litigants as constituted of four phases: an attempt to bring about reconciliation (*sulh*) between the spouses, a frank discussion of their marital problems, a decision about whether divorce should be granted, and an attribution of blame for the breakdown of the marriage, reflected in what portion of the *mahr* the husband must pay. Arbiters told litigants that their report was binding on the judge. During my observation of cases, wives—whether they were the claimant or defendant—were all divorced by the court and awarded between 40 percent and 100 percent of their *mahr*. As a result, husbands could save as much as 60 percent of what it would have cost them to divorce by repudiation, while wives could be confident of receiving some financial settlement.

Telling Tales: Arbitration of Judicial Divorce Claims in Damascus

I was given permission to attend judicial divorce sessions for 10 months during 2005–2006 by a judge who also allowed me daily access to his court.[11] I made handwritten notes during the sessions and was introduced to litigants and their families as a researcher. Although I was occasionally a source of curiosity to the visitors and clients of the four arbiters whose sessions I regularly attended, Faisal and Nasser became less formal in their interactions with me over time and encouraged me to hang around after the day's sessions were over to listen to them discussing the cases. The ease with which I was able to access research permission from the Ministry of Justice indicated the lack of politicization around personal status issues at the time. However, my presence in the court was monitored by what I assumed were the security services, and although gender and sexuality were not overtly politically contentious issues, other subjects came up during daily interactions in Damascus which I was cautious about discussing.

During this time, the central Shari'a courts in Damascus employed 10 arbiters working in pairs in judicial divorce cases, all of them practicing lawyers. The majority of the arbitration sessions that I observed were held throughout day Saturday in Faisal's office, which was located in a small house with a traditional plan in a poor, largely Sunni suburb. The house had once been Faisal's family home, but for some time he had been using it solely for his legal practice. There was a small kitchen on the ground floor, which Faisal kept stocked with food and drink for his visitors. A children's swing and a plastic bicycle were often left in the courtyard in which spouses, their families, and occasional visitors could often be overheard talking from the main office. Many took the opportunity to lobby the arbiters during the frequent cigarette breaks in between sessions. Some interrupted sessions by barging in or becoming involved in a fight. The arbiters sometimes had to physically intervene in scuffles.

Nasser (the main instigator of the cigarette breaks) and Faisal had been working together as arbiters for over a year when I first met them, long enough to have developed an easy working relationship in which Faisal tended to do most of the talking. Although they sometimes differed in private as to the significance of some aspects of the session's stories, they gave the appearance of unanimity during the sessions. In order not to forget important parts of what they heard, Faisal wrote several pages of notes throughout the day, which he and Nasser used to jog their memories during their final discussions of the cases. These notes were private and were never seen by the court.

Spouses and their relatives, who knew that the sessions had serious financial ramifications, vigorously contested appropriate gender roles and sexual propriety during the judicial divorce process. Although Faisal and Nasser were receptive to the fact that marriages had broken down, they sought coherent explanations for what had gone wrong on which to base their final recommendations to the court. Wives and husbands knew this, were aware that their claim would be harmed if they could not substantiate their rejection of their marriage in more than emotive language, and usually responded to the place, situation, and context (Hall 1992) of the judicial divorce sessions by making the case that their spouses had deviated from reasonable gender or sexual behavior, referring to three frames of reference: legislation, dominant social norms, and personal feelings.

Spouses' behaviors during these sessions, consequently, vividly illustrated the ways in which individuals attempt to make sense of what has happened to them (Kearney 2002) through narratives that "are shaped by their listeners" (Andrews et al. 2008). Faisal and Nasser participated in the construction of these narratives by intervening through asking questions, commenting on what they had been told, and changing the topic under discussion. Spouses and their families both acceded to these interventions and resisted them. While the arbiters enjoyed authority to encourage and dissuade narratives based on their status as professional men, their association with the court, and their attendant power to issue a ruling, they nevertheless told spouses that they required explanations "in their own words" and frequently gave conversational ground to (both female and male) spouses and their kin. As a result, spouses and their families had considerable scope to use, negotiate, and select legal rules and dominant norms while explaining the failure of their marriages.

My analysis of these narratives subsequently identified key themes (Polkinghorne 1995), both in terms of what people said about the content of their marital experiences and in terms of how they rationalized these descriptions in reference to society, religion, and the law.

The Anthropology of Gender Roles and Sexual Practices in the MENA

Recent anthropology has extensively analyzed the tensions that can arise as a result of disparities between ideals of the family and the day-to-day realities of family life throughout the MENA. This work has highlighted the choices and behaviors of individuals within kin networks during their negotiation of state, legal, and socially dominant norms about the family. Three scholars, in particular, have concentrated on how Arab women in the MENA respond to ideals about gender behavior and sexuality. These studies emphasize how women's positioning—within their extended family, in terms of their marital status, with regard to their socioeconomic status, given the kind of political system they are living in, etc.—is a factor in their choices and attitudes towards their intimate relationships. Women are shown to create their own personal rationales for remaining in, or rejecting, marriage.

In her study of contemporary heterosexual relationships in the UAE and Egypt, Frances Hasso highlights the ways in which individuals respond with a plurality of sexual and marital practices to state policies aimed towards the promotion of national development (Hasso 2011). She argues that, although legislation is framed as being implemented to protect women, state personal status law, in particular, has been passed, and is enforced, by governments in an attempt to regulate family life for optimum political benefit. In reaction to this, individuals form relationships outside of the parameters set by the law by entering into out-of-court, *ᶜurfi* marriages, often in reference to social or religious norms that are not sanctioned by state law as validating marriage. Hasso's exploration of consensual, non-marital sexual relationships outside of state regulation consequently highlights possible tensions between state-sponsored norms and lived realities, as people "opt out" of the state-approved model of marriage.

Suad Joseph stresses the ways in which the family is influential in socializing its members and fosters a sense of obligation between kin. Her work emphasizes the primacy of the "family of origin over the family of procreation," noting, however, that individuals "have often resisted, constructed alternatives, or created networks that crossed the boundaries of family, neighbourhood, class, religion, ethnicity, and nation, emerging with notions of self that, while privileging relationality, are quite hybrid" (Joseph 1999). People in the Muslim majority MENA are, she says, embedded in relationships that both support and restrict them as individuals.

Joseph broadly characterizes MENA family dynamics as relationships of *patriarchal connectivity*, through which individuals have a "sense of responsibility for and to others," experiencing "self as an extension of others and others as an extension of one's self" (Joseph 1999). Although not quashing individualism, connectivity "entails cultural constructs and structural relations in which persons invite, require, and initiate involvement with others in shaping the self" (Joseph 1999). She argues that in particular, the "connective patriarch may view his wife (wives), sisters, junior siblings, and children as extensions of himself [… and] may speak for them, make decisions for them, read and expect to be read by them" (Joseph 1999). Women and children respond to this expectation in complex ways, in part by expecting their own needs to be anticipated through connectivity. Joseph concludes that, for men and women, "[m]aturity may be signalled in part by the successful enactment of a myriad of connective relationships" (Joseph 1999).

Martha Inhorn interrogates in more detail what specific expectations spouses may have of one another in Egypt and how they play out in day-to-day interactions. Her findings expand on Joseph's work by illustrating how connectivity works to maintain relationships that might be seen as defective according to the law or idealized social standards. She argues that social ideals about the basic conditions that must be satisfied in order for a marriage to succeed amongst the Egyptian urban poor "often diverge markedly from social realities" (Inhorn 1996). According to the ideals, a wife in this socioeconomic stratum should expect to cook, clean, bear children, take care of the children, budget, be polite and acquiesce to her in-laws, allow her husband to stay out with his friends, avoid quarrels, remain attractive, and agree to a reasonable expectation of sexual intercourse (Inhorn 1996). A husband should provide financially for the family, be willing to travel to find work (if necessary abroad), allow his wife to visit her family, minimize interference from his own family, be emotionally supportive, limit his social activities outside of the home, avoid "bad" company, only request a reasonable amount of sexual intercourse, and not marry a co-wife (Inhorn 1996). However in practice, "women's expectations of marriage are different—and, in fact, less—than what the institution of marriage should and could be for them under ideal circumstances" (Inhorn 1996).

Inhorn notes that in reality couples make compromises for the sake of their marriages and will tolerate marriages that diverge from the legal and social ideal. Women reported that if there were serious problems in a marriage they were likely to be caused by the husband's character, love failing to develop between a couple after their wedding, the interference of extended family, sexual incompatibility, poverty, and either infertility or having too many children (Inhorn 1996). Inhorn concludes that this short, non-legalistic list of marital troubles suggests that there is a drift from "traditional marital ideals" towards "conjugal connectivity" amongst poor urban Egyptians (Inhorn 1996). She found many couples during her research in which spouses chose to overlook normative failings in their marriages for the sake of remaining in a loving, supporting relationship.

Measuring Marriage According to Legal, Social, and Personal Standards

Spouses in Damascus seeking judicial divorce were no longer willing to overlook the gap between the realities of their own unhappy married lives, and legal and dominant social definitions of a functioning marriage. In the absence of a connectivity that made their marriages worthwhile, these spouses presented a range of arguments in support of their claim that the arbiters should both divorce them and excuse them from the connected financial cost. The arbiters allowed plenty of time to listen to both spouses, inviting spouses' friends and families in as witnesses and also occasionally accommodating the involvement of their lawyers.

During the sessions, spouses and their supporters made multiple claims that gender and sexual norms had been broken, both in the legal articulation described by Hasso and the social articulations discussed by Joseph. In this process, both claimants and defendants tried to maximize their arguments by giving their interpretation of law and mainstream social norms the most advantageous spin. Spouses, their kin, and their lawyers consequently haggled with the arbiters about the meaning of specific articles in the personal status legislation determining husbands' and wives' rights and responsibilities, and debated what gender and sexual behavior was socially acceptable within a marriage.

In addition, spouses often tried to convey their personal experiences of the failure of conjugal connectivity in their marriages, describing their attempts to excuse and ameliorate bad behavior from their spouses in the past, charting their perceptions that their spouses had persisted in failing to conduct themselves appropriately sexually and/or in their role as a husband or wife, and explaining why the resurrection of conjugal connectivity was now an impossibility.

Marital Connectivity as an Ideal: Attempts at Reconciliation

The court, in the persons of the arbiters, and the legal process itself foregrounds marital connectivity through pursuing attempts to reconcile couples during the sessions. This is mandated by Law 59/1953, which obliges arbiters to attempt to mediate reconciliation between couples before considering a ruling on the divorce.[12] In support of these attempts, there is a powerful and widely acknowledged social norm in Syria, as there is across the Muslim majority MENA, that both husbands and wives should do their utmost to preserve their marriages. As a result, spouses had to negotiate this norm carefully if they were to secure the arbiters' support.

During the sessions, arbiters supported the ideal of reconciliation by evoking religious and social norms, often illustrated with quotations from the *aḥadith* and the Qur'an, and references to "common sense" ideas about the importance of marriage, the sanctity of the family, and proper conduct between married couples. They also discussed the value of love, loyalty, and affection in marriage, and often urged men to show more warmth towards their wives and wives to be more understanding of the pressures borne by their husbands. However, in private, Nasser and Faisal were realistic about the likelihood that they could bring about reconciliation. On several occasions, they told me that most spouses were so determined to divorce by the time they came to court that they had no intention whatsoever of remaining in their marriages.

As a result, although the ideal of marital connectivity was most overtly raised during discussions about the importance of both wives and husbands trying to preserve a marriage, in practice reconciliation was not so much mediated as presented as the dominant norm. The arbiters were aware that on the occasions that there was reconciliation between spouses it was largely the product of influences outside of the sessions, and that insistent claimants would inevitably be granted a divorce. They were particularly skeptical about what they regarded as empty professions of commitment to reconciliation, since spouses often seemed to behave strategically during these discussions, hoping to bolster their cases that they were not at fault for the marital breakdown. However, in emphasizing the importance of considering reconciliation, the arbiters fulfilled the procedure mandated by the personal status legislation. They also set the stage for discussions during the remainder of the sessions about what happens when connectivity fails.

Failing under the Law: Invoking Legal Rules

The law provided the framework for spouses' subsequent complaints about their marriages by setting out baselines for what wives and husbands can expect from one another. Article 1 of Law 59/1953 describes marriage as a contract "to establish a bond for shared life and procreation." The law adds that the rights established in the contract are the wife's entitlement to *mahr*, a reasonable standard of housing and financial maintenance, mutual entitlement of inheritance, and the legitimacy of any children.[13] In addition, the law states that wives will lose their entitlement to maintenance if they leave the house without "lawful justification" against their husband's wishes,[14] while husbands can theoretically be subject to claims for divorce if they are impotent or have a severe mental health problem, are absent or imprisoned, or fail to pay maintenance.[15]

In reality, wives rarely petitioned for narrowly defined forms of judicially ordered divorce in a legal system in which judicial divorce on the grounds of discord dominated petitions to the court. Nevertheless, the legislation's provisions regarding appropriate gendered and sexual behavior provided wives, in particular, with legitimate legal complaints to present to the arbiters. In these circumstances, the accused spouse generally defended himself by pleading special circumstances or arguing that the law should not be strictly applied.

This was the dynamic during the case brought by Souad, the wife of Hakim, who could only provide one room for both herself and her co-wife to live in. She told the arbiters that she had married Hakim and moved into his small home while he and his first wife were separated. Hakim subsequently reconciled with his first wife and the woman moved back into the marital home. Souad complained during the sessions that she had been forced to share a bedroom with her co-wife. Co-wives are entitled to separate accommodation under Article 67 of Law 59/1953, but Hakim responded that he could not afford to rent a second home. Faisal and Nasser expressed some sympathy for his predicament, although the divorce was inevitable, given Souad's persistence and the legislation.

Similarly, Samir petitioned for a judicial divorce after Iman took him to court to claim unpaid maintenance and her prompt *mahr*. By opening this case he prevented her maintenance claim from reaching a court ruling, but the arbitration sessions became another forum for Iman to air her complaints about his failure to adequately support her. During the sessions, Nasser and Faisal had explored a wider range of issues, including Samir's temper, the couple's childlessness, and Iman's family's interference in the relationship. However, Nasser's estimation that Samir did not earn very much became a point of reference during his discussions with Faisal about what Iman's family had to say during the process. Her paternal uncle had admitted that his niece had only begun to complain about Samir's wage and the state of their home shortly before she left him. He had nothing damning to say in response to Samir's challenge: "Did she ever complain that I was irritable (*'asabi*) or violent towards her?"

In response to an accusation by Iman's family friend that he was mean, Samir also asserted that he provided the room with a television, blankets, and a stove. Iman's maternal aunt countered his argument. A tall, soft-spoken woman, she said that she hoped that the couple might reconcile, but that it was difficult, and she appealed to the arbiters: "If a man takes a wife, he's responsible for her. I'm telling the truth, right? Tell me if this isn't so."

Finally, after unsuccessfully trying to persuade him to rent new accommodation, Nasser and Faisal awarded Samir his divorce and ruled that he should pay Iman half of her S£400,000 ($8,000) *mahr*. While coming to this decision, they expressed sympathy with Samir's financial predicament and noted that Iman was not complaining of violence, only of not having had any children and of poor housing. In attributing blame for the divorce, they consequently exercised their discretion in deciding what weight to give Samir's legally defined failure to adequately provide as a husband, given his economic circumstances and the dynamics of his marriage.

Iman, although she was the defendant, seemed relieved, having previously made it clear that she had had enough of him: “He’s not a bad man, but he is irritable and disrespectful.” Although both she and Souad referred to their legal right to a reasonable level of domestic comfort, they were also both arguing that their husbands’ insensitivity to their needs had been fatal for their marital connectivity.

Going against Social Orthodoxy

The most common arguments husbands and wives made for the absence of marital connectivity was that it was made impossible by spousal behavior diverging too far from gender norms governing marital life. Usually, wives and husbands would complain both that their spouses had unforgivably transgressed acceptable gender behavior and that they were indifferent to the impact that this had on those closest to them. However, the boundaries of acceptable behavior were contestable. This was evident during arguments between spouses, supported by their respective families, about what constituted transgressive, flirtatious behavior. Husbands sometimes claimed that a good wife would be less friendly in the company of other men, while wives occasionally insisted that husbands’ long absences from the home were suspicious. Accused spouses were likely to agree that sexual fidelity was obligatory in a marriage, but counter-argue that in their case the accusation of impropriety was unjustified and unreasonable, since it was a restrictive misreading of their lifestyle and personality.

Breakdowns in conjugal connectivity were often attributed to other disparities between spouses’ socializations and their subsequent expectations of married life—in particular, regarding the level of commitment and selflessness husbands and wives should make in order to maintain a marriage. Spouses frequently complained about their in-laws, arguing that their involvement was too much for the marriage to bear. Female claimants often complained that they were forced to live in close proximity to in-laws who treated them badly, while husbands contended that their in-laws constantly interfered in their married lives. Another frequent source of dispute was financial, with wives complaining that their husbands were either too lazy to earn a living wage or mean with money. Husbands might retaliate by accusing their wives of being too free with the household income, poor housekeepers, or indifferent to them or their children.

The arbiters’ responses to these arguments often acknowledged that the definitions of what husbands and wives should be expected to do for one another were debatable. During the course of the four arbitration sessions, as spouses had time to explain their positions and their family and friends contributed as witnesses, the arbiters were open to altering their evaluations of individual spouses’ characters and the dynamics between them. The arbiters’ understanding of who was at fault when a marriage had broken down was consequently orientated around a core sense of the legal and social norms related to gender and sexuality, with room to exercise their discretion in response to the circumstances of individual cases.

Although it was never a good thing for them to regard a husband as “weak,” Faisal’s and Nasser’s appraisals of women as “strong” could imply either approval or criticism. During one session a despairing wife stated that her husband had so utterly failed to fulfill his role as a husband, or to maintain marital connectivity, that she had “had to be the man” in her marriage.

This complaint simultaneously implied a gender norm that should have made her in some ways dependent on her husband and overtly asserted that she had chosen to reject and subvert this norm by taking control of her household. She was both granted her divorce and given a considerable amount of her *mahr*.

The Personal Experience of a Breakdown in Marital Connectivity

Perhaps the starkest examples of the breakdown of conjugal connectivity were those in which marriages had involved domestic or sexual violence. It was during sessions involving allegations about domestic violence that the arbiters, on behalf of the state legal system, could perhaps be seen to assert their authority to define appropriate gender and sexual behavior, in the absence of effective support from the law and in the face of contradictory claims about the dominant social norm.

Wives were rarely able to bring a legal case against their husbands in the criminal courts under these circumstances,[16] and a spectrum of social attitudes towards violence in the home was voiced during my fieldwork. The arbiters consequently dealt with such claims in reference to the personal experience of the claimant, religion, and morality, rather than invoking criminal law or referring to widely held social attitudes. Husbands were frequently reprimanded for having used violence against their wives and all of the arbiters I observed cited religious texts in forbidding men to slap, hit, kick, or in any other way abuse their spouses. Nasser almost unfailingly asked female claimants if they had been subject to domestic violence during their marriages, even if they had not explicitly mentioned the issue.[17]

Arbiters were less comfortable discussing allegations of sexual abuse, although they were attentive to claims that spouses were disinterested in one another sexually, which might have relevance to a legal claim about impotence, and would ask women in general terms if their husbands expected anything sexually “unnatural.” Appearing to anticipate the difficulty of discussing their marital sex lives, many spouses demonstrated caution when making accusations that the lack of connectivity in their marriages had been caused by their spouse’s inappropriate sexual behavior—usually a wife’s alleged frigidity or a husband’s sexual brutality. Moreover, the arbiters joked about the only husband who claimed that he had been the victim of his wife’s domestic violence during my observation of the sessions.

The arbiters also found it challenging when wives were not able to clearly articulate how they felt about the domestic abuse they had experienced or seemed unable to fully separate themselves from their violent husbands. Faisal developed doubts about a young, working-class wife who claimed that her wealthy, middle-class husband’s domestic violence had caused her to lose their unborn baby. Faisal and Nasser jokingly called the couple, both well dressed, young, and attractive, “Romeo and Juliet.” The wife was unable to give much detail about domestic events or the speedy deterioration of what her husband described as the “passion” in their marriage. While the arbiters both interpreted her inability to explain what had gone wrong as indicating that she had “something to hide,” my feeling was that she was intimidated by her husband’s involvement in the sessions. Both Faisal and Nasser also had doubts about the husband, following several angry outbursts during the sessions. In the end they awarded the wife half of her *mahr*—S£200,000—believing both to be culpable for the meltdown in marital connectivity.

Although husbands accused of having assaulted their wives either completely denied it or argued that they were provoked and/or had not been particularly violent, within the sessions Faisal and Nasser invariably imposed their authority in evaluating to what extent there had been abuse on a case-by-case basis. Despite the challenges arbiters experienced in dealing with cases in which conjugal connectivity was said to have been destroyed or severely damaged by domestic or sexual abuse, all of the wives who made this claim were both granted their divorce and received at least a percentage of their *mahr*; a few wives were given all of it.

Conclusion: An Uncertain Future

The discussions that took place during my observations of judicial divorce sessions confirm Inhorn's findings that lived realities within many marriages do not necessarily reflect legal categories or political and social ideals, and suggest that it is in the absence of conjugal connectivity that these failings are likely to become intolerable.[18] However, as Inhorn points out, assertions about normative standards regarding gender and sexuality are often contestable, and the boundaries of what behavior can be tolerated within a functioning marriage are pliable. As a result, spouses reified some normative standards, discounted the significance of some normative lapses, and appealed to the transcendent importance of marital connectivity, as described by Joseph, in which spouses should anticipate and be attentive to one another's needs. The intermeshing of competing claims that spouses' gender and sexual conduct broke legal rules or deviated from dominant social norms, with the complaint of an absence of connectivity, created a space in which spouses could debate what husbands and wives could reasonably expect from marriage.

Studying judicial divorce cases in Damascus, therefore, both extends knowledge about marital relationships in the MENA, through analysis of how spouses explain the breakdown in connectivity during a dispute, and increases understanding of how the state legal system responds. The arbiters' receptivity to what spouses and their kin said had tangible effects in the financial orders that were finally issued in each case. The arbiters' intervention in these disputes might, consequently, be argued to have temporarily set down red lines about what gender and sexual behavior was and was not considered appropriate by the state before the outbreak of the current war.

It is impossible, in conclusion, not to speculate what narratives will be given a hearing following the end of the current devastating conflict in Syria. In the aftermath of seismic and traumatic political change, Syria's current personal status legislation may be associated with Assad's brutal regime and perceived as embodying misguided interpretations of Islamic law. Syria's unique understanding of judicial divorce may, consequently, come under politicized criticism and may not, subsequently, survive future legal reform.

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1 Articles 112–15, Law 59/1953.

2 There are separate personal status laws dealing with family and inheritance matters for the Muslim, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Catholic (Roman Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Maronite, Chaldean and Latin), and Protestant communities. Muslim personal status Law No 59/1953 includes legal rules specific to the Druze community, such as the non-recognition of polygamous marriages. There are separate *sunni* Muslim and Druze family courts, while the different Christian churches have *ruhi* courts.

3 These legal and social practices cannot be assumed to have general continuity, given that at the time of writing Syria is two years into brutal conflict.

4 For a more detailed description of divorce provisions in Law 59/1953 see Carlisle 2007a.

5 Article 113:1, Law 59/1953.

6 Article 114:2, Law 59/1953, amended by Law 34/1975.

7 Article 114:2, Law 59/1953, amended by Law 34/1975.

8 Ramadan (2005) finds that the Shari'a appeals court in Israel has ruled that judicially divorced women should, in principle, receive all or some of their *mahr*, unless they are fully responsible for the marital breakdown.

9 See Carlisle 2013; Sonnerveld 2011.

10 Welchman 2007.

11 I had previously been granted a research permit by the Ministry of Justice under the aegis of the Institut Francais du Proche Orient.

12 Article 114:1, Law 59/1953.

13 Article 59 and Articles 65–70, Law 59/1953.

14 Article 73, Law 59/1953, amended by Law 34/1975.

15 Articles 105–10, Law 59/1953.

16 A few wives had reports from hospitals or branches of the police testifying that they been assaulted, but these did not perceptibly change the way in which the arbiters worked during the sessions.

17 Although the term “domestic violence” was never used by the arbiters, they would explicitly ask wives and their relatives if husbands were bad tempered or had been violent during the marriage.

18 See Carlisle 2007b for a judicial divorce case in which connectivity was absent between the wife’s family and the husband, resulting in a divorce.

Chapter 11

Negotiating Courtship Practices and Redefining Tradition: Discourses of Urban, Syrian Youth

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This chapter will look at the way that urban youth negotiate local norms concerning premarital relationships and courtship practices in contemporary Syria, focusing on how they are stretching the limits of gender interaction in order to find a suitable person to marry. In the past five decades the everyday life of youth in Syria has been affected not only by internal influences, including modernization programs and rapid urbanization, but also by external influences such as globalization. In addition, discourses inspired by the Islamic revival have gained more influence, and the role of Islam as an important social and ideological force in Arab societies such as Syria has been rising (Sparre 2008, 3; Khatib 2011). These varied influences have impacted local marriage practices, and young people are increasingly upholding the companionate marriage ideal and finding their own partners (Hamon and Ingoldsby 2003; Tekce 2004; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Hart 2007; Padilla et al. 2008).

Yet in describing courtship practices, young people in Syria often use a discursive framework that emphasizes holding onto local traditions (*taqālīd*). Therefore, in this chapter we will pay particular attention to how young people's views concerning courtship practices are articulated by deploying local discourses of Muslim cultural authenticity. It is important to note that local discourses of cultural authenticity are often more about re-inventing tradition in relation to the Other—in this case, the West—rather than actually preserving it (Hobsbawm 1992; Carrier 1995). We claim that amongst Syrian youth, courtship practices are subtly negotiated by using an idealized reformulation of an authentic Muslim culture which is constructed vis-à-vis a contrasting image of Western practices. On the other hand, we also analyze how images of an idealized West are deployed by those youth who more radically challenge contemporary, local practices.

These discourses of Syrian youth reflect the fact that issues related to gender and sexuality are at the core of contemporary representations of Muslim cultural authenticity. The roots of this phenomenon date back to Western colonial discourses, where gender and sexuality issues were particularly emphasized in defining the differences between Western culture and Muslim culture, thus essentializing these cultural entities (Said 1979).[2] Colonial authorities in the Middle East viewed local gender-related practices, such as gender segregation and veiling, as examples of women's oppression, and these practices started to symbolize the backwardness of Muslim cultures in Western representations and colonial governance practices (Ahmed 1993). Islamist discourses on cultural authenticity reacted to oppose Western influence by conversely celebrating and consolidating practices such as gender segregation and veiling as signs of the supremacy of Muslim culture (Ahmed 1993; Moghadam 2005; Nader 2012).

Nevertheless, post-colonial secular nationalist discourses continued to associate liberal gender policies with modernization and development (Rabo 2005). As a result, in today’s Arab societies—Syria included—the state and other political actors use women as symbols of both modernization and cultural authenticity (Yuval-Davis 1997; Sparre 2008).

The secular nationalist Ba’ath party came to power in Syria in 1963. In 1971, the Assad family took over leadership of the Ba’ath party and the same family has ruled the country ever since. The Assad family belongs to the Alawite Muslim minority, despite Syria being a predominantly Sunni Muslim country.[3] As we are writing this chapter, Syria is in a state of civil war between the Assad regime and different opposition groups (predominantly Sunni) who are seeking to topple the current regime. However, most of our fieldwork was conducted before the recent uprising began in 2011, while Syria was still calm.

Prior to the current civil war, the official discourse of the Ba’ath party promoted ideals of equality and national unity of ethnically and religiously diverse people, and the progressive policies concerning women were used as the symbol of the nation’s development and modernization (Sparre 2008). The Ba’ath party’s secular agenda was considered to be beneficial to women as a result of both legislative and institutional changes that favored women in regards to education and the employment sector (Shaaban 1998). For example, as a result of the educational policies of the regime, women comprised more than half of all university students (Wieland 2006, 71). Despite the secular character of the state, Islam remained its official religion and personal status laws were tied to Islamic Shari’a law (Shaaban 1998). While the Assad regime has attempted to keep Islamist groups under tight control, Syrian society has still undergone a certain degree of Islamization as the discourses inspired by the Islamic revival have gained more popularity amongst its citizens. This is evident, for example, from the increasing number of young women who wear the *hijab*, a modern style headscarf (Sparre 2008, 3; Khatib 2011).

Our analysis is based on a total of 36 in-depth interviews collected during ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Syrian cities of Damascus and Latakia during the years 2005–2006[4] and 2010,[5] and among Syrian youth in the Jordanian capital of Amman collected between November and December of 2013.[6] In total, we interviewed 21 women and 15 men who were between the ages of 16 and 32. They were all from middle-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds, and the majority of them—all but two—were either college educated or were still in high school but planned on getting a college education. Additionally, only two of the interlocutors were married but ten were in a relationship at the time of the interview. The study group included representatives of different ethnic and religious groups, although the majority of the respondents were Arab Sunni Muslims, and all were raised in Syria.[7]

To analyze the interviews, we have applied discourse analysis as a methodological and theoretical framework. In this approach to subjectivity and identity, language constitutes rather than reflects or expresses the meaning of experience and identity. Competing discourses produce different subject positions and forms of identity (Weedon 2009, 17–18; Foucault 1982, 95–6). In this chapter we pay special attention to two discursive frameworks that are deployed by our respondents to express and justify views concerning local norms of gender interaction and courtship practices. Our analysis of these discourses is based solely on our interviews with Syrian youth. Nevertheless, we assume that they are a reflection of a net of wider discourses, such as Ba'ath party rhetoric, global Islam, transnational Arab media, and popular culture.

The first discursive framework that we identified in our interviews will be referred to as the *muḥāfiẓ* (conservative) discourse. *Muḥāfiẓ* is an Arabic term used locally to refer to conservative views and individuals in a generally positive overtone, versus the contrasting terms *mutakhalif* (backward or reluctant to embrace new ideas and practices) and *mutaʿaṣṣib* (fanatic), which are used to refer to conservative individuals in a negative light. The *muḥāfiẓ* discourse constitutes a subject position which emphasizes a Muslim identity concerned with preserving customs and traditions (*ʿādāt wa taqālīd*). It is deployed to endorse the norms of gender segregation in the local society (*mujtamaʿ*).[8] The second discursive framework that we identified in our interviews is the *munfatiḥ* (open-minded, liberal, or tolerant) discourse. This subject position is deployed in our interviews to criticize local norms of gender segregation.

While the subject positions we refer to here are a result of our analysis, both of these concepts (*muḥāfiẓ* and *munfatiḥ*) are also widely used in everyday Syrian discourse to describe individual positions towards practices related to gender. Some of our interlocutors used the concepts to describe themselves and some of them positioned themselves as being "in the middle" of a liberal-conservative (*munfatiḥ-muḥāfiẓ*) continuum. However, in this chapter we are not focused on how our interlocutors categorize themselves, but rather we focus the analysis on the subject positions they take in our interviews (as identified by us). In discourse analysis, the process of identification is conceived of as fluid and, as such, many youth did take these subject positions flexibly. Yet we will refer to youth who consistently positioned themselves in the *muḥāfiẓ* subject position as the *muḥāfiẓ* youth, and youth who consistently positioned themselves in the *munfatiḥ* subject position as the *munfatiḥ* youth.

Our *muḥāfiẓ* interlocutors, roughly speaking, represent average, urban youth who fall in the middle of a liberal-conservative continuum when it comes to views concerning gender interaction norms. They identify as people who do not challenge the core of the prevailing local gender norms, even though they are also negotiating the boundaries of acceptable gender interaction. In contrast, the *munfatiḥ* youth are explicitly challenging local norms of gender interaction. These youth are clearly a minority in Syria, yet it is not rare to encounter them.[9]

While the aim of this chapter is not to make comparisons between religious or ethnic groups, it is worth mentioning that there were Sunni Muslims who clearly positioned themselves as either *muḥāfiẓ* or *munfatiḥ*, while the few Alawite Muslims in our study group often used these subject positions according to the situation. The few representatives of religious and ethnic minorities—one Christian, one Druze, and one Kurd—positioned themselves as *munfatiḥ*. Background, however, does not necessarily define the subject position one takes, which is evident from the fact that siblings from the same family often have different views and positions. This may reflect the variety of discourses available in the current context of rapid social transformations. In addition, in our study group of middle-class to lower-middle-class youth, class background did not seem to play a significant role in the positions one takes.

Contemporary Courtship Practices in Urban Syria

In the twenty-first-century urban, Syrian context, it is common for young people to interact with the opposite sex in public places—on college campuses, at work, in local cafes—and meet potential marriage candidates (Booth 2002).[10] In this context, what is locally referred to as traditional marriage (*zawāj taqlīdī*) is no longer synonymous with the concept of arranged marriage. This latter concept is commonly understood to be a marriage in which parents choose the marriage partner and the couple has little or no say in the match, often meeting for the first time on their wedding day. Even though we should be critical of broad generalizations concerning the marriage practices of previous generations, this is how many interlocutors described their grandparents' generation meeting for the first time. Regardless of obvious changes in courtship practices, the *muḥāfiẓ* youth emphasize the value of customs and traditions associated with what they call traditional marriage. Therefore, attention must be paid to the way the content of concepts like traditional marriage are changing, and how different discourses concerning tradition are actually used in the process of negotiating local practices.

In Syria, the method of finding a spouse that is currently referred to as traditional marriage (*zawāj taqlīdī*) or the family way (*zawāj al-ʿāʾila*) allows the couple to decide whether to get married, yet involves methods that maintain a certain degree of gender segregation. First, family members or acquaintances set up a couple or the groom-to-be approaches the family of the young woman in order to get to know her. Next, if the couple and their parents agree, the couple meet each other under the supervision of a family member and, after a time, decide if they want to get engaged. Finally, during the engagement period, the couple has more time and —depending on the families in question—privacy to get to know each other better before the official wedding ceremony (Wynn 2003; Singerman 2012). Conversely, some young men and women also find partners through the path of love (*ṭarīq al-ḥubb*): a couple meet and then get to know each other on their own, fall in love, and decide to get married with or without their families' approval.

While these two paths to marriage may seem oppositional—and are often framed as such by interlocutors—a common path towards marriage among urban Syrians is a blend of both. There is great variation in different communities and families in Syria concerning how much interaction between the sexes is allowed before marriage. Even though in some families young women are prevented from having any unnecessary contact with unrelated men (and therefore discouraged from continuing their studies or work), in other families the parents may even accept courtship in public spaces before engagement. In addition, some interlocutors showed a clear preference for dating a prospective partner before making any sort of official commitment, such as engagement or marriage, even if they had to keep it a secret from their families. Often, young people meet someone they like on their own, get to know each other for a while, and then go to their parents to make their relationship official. For example, Ahmed (22, male)[11] explained why he would meet a girl in secret: "Some things are secret and nobody knows about it. I take my time and get to know someone, and when I know that I love her and she loves me and the matter is serious then I tell them [his parents]." It is always possible that the parents might reject the marriage and, if this is the case, young people rarely act against their parents' will, since parental support is seen as necessary for the success of a union (Wynn 2003).

Finding a Suitable Spouse—Points of Negotiation

Most of our interlocutors underscored that love is an important thing to have in marriage. Some expressed a preference to be in love before any official commitments, while some believed that love usually develops during the engagement process. Many *muḥāfiẓ* youth thought that love was not necessary before marriage but that finding a compatible spouse would ensure that love would develop during marriage. For Tasneem (21, female),[12] getting along with a potential husband is more important than the idea of love, which can develop after the marriage takes place:

> Maybe God will send someone who will be comfortable with me and I will be comfortable with him. Now, I don't believe in something called love. Now anyone I feel comfortable with and I feel that he is good, it isn't necessary that I love him. Love will come after marriage.

In general, the *muḥāfiẓ* youth believed it was possible to find a compatible partner within the confines of what they called traditional marriage. Yet there are some subtle points of negotiation where the boundaries of standard practices are stretched. In criticizing old practices and justifying more agency in the decision-making process, the *muḥāfiẓ* youth emphasized the value of a successful marriage. They rejected not only the practice of arranged marriage but also hasty marriages with a short engagement and/or marriage at a young age, all of which were considered to be backward traditions (*taqālīd mutakhalifa*) still present in urban Syrian society. All of these were seen to occur to the detriment of the couple's future happiness and to be a serious threat to one of the most important goals for these youth—an intact nuclear family. In order to achieve this goal, they often placed emphasis on the need for love within marriage. As Zidan (27, male) explains:

> I believe that in a loveless marriage there will be a lot of problems, the personalities of the spouses will clash. There is a harmony between the personalities of a couple who is in love. Without this harmony there will be problems between them and they will separate, and I want to avoid the situation where the family is torn apart.

To find a compatible spouse, young *muḥāfiẓ* women subtly stretched the boundaries of acceptable interaction with potential marriage candidates. For example, Leila (22, female) argued that it is essential to have enough privacy to get to know the candidate well enough before deciding to marry, making it a point to differentiate herself from those who held different views by describing them as having an old-fashioned mindset:

> In some families, they don't let a girl and a boy be alone together, even during the engagement. They don't let them be in the same room by themselves, talk in private, or go out together … you can't get to know the personality of the other person like that, to be relaxed with him. You can't get to know all the features of the other person. I don't prefer this [practice]. But there are also those people who have old-fashioned minds. Old people don't accept anything else.

In pursuit of compatibility, some *muḥāfiẓ* youth also negotiated local norms by preferring to meet a potential spouse on their own in a public space, such as at work or school, versus through family or neighborhood contacts. One reason for this was that it would enable the young person to observe a candidate from a distance and judge his or her suitability. As Leila explained, this is an acceptable practice so long as a certain amount of distance is maintained:

"I think it would be better, if I knew him beforehand … not a close relationship, but I would know him, how he behaves with people."

Although the *muḥāfiẓ* youth emphasized that a relationship with a potential partner should not become too familiar before an official engagement, it is important to note that the practice of engagement itself is changing. At the present time, it is often perceived not as a commitment that automatically leads to marriage, but as an opportunity for the couple to get to know one another better on a trial basis, yet one that is official (*rasmī*). Tasneem (21, female) described this official connection as the signing of the marriage contract (*katb al-kitāb*):[13] "They should be engaged or have *katb al-kitāb* and they see. If they're compatible, if they like each other, they continue. And if they don't, they end the relationship." This formal connection provides couples with more time—and often privacy—to get to know one other so that they can decide during this period if they are actually compatible.

Some gender differences emerged in views concerning courtship and marriage practices. Young men often described the ability to create their own limits and borders (*ḥudūd*) in courtship practices because their reputation and honor are not at stake as they are for young women. A young woman's reputation, for example, could be damaged by just being seen in public with a young man, whereas men do not have this reputational threat. Many young men are doubly aware of this and are explicit that they would prefer to marry a young woman who does not talk to men more than necessary. Another preference among men—and complaint among women—is the emphasis placed on a woman's looks during the marriage search. Men, however, face a different challenge in the courtship phase, since a man and his family are required to pay all the costs of marriage—including the dowry—and he has to be well established economically to be able to support the family (Singerman 2012). Some men prefer to marry a woman who works and can contribute to the family income as the cost of living continues to rise. One common scenario that ended several love interests—and even relationships—in our study group was that the young men lacked financial resources, so the young women married someone else (Singerman 1996).

The next two sections will introduce the viewpoints of the *muḥāfiẓ* and *munfatiḥ* youth regarding local gender segregation norms, the specific negotiations of norms entailed by these two subject positions, and how they deploy images and views concerning Western gender relations.

The Muḥāfiẓ Discourse: Producing Tradition and Cultural Authenticity

In Syria as well as in Western discourses, cultural changes towards more liberal practices are often associated with "Westernization." However, the *muḥāfiẓ* youth did not associate the new liberties in local courtship practices and the companionate marriage ideal which they were promoting with Western liberty, but instead perceived marriage as a sphere that is unaffected by external influences. Leila, for example, negatively responded when directly asked if there are Western influences present in local marriage customs. "I don't think so. Because in our society we are against the Western practices of marriage. The West has no influence."

While discussing the differences between local and Western courtship and marriage practices, *muḥāfiẓ* youth set apart local traditional practices from Western practices by describing them in positive terms compared to those of the West, despite earlier criticizing aspects of these traditional practices and customs. To understand this discrepancy, it has to be noted that there were actually two different discourses in the *muḥāfiẓ* discursive framework that were used to refer to the concept of tradition (*taqlīd*) in courtship and marriage practices. The first discourse concerning tradition was used while referring to local customs defined as backward, such as arranged marriage, fast marriage, or early marriage. The second discourse was used while describing differences between Western culture (*mujtamaʿ gharbi*) and Muslim culture (*mujtamaʿ sharqi*).[14] In this latter context, tradition was addressed in positive terms as the authentic Muslim tradition. This can be seen as an example of tradition being reinvented and produced vis-à-vis the Other instead of the continuation of local practice (Hobsbawm 1992; Carrier 1995). In this phenomenon, Muslim culture as an essentialized entity is constructed against an equally imagined and essentialized West. In the discourses of Syrian youth, the nuclear family unit and companionate marriage ideal are defined as the core of truly Muslim marriage traditions, while these practices are in striking contrast to the actual practices of previous generations. This discourse of Muslim authenticity deployed by the *muḥāfiẓ* youth is in accordance with the prevalent Egyptian Islamist discourses on family described by Lila Abu-Lughod (1998), where the nuclear family and companionate love are defined as a return to Islamic traditions and any resemblance to the Western family model is intentionally forgotten. Also according to the Syrian *muḥāfiẓ* youth, instead of turning to Western values, they are actually returning to true Islamic values and traditions concerning marriage.

These divergent uses of the concept of tradition become a tool for *muḥāfiẓ* youth in negotiating gender relations while remaining loyal to their Muslim identity. For example, forced marriages were defined as backward, outdated, and against the principles of Islam. As Haifa (17, female) explained, “Our family can’t force us to take or marry a person we don’t want, even according to the Islamic religion. If a girl refuses marriage, no one can force her or cause problems.” In a similar manner, some young *muḥāfiẓ* women challenged the prevailing atmosphere towards divorce and believed that a couple who are not in love should not stay together unless they already have children. According to them, even though divorce is a practice stigmatized by Syrian society, it is an acceptable and simple procedure according to Islam. Nawal (24, female) explained,

> Even though religion allows divorce and there is nothing complicated about it, it is still complicated in terms of societal customs and traditions. People are afraid of gossip. A woman who is divorced is treated badly.

Even though the *muḥāfiẓ* discourse presented the authentic Muslim tradition as essentialized, static, and a-historical—as idealized reformulations of local culture often are (Carrier 1995)—we claim that it is flexible and fluid, since it is actively produced in relation to the assumed differences between Muslim culture and Western culture. Therefore it is beneficial to look at the specific way the *muḥāfiẓ* youth defined these cultural differences. First of all, they described the differences in courtship practices between the two cultures as due to gender segregation; according to our interlocutors, in Muslim culture, norms of gender segregation regulate the contact between sexes and premarital relationships are not allowed, while in the West there are no limitations of this kind. Therefore, it is vital to Muslim culture that there are no relationships outside the context of marriage—meaning both premarital or extra-marital relationships. Integral to Nawal’s description of marriage in Islam is the idea that a relationship begins after marriage. She says,

> Here we have to make the decision to get married and really get married before it is allowed to live together and start a family. It is not possible to start a relationship or a sexual relationship outside marriage. First you get married, and then you can have a relationship. But in the West you can do as you like.

Even though most young people in our study group got to know more than one potential candidate for marriage or even had multiple engagements before marriage, these were not considered relationships (*ʿalāqāt*) in the same sense as in the West, where relationships include sexual intimacy. This is probably partly due to the fact that the Arabic term for relationship (*ʿalāqa*) refers to sexual relationships such as a non-marital affair or the sexual aspect of the marital relationship.[15]

Even if restrictions concerning the sexual aspect of a relationship are at the core of this conceptualization, other restrictions regulating the contact between unmarried youth are considered to be equally significant. For the *muḥāfiẓ* youth, the red line (*al-khaṭ al-aḥmar*) was defined as keeping the contact between a young man and woman to an impersonal level (*ma fī ʿalāqa shakhṣiyya*), as they expressed it, meaning there is no intimacy until the relationship is under the supervision of the families. Even though the *muḥāfiẓ* youth conceptualized gender relations in Muslim culture and the West as oppositional based on whether there are relationships before marriage or not, in our view, the differences are more related to the families’ supervision of the relationship. This discursive strategy of emphasizing cultural differences, however, allows *muḥāfiẓ* youth to distinguish the novel courtship practices that they are promoting from Western practices, which are seen as suspicious in the local context.[16] At the same time, flexible definitions of the concept of a relationship (*ʿalāqa*) enable the negotiation of boundaries and interaction between young men and women before marriage. There are subtle negotiations concerning when the contact between a young woman and a young man becomes intimate and exactly when a relationship begins. For example, Leila claimed that she did not approve of having a relationship before engagement, yet described sitting and getting to know a marriage candidate as appropriate so long as boundaries are maintained:

> For me there is no problem with having contact with boys, as long as you don’t go too far … for example, to have a boyfriend, who I might marry later. But it is possible to sit together with someone in order to find out if we are compatible, and what kind of personality the other one has.

In defining the acceptability of a premarital relationship, an important issue for *muḥāfiẓ* youth—as well as for the *munfatiḥ* youth—was the seriousness of the relationship. Young people in Syria divided premarital relationships into two categories: the serious ones, which have a goal of marriage, and those which are just for fun (*tasliya*). When asked about how the female characters in *Sabaya*, a popular Syrian television series (*musalsal*), are often seen going out with different men, young women made a distinction between seeing someone for entertainment and getting to know someone seriously. Reem (23, female) described this as wrong and explained, “They’re not taking it in terms of a serious connection, they’re taking it in terms of entertainment, going out.” However, she noted, “If it is within limits (*ḍimna al-ḥudūd*) and for the purpose of getting tied down, then it is okay.” There is no term in Arabic for a serious pre-marital relationship, so when young Syrians were asked about courtship, the question was easily read as having these relationships “only for fun.” Similarly, the concept of having a girlfriend/boyfriend[17] was often associated with a fun, entertaining relationship. One reason for rejecting Western dating culture could be that Western relationships were often considered not serious because they do not always lead to marriage.

In *muḥāfiẓ* discourse, Western freedom in gender relations was often associated with two negative side effects—promiscuity and lack of commitment to the sanctity of marriage. People in the West were assumed to have multiple and subsequent relationships rather than being committed to one serious relationship, resulting in the prevalence of divorce and infidelity. In contrast, love and commitment to a monogamous relationship were described as positive features of Muslim culture. Dorota (24, female, Alawite Muslim)[18] explained that people in the West change partners too easily, which leads to insecurity in relationships. For her, a relationship should be about committing to one person:

> I could not live in that kind of freedom … that I would love one person first, and then leave him and fall in love with someone else, or live together with someone and then leave him. I couldn’t live like that. This is also a religious matter for me. I’m religious, and therefore I don’t want to have many relationships with different people. I only have one person I love, or no one.

While the *muḥāfiẓ* youth thought that there should be enough freedom for them to be able to make the right choice, many of them introduced the point that becoming too deeply involved with many different candidates results in an unending cycle of different relationships. Thus, certain limitations on interaction between the sexes were seen as a positive thing. When asked if it would be good to try having a life together before marriage, Leila disapproved of this idea. She explained, “If I tried it with many people, thinking I will marry them later, and then at the end, I don’t. If you try it with different people, you will get to know a lot of boys … have a lot of boyfriends, relationships … every time it doesn’t feel right, you break up and start a new relationship.”

The *muḥāfiẓ* discourse included the idea that it is specifically the singularity of a relationship that makes it special. Leila continued her explanation: “I myself feel that a woman and man were created to be [thinking] … if they have a relationship based on love, it is sacred. It won’t be as special if you have experienced it already before marriage, it’s not nice (*mū ḥelū*).” Wael (24, male) thought that it is the singular character of a relationship which creates the emotional bond between a couple in the first place. In his thinking, divorce is so common in Europe because relationships are not unique to marriage and once a couple gets married, the emotional connection between them is usually missing. He said, “Even before marriage they have had a lot of relationships with feelings attached with other people, no problem. There is no strong commitment in these cases.”

Following this logic, some *muḥāfiẓ* youth wanted to avoid relationships before marriage because they believed that it ensures a strong relationship between spouses. One practical reason behind this was that it is easier to love and accept the personality of a spouse when there are no other people with whom to compare him/her. As Leila explains:

> If you have gotten to know many boys before marriage, it can happen that when you finally marry someone, you will notice some negative traits in your husband that someone you knew before did not have. There is something missing in his personality that was good about the other man … this will bring crisis to the marriage … having many relationships before marriage will make your relationship with your husband unstable.

Although the stability of a relationship itself was an important value in the *muḥāfiẓ* discourse, it was also associated with another important value—having an intact family. When asked about going out with girls before marriage, Halim (29, male) praised the restricted relationship culture, claiming that it protects the family by securing marital love:

> Yes, this is very, very bad because this doesn't build families. The good family should be built on the real love and the real love comes from the reserved relation[ship]. And after you reserve this relation, you build and build the real love between girls and boys because the girl herself doesn't know any others so she thinks that her husband and her fiancé is the most perfect and he as well. So they build a good family.[19]

The Munfatiḥ Discursive Framework: Redefining Honor

In their negotiation of local courtship practices, the *munfatiḥ* youth did not situate what they were promoting against Western practices; rather, for them, the West represented the ideal. Similar to the *munfatiḥ* discourse, marriages based on mutual love and an intact family were presented as valuable in their discourse, but they saw the gender segregation norms and traditional conceptions of honor as something that impedes finding true love. They rejected all local traditions related to courtship practices as backward and described gender relations in the West as "easy" because there is no social control and there are no "problems" as there are in Syrian society.[20] The *munfatiḥ* youth argued for an imagined Western-style freedom that would, in their view, result in better marital relationships because it allows for a couple to determine compatibility. In particular, living together and having premarital sex were viewed as appropriate tests of a potential partner before marriage. Some also thought that in order to find out who is "really special," it is essential to have previous experience with other partners to be able to compare partners—a logic that contradicted the logic used by *munfatiḥ* youth.

In the *munfatiḥ* discourse, the West represented the ideal gender relations, which were associated with features such as freedom, maturity, and independence. These qualities formed an alternative framework for defining honor where traditional conceptions were turned upside down. By allowing freedom in general and especially in gender relations, the West represented a possibility for self-expression and self-improvement among *munfatiḥ* youth. Being able to get experience from life and relationships was also seen as a way to learn to handle a future marital relationship. In the next account, Hala (female, 22) associated the freedom to experience and learn about gender relations, including sexual intercourse, with education:

> In Europe [people have a] very good personality, strong and educated. There is no education here. In Europe … you can do whatever you want, maybe in a bad way, maybe in a good way. But when you behave in a very, very, very bad way, you teach yourself. You will learn, but here you can't learn anything, you will be a very foolish person. I don't have any experience from life. When you marry someone, you don't have any experience, because you are always in your house. You can't talk to boys, just to girls. You don't have any experience, maybe in sex, maybe in love, maybe in anything.[21]

In a similar vein, *munfatiḥ* youth did not associate sexually active Western women with loose morals, as *muḥāfiẓ* youth sometimes did; rather, they associated them with adulthood and maturity. For Daniel (23, male, Christian), the liberal sexual practices of Western women were ascribed to the fact that they are responsible for their own lives in general:

> Because they are more free, they are closer to be women than girls … like the girl in Finland, she is like a woman, she is responsible for her life for a long time, she is more free. She had to think about, like she is more independent. The Syrian girl, she spends her whole life before marriage in her parents' house … so she is not that free, she is still under the control more than the girl in the West. That's why the foreigners are, like it's easier to have a relationship more than the Syrian girls, not because they are sluts or they are bitches or they are really, they want sex at every moment, this is not true.[22]

Similarly, traditional conceptions of honor were negotiated by *munfatiḥ* youth using these ideas of sex and relationships as indicators of responsibility and adulthood, and losing one's virginity was even associated with adulthood and autonomy in decision-making. Hala clearly made this point:

> It is not wrong to be a woman[23] and to lose my virginity. It is good. I think it is another life, when you become a woman, very big and adult and you can decide and you are free. When you'll be a woman, you are not afraid from anything, anyone.

While negotiating conceptions of honor by using notions associated with Western culture, *munfatiḥ* youth were also redefining the concept of the bitch (*sharmūṭa*).[24] While this concept is commonly used in Syria to refer to promiscuous women who have sexual intercourse outside the context of marriage, the *munfatiḥ* youth did not view a woman who has premarital sex within a serious relationship as a bitch. Hala recounted having a boyfriend and sharing intimacy with him: "The others call me a bitch, but I am not a bitch, I am doing this with someone I love."[25] For Hala, a bitch is a woman who "… loves sex and lies to men about loving them in order to get sex and money." The concept of the bitch was associated with dishonesty and gaining benefits from sex.

Some *munfatiḥ* youth also associated Western sexual liberty with the progress of the society in general. According to Zidan, after premarital sex became permissible in European culture, "The capacity to think was set free for other worries towards matters that benefit society, such as scientific research and thinking, towards developing industrial processes … European society became materially and culturally productive." This is the reason why Ajar (24, male, Kurdish) thought that some women have to sacrifice themselves and take on the role of the bitch in order for Syrian society to become modern. Here, the whole concept of the bitch has actually changed from something that is despised into something that is positive and even productive.

Conclusion

As they negotiate courtship practices, Syrian youth emphasize companionate love—regardless of their different opinions on how to achieve it. For some, achieving this ideal requires certain restrictions on the interaction between the sexes, while some argue that finding a suitable partner requires maximal freedom. There is a clear polarization in the *munfatiḥ* and *muḥāfiẓ* discourses towards local gender segregation and the images and views concerning the West that they deploy, with the former opposing it and the latter idealizing it. Yet two aspects must be discussed before concluding that urban, Syrian youth are polarized between those who want changes in courtship practices and those who are against it.

First, even though the *muḥāfiẓ* discourse emphasizes cultural differences and opposes Western influences, this does not prevent the *muḥāfiẓ* youth from negotiating more freedom in gender interaction. Rather, it can actually be seen as a strategy for achieving it. While redefining the Islamic marriage process vis-à-vis Western culture, they are able to gradually widen the scope of acceptable behavior and justify new practices. The *muḥāfiẓ* youth, in fact, use Islam as a discursive resource to negotiate for more freedom in order to find a compatible spouse, given that companionate love is seen by our interlocutors as the foundation of an authentic Muslim marriage tradition. Second, the *muḥāfiẓ* and *munfatiḥ* discourses are not mutually exclusive but, rather, youth can deploy them flexibly in their everyday lives to mold their own views and positions according to the situation.

Considering the current crisis in Syria, which has been increasingly sectarian in character, the polarization of the country’s different sects is a major concern for the future. In addition, the political climate of Syria might become polarized between those who support of Islamist movements and those who oppose them—even among Sunni Muslims. As a result, it is possible that gender issues will once again be scrutinized, as Islamist movements tend to seek popularity by opposing the threat of Western influences and often aim to restrict gender interaction as part of this. As our analysis shows, as they negotiate courtship practices, urban Syrian youth seem to be forced to choose a side—to be for Western practices or against them. Perhaps this phenomenon will be further emphasized in the near future as Islamists potentially gain more influence in Syria. In addition, resentment towards the West may increase if Syrians are disappointed by the Western nations’ reluctance to interfere in the civil war and if they view these nations as indifferent to their suffering.

In order to dismantle these polarizations, it is important to examine the discourses of our young Syrian interlocutors and to see that behind the discourses of cultural authenticity—which place emphasis on maintaining gender segregation—there are also subtle negotiations of these norms. Furthermore, it is important to look behind the discourses, which emphasize cultural differences between Muslims and the West, to the shared family values such as ideals of companionate love and an intact nuclear family. These elements of courtship and marriage also stand as common ground for our young Syrian interlocutors, who come from different backgrounds and represent a variety of viewpoints.

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1 Both authors contributed to the chapter equally, and therefore the names of the authors are placed in alphabetical order.

2 This chapter will deal with conceptions of *western culture* and *Muslim culture* and we, therefore, always refer to them as discursively constructed ideas instead of actual cultural entities.

3 As of 2006, the majority of Syrians were Sunni Muslims, estimated to be 69 percent of the population, followed by Christians at 14.5 percent and Alawites at 12 percent (Wieland 2006).

4 In 2005–2006, Sandra Nasser El-Dine (half Finnish and half Syrian but born and raised in Finland) lived in Damascus and then Latakia with her Syrian relatives. In total, she conducted 13 interviews.

5 In 2010, Lindsey Conklin (American) lived with a family (a mother and her 18-year-old daughter) in Damascus for the summer and conducted 18 interviews.

6 In 2013, Sandra Nasser El-Dine lived with Syrian youth in Amman for several months and conducted five interviews.

7 Ethnic minorities include one Kurd, three Palestinians, one Iraqi, and one Lebanese; religious minorities include four Alawites, one Druze, and one Christian.

8 *Mujtama‘* can be translated as "society" or "community." First, it can refer to the society on a larger scale, such as *mujtamaʿ sūrī* (Syrian society and culture) or *mujtamaʿ sharqi* (Arab/Muslim/Eastern society and culture), and secondly, to the local community one belongs to, which also controls rules regarding modesty and a person's reputation. It is notable that these different connotations are used interchangeably in everyday usage.

9 Out of our respondents, 15 consistently placed themselves in the *muḥāfiẓ* subject position and 10 in the *munfatiḥ* subject position, and the remaining 11 positioned themselves in a situation-dependent manner.

10 This was the case before the civil war drastically altered the conditions of everyday life in many parts of Syria.

11 Quoted interlocutors are Sunni unless otherwise described in parentheses.

12 Most of the interviews quoted in this chapter were conducted in Arabic and translated into English. Therefore, the language of the interview will only be mentioned if it is from an interview conducted in English.

13 For Muslims, *katb al-kitāb* is the formal marriage contract that means a couple is married according to Islam. However, the marriage is not official in the eyes of the society (mujtama‘) until the wedding party occurs, often a few months after the contract is signed.

14 In this context, our interlocutors mainly used the term "Eastern society or culture" (*mujtamaʿ sharqi*), by which they referred to Arab/Muslim societies as a whole versus an implied "Western society or culture" (*mujtamaʿ gharbi*). Since they often used *mujtamaʿ* to refer to aspects that could be translated as "culture," we sometimes translate *mujtamaʿ sharqi* as "Muslim culture" and *mujtamaʿ gharbi* as "Western culture."

15 On the other hand, the concept of a relationship (*ʿalāqa*) is changing. Young people are starting to attach a connotation of a serious relationship to the term. Because of the variable definition, it is hard to know which definition a person is referring to while speaking Arabic—a sexual relationship, a relationship for entertainment, or a serious relationship.

16 The Western practices comparison was not prompted by the interview questions; rather, when they were asked to elaborate on or justify their views (to a Western researcher, nonetheless), the West usually jumped into the conversation as if it was implicitly there as a reason why too much freedom is not a good idea.

17 Usually referred to using the English word for boyfriend or girlfriend: do you have a boyfriend (*ʿindik boyfriend*)?

18 Her mother is Polish and her father is Syrian, but she was raised in Syria.

19 The interview with Halim was conducted in English.

20 The quoted words in this paragraph are from interviews done in English.

21 The interview with Hala was conducted in English.

22 The interview with Daniel was conducted in English.

23 In Arabic, a girl (*bint*) becomes a woman (*marʾa*) when she loses her virginity. *Bint* refers, therefore, also to a virgin (Singerman 2012, 75).

24 The more specific translation of *sharmūṭa* would be "slut," but we use "bitch" here since it is the original term that our interlocutors referred to in English.

25 From an interview done in English.

PART 3
Mahrem, the Gaze, and Intimate Gender and Sexual Crossings

Chapter 12
Identity in Alterity: *Burqa* and Madrassah Education in Pakistan

Saadia Abid

Constructing Identity through Clothing?

In all its varieties, identity implies distinctiveness. What causes this distinctiveness? It is achieved through alterity, or otherness. The term "identity" simultaneously connotes the notions of sameness and difference. People derive their individual identities in opposition to the Other, as is noted by Voestermans: "Identity is the affirmation of who we are by contrasting nearly every element of our way of life with that of others. This self-other dialectic is the core of the debate on alterity and identity: they invest each other with meaning, one does not go without the other" (Voestermans 1991: 219). Identity is a fluid and dynamic concept. There is no single definition that encompasses all of its variations: individual, group, professional, social, civic identity, and so on.

Similarly, alterity is embedded in various factors. Being women is not the same as being Christian women or Pakistani or Russian-speaking or Caucasian women. In each there is a different aspect highlighting the distinctiveness, the uniqueness and the otherness. Religion, nationality, language, and race, respectively, stress alterity in these examples. One can have several identities simultaneously, but the aspects are not equally significant at all times. It is the context in which identities are enacted that determines which factor demands greater emphasis.

People across all cultures use and alter the body to express identity. These outward social cues can reflect identification with an ideology, faith, ethnicity, and nationality, as well as establish uniqueness. Religion is a significant factor in stressing unique identity, and religious dress is one dominant expression. Geertz saw the importance of religion as a complete "cultural system" by virtue of which people draw their ethos, as well as their worldview. The power of religion lies in the fact that it provides the person and the group a distinct understanding of the world and themselves. Religious symbols serve not only as "models of" but also "models for" reality for the believers (1973).

Clothing, like all the other forms of material culture, is a reflection of the society and people by whom it is worn. It is not mere cloth, but cloth worn in appropriation to a value system established by a society. The code of dress thus developed over a period of time corresponds to all the potent variants: culture and tradition, values and ideals, religion and rituals, ceremonies and celebrations, profession, gender, and space. The conformity to this value system renders an identity expressed through dressing.

Dress operates as a means of "visual communication." This communication, argue Barnes and Eicher (1992: 1), takes place even before the "verbal" one, to establish if communication is possible at all. This symbolic communication or interaction renders clothing "meanings" and consequently "the ways that people use and relate to the clothing as material culture becomes meaningful" (Shirazi 2000: 115). Dress then, like language, becomes a characteristic peculiar to human beings who use it as "social dialogue" (Andrewes 2005: 20).

Dress, which is a marker of identity, is strongly influenced by factors such as religion and gender. The veil, predominantly associated with Muslim women, has been stereotyped as a gendered dress. Religious dress often displays a gender disparity; men and women are required to dress in different ways.[1] In so doing, it particularizes the dress not only in terms of religion, but also gender. This typification leads to the development of a cognitive model of dress internalized by the adherents.

The process of identity construction through typification of dress and peculiarizing of gender leads to 1) rendering of identity, 2) understanding of gender, 3) categorization of dress, and 4) setting rules of inclusion and exclusion. The process of identity construction is a process of reflection on one's self as well as one's gender. Corollary to this is reflection on the Other, against whom one's own identity is formulated.

Research and Methodology

This chapter presents a case study of the Madrassah Jamia Hafsa (MJH) in Islamabad to elicit the process of *purdah* (observance) by female students as a consequence of religious education, which thereby constructs a distinctive religious identity. This empirical research presents an emic perspective of a "religious dress" which has a contextual side to it. Emic, being the "insider view," is derived from the linguistic term "phonemic." Emic perspective in anthropology refers to description of "another culture in terms of categories, concepts and perceptions of the people being studied" (Ferraro and Andreatta 2012: 17).

MJH, a female Islamic seminary, was established in 1992 as a sister branch of Jamiat ul Ulom al Islamia al Faridia (1984); both are affiliated with the Jamia Mosque of G-6, Islamabad, popularly known as the *Lal Masjid*, or the Red Mosque (1970), due to its red-colored edifice. MJH was one of the largest religious educational institutions for women in the Islamic world. It had an enrollment of more than 6,000 female students and provided boarding and lodging to almost 90 percent of the students (http://jamiahafsa.multiply.com/reviews 20-06-08). The *madrassah* had a controversial public standing, mainly due to its affiliation with the Red Mosque, famous for its religio-political activities and the involvement of its students in political matters concerning religious policies. In July 2007, the government launched a siege against the seminary. During the eight-day siege, several attempts to reach reconciliation between the government and the mosque's administration failed. MJH was then disbanded and demolished.

This study is part of a larger research project based on five months of fieldwork from November 2006 to March 2007. During this period I conducted a total of 35 in-depth interviews and three focus group discussions. Purposive sampling was used to include all the potent variables within the *madrassah* population: resident/day scholar, married/unmarried, student/teacher, and urban/rural. The age of respondents ranged from as young as 5 up to 40 years.. Within the student population, two elements of stratification were also considered: their grade within the *madrassah* and their exposure to the global education system. The students from each grade were interviewed. Included in the sample are both students who had an exposure to global educational institutions and those who did not. This careful selection of the respondents was to see if there is any variation in conception and practice of *purdah* with reference to these independent variables. What is strikingly interesting is the uniformity in understanding *burqa* as the "*purdah* dress" for the pupils therein, which then helps establish the deep impact of *madrassah* education.

Constructing a Puritan Muslim Identity

Students apply a great deal of energy to creating an identity that has its roots in religion. Talking about the role of religion in identity construction, Seul argues that "religion frequently serves the identity impulse more powerfully and comprehensively than other repositories of cultural meaning can or do" (Seul 1999: 567). I choose to discuss identity in this case not as a structure, but rather as "a set of processes operating in a principled manner" (Breakwell 1986: 23, 25).

These sets involve three major processes: assimilation, accommodation, and evaluation. While assimilation refers to "absorption of new components," accommodation helps in the "adjustment of the new elements in the identity structure" and rearranges the "salience and central hierarchies." The process of evaluation establishes "subjective indices of relative worth for potential additions to identity" (ibid.). These processes are guided by either one or a combination of four principles: 1) self-esteem—"the desire to be evaluated positively," 2) distinctiveness—"the desire to be unique," 3) continuity—a "consistent account of self-conception," and 4) self-efficacy—"striv[ing] to be competent" (Breakwell and Lyons 1996: 34, 35).

At MJH, the girls, who are already Muslims, develop a heightened sense of "Muslim identity" after coming to the *madrassah*. An 18-year-old student in her final year, while discussing her experience of the life in *madrassah*, showed regret about not putting in enough effort to know the correct form of religion, saying, "I feel as if I have wasted my whole life. I used to perform my religious obligations regularly, but not the way they are supposed to be performed. I did not know the correct way of doing them then."

The students at MJH learn new or reformed ways of performing religious duties and adapt to them. They also internalize new hierarchies. When asked about the most significant thing that they learn in *madrassah*, the usual reply is either, "We used to think religion is for life; we learnt here that life is for religion," or "Islam is not just a religion, it is a complete way of life and we are taught and disciplined to reflect this belief in everything we do."

Religion gains primary importance in their lives after they join the *madrassah*. The process of identity construction represents a shift from being Muslims to being puritan Muslims. This process, which is initially guided by the principle of self-efficacy, results in students' acquisition of a distinctive identity and a renewed sense of self-esteem. This is reflected through their affiliation with one particular school of thought and enhanced religiosity, respectively.

The students acquire a renewed sense of individual identity through interaction within a new social context, as well as a distinct group identity shared at two levels: on the macro level, the students share their identity with all those studying in *madrassah*s, while on a micro level they affiliate themselves with one particular school of thought—*Deobandi Hanafi Sunni*. Kelman's model of social influence[2] is particularly useful to analyze the dominant social influence at MJH. This model addresses the "evaluative components" of social influence, which have three sub-categories: compliance, identification, and internalization.[3]

Compliance occurs when a person accepts the influence of another person or group to "achieve a favourable reaction from them" (1999: 8). Identification occurs when a person accepts the influence because it helps to develop a positive self-conception. During the process of identification a person vicariously participates in pre-established identities of the influencing agent, a person or a group and "gain[s] a sense of power and status that, as individuals, [he] lack[s]" (ibid., 13). Internalization occurs when a person identifies with another person or a group because the individual's existing values are in congruence with the influencing agent (ibid., 10).

In the case of MJH, the girls "identify" with the new social group they encounter and are embedded within. The administration of the *madrassah* influences them through the dissemination of a specific field of religious knowledge. It also influences their ideology of knowledge, which places religious education above all other forms of education. The girls, with their newly acquired belief that religion governs life and their new status as religious scholar, find themselves capable of using religion as the reference point to speak with authority on various subjects.

This group identity is established against an absent Other. During my discussions on various topics with MJH students, this absent Other was always present in the minds of my interlocutors to compare with themselves. Burgat states:

> It is indeed the Other who tells us who we are, what space we take up in the world, and for many what role we play in it. Identity is only the result of the encounter with otherness …. It is on the Other that our "relativity" depends and we will thus identify ourselves with or against him." (2003: 21)

Who falls into the Other category is a primary concern of my research. An exact definition of this category is elusive, as the imaginary Other is referred to with a very broad term, *log*, meaning "people." My research shows that it is not one particular group; the boundaries of this group are loose, and could include anyone who does not study in *madrassah*, holds a negative viewpoint about it, or does not adhere to the *Deobandi Hanafi* principles. In its widest sense, it would include the West and people who imitate western culture. What defines this group as Other depends on the content and the context of a particular discussion. When the discussion is about gender identity, the absent Other is usually the non-Muslim western women and indigenous women who follow them. There is a tri-dimensional identity structured against the Other which includes 1) the conception of the self, 2) perception about the Other, and 3) the presumed conception of the self by the Other. The self is defined in opposition to the Other as more religious, moral, and spiritual.

The girls express their group identity as puritan Muslims in various ways: ideology, schooling, behavior, speech, and actions. The most dominant expression, however, is the uniform dressing of the girls; they wear black and are covered from head to toe.

Purdah and *Burqa*: Traditions in Women's Dress

In *madrassah* Jamia Hafsa, just as in many other female *madrassah*s, the girls exhibit uniform dress in the absence of written rules and regulations. It would appear to any outsider that the *burqa*-clad women entering the *madrassah* wear the garment throughout the day. In reality, this uniform is worn only in public or when there are men present. The girls at this Jamia are conscious and cautious about their uniform—the *burqa*. Upon joining the *madrassah* the girls soon wear it in replication of their colleagues. It provides them with a specific identity and reflects their ideology—an ideology that is learnt in the *madrassah*.

Donning the *burqa* is a learned behavior, which becomes an important part of their religious conceptual framework regarding dress only after joining the *madrassah*. The pupils say that previously they had a different conception of *purdah*, which they consider as lack of knowledge or ignorance of its correct form. The proper form is explained as a dress that conceals the whole body. An inquiry about their earlier style of dress reveals the diversity in clothing and the varying degrees to which the body was previously covered. What is common in all the cases is the wearing of *shalwar*, *kameez*, and *dupatta*, the national dress of Pakistan. *Shalwar* are loose, baggy pants; *kameez* is a long tunic; and a *dupatta* is a long, wide piece of cloth measuring approximately 2–2.5 meters long and 1 meter wide. The conservative form of this type of dress is loose in shape and covers the whole body from head to toe, leaving only the face uncovered.

Compared to the *burqa* or *chadar,* a *dupatta* is considered modern. Shaw notes that a "*dupatta,* in the city, signals modernity, especially when it is worn not carefully over the hair but casually over the shoulder" (Shaw 2000: 118). The modern form of the national dress includes the *dupatta* worn casually. It may not conceal the whole body; the head remains uncovered and part or all of the arms are revealed. Both forms of dress—conservative and modern—are worn by the girls, with the majority dressing conservatively even before coming to the *madrassah*. Out of 35 respondents, only one girl claims to observe *shara'i purdah* before coming to the *madrassah*. The rest, even if they cover their bodies and faces, believe that their previous style does not fulfill the requirements of *shara'i purdah*.

Purdah: The Gendered Term

When asked to explain *purdah*, teachers and students alike universally respond, "The word '*aurat*'[4] means *purdah*" (*Aurat naam hi purdah ka hai*). They often add, "A woman is something that needs to be kept hidden" (*aurat hai hi chupanay ki cheez*). The Urdu word *aurat* means woman. It is derived from the Arabic term *awra* (also spelt as *aurah*), a noun that comes from the verb "*awira*," meaning "something shameful to look at" (Goto 2004: 289). The noun *awra* means "an object to be concealed" (Engineer 1996: 90). It also means "private parts" (Zeno 1996: 102). The Dictionary of Islam provides two meanings of aurah or aurat, one is shame or modesty, second that part of the body that must be covered (Hughes, 1885: 565). Because of its gendered connotations, *awra* is perceived as an inauspicious term to Muslim women. A less common and more formal term is *mastoorat*, which refers to women who cover themselves. It is derived from the root word *satr*, a term which carries immense significance in the context for purdah. Satr literally means "hidden"; in the light of Shari'a and with reference to purdah and dress it means those parts of the body which must be covered" (Attaria, 2006: 35)

At the *madrassah*, *satr* requires women to cover their whole bodies, including their faces. It is preferable to cover hands and feet, too. I observed that in most encounters with men, the girls at the *madrassah* seem considerably more conscious about covering their hands, while their feet may be left uncovered. The girls prefer that men cover themselves more than is required of *satr*, as well. *Shalwar kameez*, which is the national dress for both men and women, is considered proper, while pants or jeans and shirts are seen as symbols of westernization, or improper dress. When asked, *satr* is explained by the girls in the light of Shari'a. Practically speaking, inside the *madrassah* they cover themselves in accordance with social norms, always wearing *shalwar kameez* that completely conceals their body. They even keep their heads covered all the time as a mark of religious devotion.

With the link established between the terms *aurat* and *mastoorat* and clothing, the *madrassah* students provide a negation of Saussarian theory, which asserts that signifier and signified do not have a natural link but an arbitrary one—a link that becomes evident on the very first response to what is *purdah*. In this case, a natural link is emphasized between the words *aurat* and *mastoorat* and the actual physical being—a link which requires women to observe *purdah*. This natural link has its roots in their belief that Islam is a religion supporting nature, *deen i fitrat*, and *purdah* is a divine decree. The girls claim that "their" *burqa* befits this divine injunction.

Burqa: Dressing for Purdah

The *burqa* is a multi-aspect garment and, according to the students, the ideal *purdah* dress. The *burqa* is a type of "flat-cut clothes," which are "garments with no shape or lines." The cloth is sewn in a way that it loosely hangs over the body of the wearer, obscuring any curves or prominent lines (Andrewes 2005: 9). The dress consists of two parts: the body gown (*jilbab*) and the headscarf (*khimar)*.

Jilbab

Jilbab is a generic term that, together with its related terms, *djellaba*, *jillaba*, *gallabiya*, or *jallabiya*, is used in Arabic to connote a special form of dress, worn by men as well as women (Elguindi 2005: 369). *Jilbab* has been discussed quite extensively due to its usage in one of the two Quranic verses concerning *purdah* observance (33:59). Elguindi defines it as a “long loose shirt dress” (2005: 370). *Jilbab* conceals the body, but does not necessarily cover the head.

Traditionally, “[Muslim women] covered their faces by wearing the *jilbab* from the top of their head, and showed one eye,” and “[Women] tied [the *jilbab*] above their eyebrows” (Goto 2004: 281). The girls at the Jamia Hafsa, in light of these and other similar traditions, perceive *jilbab* as a long, wide piece of cloth worn to hide all body parts, including the face. But to legitimize covering the head and hiding the face, it is usually verse 24:31 of Qur’an that is referred to. In the verse, the word *khumur* (plural of *khimar*) holds particular significance for the girls. A brief description of the word is as follows.

Khimar

Hiding the face is an essential requirement of *purdah*. *Khimar* is a veil, the use of which predates Islam (Goto 2004: 287). It has been defined as a traditional garment for the head and neck (Stowasser 1997: 95), as well as a form of veil that covers the head and extends over the torso (similar to the cape worn by Catholic nuns) (Mahmood 2005: 41). In the majority of instances *khimar* is established as a head cover, although it is occasionally referred to just as a covering, and not specifically for the head.

The *jilbab* and *khimar* should fulfill the dress requirements of *purdah*. Despite variations in description and tradition, the students at *madrassah* all end up wearing the same type of clothing: the black, all-concealing *burqa*.

Hidden in Plain Sight: Establishing Group Identity behind the Veil

According to students, the first and foremost function of the *burqa* is to hide: hiding of the physical and tangible body, the dress, the adornments, and the intangible but apparent beauty which for them lies in the contours of the body and the face. There is a mutual consensus among the girls that hiding the face is especially important. The girls claim that they never go in public areas without their faces covered. A young *mu’alima* (teacher) explicates:

> A woman’s body is made such that it is beauty from head to toe, only hands and feet can be left open. In fact, it also depends, sometimes it is better to cover them too, a woman has to decide for herself. Her whole body is *awrah*; she needs to cover each and every part. If she covers it all but does not hide the face then it is of no use. Because the real beauty lies in the face: face is composite of beauty (*majmu’a al mahasin*).

If the world believes that beauty is to be appreciated and displayed, the girls at the *madrassah* think otherwise. They explain that the face is the core of beauty, and that revealing such beauty can bring harm to the moral order of society. A 19-year-old *mu’alima* (teacher), also a recent graduate of the same *madrassah*, says:

> See, we all here wear *niqab*, and that of course is not without reason. It may vary in style though but the purpose is to hide the face. Because we believe in it, we believe that the face is *ummul fitan* (the mother of all evils). People are attracted to a beautiful face. Boys see and fall in love with a beautiful face, then they seek ways to stay in touch, first

> they want just to talk then they want to meet, and so starts a never-ending story of love; it is not allowed in Islam. It is not allowed for men and women to have any relationship like friendship and love.

These two features of the face most frequently referred to, *majmu'a al mahasin* and *ummul fitan*, lend it unmatched superiority over other parts of the body. It is the core; the whole body seems to be dominated by this primary observable part of the body. A 37-year-old *mu'alima* (teacher) establishes:

> The eye first catches the sight of face and then the rest of the body and not the other way around. The face is the center of the body. It is no use wearing the *burqa* if one does not cover the face, the locus of beauty and splendor.

The face holds significance also because in them "the soul finds its clearest expression" (Simmel 2004: 1–10). Simmel's concept of beauty is applicable only when *purdah* is observed properly, as purity and piety are reflected in the face. When the face is revealed it can lead to sexual stimulation; the opposite gender is attracted to this facial beauty, increasing the likelihood of ending up in sexual involvement. This element of the beauty of the face, the "power" to sexually stimulate and excite, is largely perceived as a negative trait by my interlocutors.

But *burqa*, I found out, is also about covering nakedness. Revealing any part would be equated with actually making that part naked. The concept of nakedness applies to the whole body of a woman, to varying degrees. Revealing the arms is not as sinful as revealing the legs or showing cleavage, as a 20-year-old student articulates:

> A woman's body is *awrah*, it needs to be covered completely and remain hidden. Every part is like a private part. Let's suppose that if I wear half sleeves it would mean my arms are half naked. But these days the girls have no shame, they even go out showing off half their legs; what a grave sin!

Another 18-year-old student in the final grade at the *madrassah* explains why modern clothing is detestable:

> I am unable to understand the purpose of clothing these days; the shirts are getting shorter, the material thinner. It seems that people are wearing clothes and yet not wearing them …. And they say it is because of the hot temperature, I wish they realized it will be hotter in hell.

Purdah code includes the non-display of ornaments. The exhibition of body adornments, the use of tinkling jewelry that makes sounds and may attract another person, is strictly forbidden. What constitutes adornment and its hiding has been a topic of considerable debate in religious texts (see Goto 2004, 288–9). Such a discussion forms only a small part of the debated material studied by the girls at the *madrassah*. These debates are considered "problems of *fiqh*," thoroughly researched by religious scholars. Ordinary men and women are required to follow the rulings set by the scholars. The present research shows that the rules set by the religious scholars of the *Deobandi Hanafi maslak* for "what is apparent," and "ornaments" include a woman's body and face as well as jewelry, makeup, and dress. This is confirmed by their understanding of the word *jilbab*: "*Jilbab* is a must, everyone woman should wear it. Any *chadar* that covers the body, that hides the dress, the fitting of the dress, the body, the face, and if possible the eyes too," explains an 18-year-old student.

Jewelry and makeup for ornamentation and beautification are seldom used by the girls. They believe "that God created human beings in perfect form which should not be altered by the use of makeup" (a student's comment taken from a focus group discussion, agreed upon and endorsed by all the participants). The only makeup worn by the girls is kohl in the eyes, and when it has been applied, they cover their eyes with a thin cloth attached to the *niqab* (called *qumasha*). Even kohl is not used by most of the girls, because they believe it beautifies the eyes. What is most common is the use of henna on hands. The girls do often paint henna designs on each other's hands. The use of both kohl and henna hold religious significance—their use is approved by the religion.[5] Using kohl means following the prophet's *sunnah*.[6] As for henna, the students narrate that the prophet told a woman to color her fingernails with henna so that her hands would not be like the hands of men. When the hands and eyes are adorned, they are covered in the presence of one with whom marriage is permissable (*namahram*).

Simplicity

The primary goal of style for a *burqa* is simplicity—"something which is to hide beauty should not be beautiful, otherwise it loses its significance" (a student's comment taken from a focus group discussion). The *madrassah* students believe that the *burqa* should not be enhanced with embroidery, threadwork, sequins, printed motifs, colored piping, and so on, lest the dress grab the attention of others. A 20-year-old teacher says, "A *Burqa* should not be an attractive one. It has to be simple, not so fancy that the people pay more attention to a woman's *burqa* while talking to her." Simplicity is also preferred on the grounds that a beautiful garment would make people curious about the person wearing it. A young student says the same: "The package has to be simple, the more beautiful the package the more it will attract others and make them curious about the inside product" (a student's comment from a focus group discussion).

The teachers of the *madrassah* reflect upon the negative influence the fashion industry has on the form and style of *burqa*, marring its real purpose:

> Fashion has influenced the *burqas* too. Once we went to buy some for our girls and we were astonished to see glittery and glamorous *burqas* in shapes that would reveal body contours more than conceal. The shopkeeper wanted us to buy one of those but we insisted on simple ones. He was rather surprised that we were not interested in any of them, saying that this is what is in demand these days. The ultimate design was one with embroidered roses and "love" written in the center of the rose, just imagine! Some girls started to laugh at the absurdity of the idea, simultaneously touching the tips of their ears and asking for God's forgiveness,[7] others just shook their heads in disapproval. Such beautification nullifies the purpose of *burqa* (a teacher's comment taken from a focus group discussion).

Simplicity does not mean complete uniformity in style. The girls select from the different styles of plain black *burqas* sold in the market, as well as within the *madrassah* premises. This variation in style is subtle and often non-visible to an outsider, to whom all the girls seem to be dressed in uniform *burqas*. The two popular forms of gowns include *coat numa* (like a coat) and *kalion wala* (a garment with panels and looser in form than the *coat numa*). Similarly, there are two types of headscarves: one has an attached *niqab*, sewn with the scarf, whereas in the other type the scarf and the *niqab* are worn separately. In the case of the gown, the *kalion wala* was in vogue; but in the case of the headscarf it was just a matter of personal choice. Some liked the *niqab* attached to the scarf, while others liked it separate. The separate *niqab* can be made with just a single layer of cloth to hide the face or with double layers—a thick layer to hide the face and a thinner one to hide the eyes. This thinner layer is called *qumasha*. The girls preferred the double-layered *niqab* with *qumasha,* and often hid their eyes when outside the *madrassah*. The fabric used for the *burqa* is mostly georgette or other synthetic cloth. The key requirement is that the fabric be opaque. The gown and the headscarf are always of the same material. Such fabric is preferred because it hangs loosely over the body and does not cling. The time and effort required to iron such fabric is also considerably less, as once ironed it does not need to be re-ironed until the next wash.

Black: The Chosen Color

The most significant contributor to the uniformity in student dress is the black color of the *burqa*.[8] The explanation of opting for the black color is complex; it is not compulsory, but preferable—preferable to the extent of compulsion. The gown has to be loose and must be a dark and dull color, as darker colors reduce the chances of identification or revealing the body.

Discussions on *burqa* color always begin with the general statement that "it is not compulsory to wear black," followed by value-oriented choice for the color. Students reason their preference of black over other colors on various grounds. It has religious significance for them, and is considered the chosen color of the *sahabia-s* who used to wear black *jalabeeb*.[9] There are several other reasons to wear black that associate the color with group identity. Black is preferred on the basis that such a dark tone minimizes differentiation within the group, and that uniformity brings group solidarity. The preference for black reflects the preference for similarity over difference.

On an individual level, the uniformity of dress and color hides the identity, while on the group level it creates identity. The preference for black is justified as such by a 23-year-old student in the final grade:

> Dress marks an individual's identity. Black gives similarity to our dress and distinguishes it from the rest. Just as a policeman is required to wear a uniform to be recognized as such among ordinary men, the Muslim women should dress up in a way that they are recognized as *ummat i Muhammadya* [the people of Muhammad]. We should make an effort not only to be Muslims but to appear to be Muslims, too. I personally favor the similarity in dress because it will then become a symbol of Muslim women's identity as followers of the prophet on a collective level, which gives a sense of strength.

These are not the only characteristics associated with this color. Black is alternately believed to enhance beauty. The students I talked to believe wearing black makes a person look attractive. This aspect of the color emerged during informal conversations, and as one of the basic reasons to cover the face. Still, during the discussions on the significance of black, the girls always showed a preference for other, aforementioned reasons. Once, while watching the day scholars wearing their *niqab* before leaving the premises, an 18-year-old student remarked:

> You know what I think, that the black color makes even an ordinary face look beautiful. Imagine, if these girls go

> outside without covering their faces, will they not attract men?
>
> (Another student of the same age reiterated what the other had said: “I think so, too, such is the magic of this color!”)

Wearing of the black *burqa* in Pakistan connotes either one or a combination of several images: a *madrassah* student, a fundamentalist, a conservative, a religious or pious woman, or a rural inhabitant, to name a few.

Categorizing Dress

The girls always say that black is not “the” color, and *burqa* is not “the” dress, yet they confirm that they wear “… only black *burqa* in public places.” The dress underneath reflects a wider range of choices, but it is also guided by certain rules. The discussions about dress reveal an underlying code and establish that all the various forms of style, their own and those of the Other, may be categorized under four broad headings: preferable, acceptable, partially acceptable, and absolutely rejected.

“Preferable” is replication of the style worn by girls at the seminary. Under the category “acceptable” are all styles that fulfill the necessary criteria of *purdah*, including loose outer garment and covering of the head and face. It does not necessarily involve the use of black cloth or the same style of gown, headscarf, or face covering as theirs; it may vary in style and color. “Partially acceptable” includes wearing of *shalwar kameez* with a long, wide *dupatta* covering the head, in light colors. “Absolutely rejected” includes all those dresses that bear any resemblance to western dress or that are perceived as glamorous or modern by the society at large, or that reveal the body contours.

A change in the context may elevate the partially acceptable dress to the acceptable, or even preferable, as one of the respondents narrates:

> After high school, my mother went to stay in England. There she met Pakistani girls wearing skirts; she explained to them that this type of dress does not fulfill the requirement of our religion. Her lectures were very effective; they encouraged retaining one’s identity in a foreign land and the girls then started wearing *shalwar kameez*. The purpose of dress is to cover. I don’t think there is any western dress that fulfills this criterion—either they are too short or too tight.

Conclusion

Dress is not just a simple stitched piece of fabric, but rather a conception. It embodies and reifies not just the self, but several other particularities including religion, sexuality, and gender. It further entails conceptualization of modesty, privacy, and religiosity.

Dress, particularly religious dress, is a strong, visible marker of identity. Its material conception begins in interpretation of religious text, which is complex, varied, and problematic in its own right. While the interpretation of the *burqa* as religiously approved dress may seem rigid and static, in reality, it is dynamic and altered with reference to time and space. It provides context to sexuality and sexual normalcy. It is considered normal for women, who are perceived as sexually vulnerable, to cover themselves. As gendered dress, the *burqa* reflects upon gender-appropriate norms and values held by the adherents. A female archetype is created and replicated through the use of dress.

Burqa as root metaphor creates and demarcates the boundaries of insider/outsider. An integral component of the process of self-identification through dress is reflection upon others. Dress constructs identity in alterity. This process is twofold: it constructs self against the Other and helps identify and classify the Other. These boundaries form a continuum with fuzzy and permeable outlines. It has been noted in the discussion on categorization of dress that while *burqa* is perceived by *madrassah* students as the most appropriate dress, with a change in context, it was replaced by the national dress. Taking an emic perspective, that is, that of those who wear it, the *burqa* can be seen as a dynamic, gendered marker of religious identity in modern Pakistan.

Here it is also important to note firstly that the *burqa* is not only worn by the girls of MJH, but also by other segments of the society and students in *madrassahs* of all the different schools of thought. Secondly, the girls affiliated with MJH or any other *madrassah* in the country wear only black *burqas*, with the exception of those at Al-Huda International School.[10] Among the other segments, especially in the urban settings, black is not the only color worn. The *burqa* is available in different colors—usually dull, pastel, or dark—and various styles. Lastly, the *burqa* has undergone considerable change; the present form is heavily dominated by the Arabic style *abaya*, a long gown with a headscarf and *niqab*. The *niqab*, however, is not a compulsory part of the *burqa*, except in the case of *madrassahs*. Women across the country wear varied dress patterns, and it would be erroneous to generalize or say that the *burqa* is a style idealized by all Pakistani women.

At a theoretical level, my aim is to bring to attention, through this study, the less-discussed concept of alterity embedded within dress. So while it has been significantly recognized and written about in studies related to clothing and dress that the two are deeply interrelated, what has not been given due attention is the concept of the alterity entailed in dress. On the other hand, in writings about identity the concept of alterity is often discussed. Dress constructs identity; identity is about distinctiveness, which is achieved through alterity. With this argument I would like to establish that any academic discussion of dress generally and religious dress particularly necessitates discussion of alterity. This could further be elaborated through our earlier examples of Christian women or Pakistani or Russian-speaking or Caucasian women, reflecting distinctiveness in identity. In a similar vein, any adjective used with dress—for instance, ethnic dress, national dress, religious dress, conservative dress, modern dress, official dress, casual dress, women's dress—establishes not only distinctiveness but also feelings of otherness. Attention to such intricacies involved in dress and clothing will help us better understand the emic perspective of dress by a particular community.

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[1] This holds true at least for the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions, which define wearing of the headdress as an integral part of women’s dress in theological discourse. How the text is variably interpreted and practiced is another debate.

[2] Kelman defines social influence as “change in a person’s behaviour as a result of induction by others, whether another person or a group.” Kelman argues that social influence has multiple expressions, including “suggestion, persuasion, modeling, coercion or providing information” and leaves an impact on a person’s “attitudes, opinion, beliefs, values and actions preferences” (1999: 7). In the case of MJH I found that all these expressions are exercised through formal and informal lectures to influence, discipline and regulate girls’ behaviour.

[3] Although Kelman refers to the multiple expressions of social influence, his model largely concerns its evaluative components (1999:7).

[4] The inversion in the answer stating not what *purdah* is, but what *aurat* (woman) is, is intentional. It is in almost every case followed by an elaborate discussion about the term itself. A detailed connection is then established between the Urdu term *aurat*, the Arabic *awrah*, and the physical woman. It is important to mention here that in Arabic the term used to refer to women is not *awrah* but *naas*.

[5] Use of kohl and henna are considered *sunnah* of the prophet. Helmecke’s short article in *Medieval Islamic Civilization* provides a useful introduction (Helmecke 2006: 177). For details on the use of kohl refer to Bradley and Creagh 2006: 179.

[6] The term *sunnah* means “way” or “method” or “pattern.” It may be defined as the practical exegesis of the Quran through the sayings, practices, and acceptances of the prophet Muhammad (Qaradawi 2007: 1)

[7] It is a common practice that, when the girls hear something that is disapproved of by their religion, they ask for God’s forgiveness and mercy in Arabic and sometimes also touch the tips of their ears, which symbolizes the same thing. Such an act is not only common to the girls of the *madrassah* but also to the society in general.

[8] Several studies suggest that black or/and white have always been the dominant colors of the two popular styles of *burqa* in the region (Wilkinson-Weber 1999: 77; Srivastava 2003: 177; Schimmel 1980: 110; Jeffery 1979: 152).

[9] No Quranic reference or *hadith* is provided to support this belief.

[10] For details visit http://www.alhudapk.com.

Chapter 13
The Daring Mahrem: Changing Dynamics of Public Sexuality in Turkey[1]

Sertaç Sehlikoglu

As social transformations and new forms of sexualities are studied with close interest by social scientists, the question regarding the content and the formation of heterosexual culture that makes and remakes itself on a daily basis through forming boundaries and normalities remains theoretically less explored. Yet such a concern calls for further elaboration of the very boundaries in sexuality that differentiate public from private, intimate from distant. Indeed, in their pioneering article, Berlant and Warner discuss sex and sexuality as something "mediated by public" and argue that heterosexual culture creates privacy in order to identify and operate itself and preserve its own coherency. Albeit private, intimacy "also involves an aspiration for a narrative about something to be shared (1998: 281).

This chapter looks at the heterosexual culture in Turkey as a system that creates its own institutions of intimacy and privacy, which regulate their sexualities and bodies in public through creating borders, normalcies, and privileges. In order to address this question, I focus on the culture of *mahremiyet* (the Islamic notion of privacy and intimacy) as an "institution of intimacy" (1998), and gazing and hiding are the two fundamental components of this culture. I also share two vignettes that trouble the culture of *mahremiyet* in seemingly unrelated, but in fact deeply connected ways: the headscarf-wearing cover girls of *Âlâ* magazine and the kissing protest in Ankara, both of which threaten the power dynamics of gazing and hiding in the culture of *mahremiyet*. I argue that the culture of *mahremiyet* is central to the ways in which both public and private sexuality are imagined, regulated, and screened in everyday life. Gaze, whether it is cross-gender or same-gender, is still a very prevalent phenomenon in contemporary Turkey, shaping women's control of their bodily movements in public life. The aggressiveness of the gaze leads to a multilayered process of guarding privacy and protecting heterosexual intimacy through cultural scripts, normative spaces, and gendered acts in urban spaces in Turkey. Women's strict management of their bodies in terms of public sexuality is multilayered and multifaceted, shifting depending on space and context. I suggest that studying *mahrem* as an institution of intimacy will allow us not only to understand the conditions that make and remake the intimacy, but also to question the very nature of "secrecy" and "porousness" in it. The culture of *mahremiyet* as an Islamicate institution reflects the technologies that not only interlink public and private aspects of heterosexuality but also make and remake itself in the context of Turkey.

The term "Islamicate" is borrowed from Babayan and Najmabadi (2008), who adopted the term from historian Marshall G.S. Hodgson and used it to "highlight a complex of attitudes and practices that pertain to cultures and societies that live by various versions of the religion

Islam" (Babayan and Najmabadi 2008: ix). It refers to the contexts in which Islam is lived as a religion in society, although it may not be imagined within the same interpretations or followed by each and every individual at the same level of devotion. The term allows researchers to locate the values associated with Islam with local fractions within its historical and geographical limitations, without necessarily essentializing those values at the center of the lives of those who are living in that context. Islamicate nicely fits into the purpose of this chapter, as it aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which sexuality operates in everyday life and the agencies of the individuals who are in continuous negotiation with border-making institutions, enactments, and imaginations, through dimming, obscuring, and obliterating those borders.

Mahremiyet

Mahremiyet is a word that is not translatable into English, as it simultaneously refers to multiple words in English, including privacy, secrecy, and domesticity. It is derived from the word *mahrem*, which literally means "forbidden."[2] The word, in Turkish, commonly denotes a private, often sexual realm in the lives of individuals, couples, or families and is therefore confined by normative boundaries. Although the word *mahrem* is originally Arabic, derived from h-r-m, which simultaneously means sacred and forbidden, I will be discussing *mahrem* in relation to the ways in which it is used in the Turkish language for this research. Depending on the context in which the word *mahrem* is used, it may or may not refer to the sexual realm, but it always denotes confidentiality that the insider is expected to preserve and an outsider is expected not to violate. In one of the most prominent works related to contemporary forms of *mahremiyet* in Turkey, Nilüfer Göle (1996) attempts to link the concept to the political realm in order to further analyze visible Islam's relationship with modernity and secularity. Göle underlines the impossibility of fitting the "insider-outsider" dichotomy of *mahrem* into the Western public vs. private binary.[3] She says, "*mahrem* literally refers to intimacy, domesticity, secrecy, women's space, what is forbidden to a foreigner's gaze; it also means a man's family" (1996: 7). This chapter, however, is going to focus on the culture of *mahremiyet* as an individual understands it in relation to sexuality in everyday life, as a border-making mechanism that creates borders between spaces, between individuals, and within the body of the same individual. In fact, the query on *mahremiyet* and the prerogative to infringe on such boundaries, then, is the key aspect of this chapter. Veiled models posing for fashion magazine shoots and urban couples kissing to protest the banning of public expressions of intimacy are troubling because they both infringe on *mahrem* boundaries in contemporary Turkey.

Mahremiyet is a governing idea in contemporary Turkey that leads to institutions of intimacy (Berlant 1998), and the daily techniques that individuals, and women in particular, use to regulate spaces in everyday life. The daily techniques are created to handle interactions with various people in a range of settings from the bus to the streets, or while shopping or working. Thus, the way Islamic *mahremiyet* is analyzed here does not necessarily involve a theological or legal analysis per se. The emphasis is instead on an anthropological analysis that relates to individuals' own conceptualizations and imagination and how gendered they are.

Mahremiyet is constituted through cultural scripts, normative spaces, and gendered acts in the Islamicate contexts of the Middle East. Thus *mahremiyet* is defined, made, and remade in daily life as part of the institutions of privacy that Berlant says are "created to stabilize" and "normalize particular forms of knowledge and practice and to create compliant subjects" (1998: 286, 288). The culture of *mahremiyet* creates a practical knowledge deeply embedded, not only in the *mahrem*'s (often women's) embodied sexuality in public, but also in the way individuals imagine gender relations within the heterosexual culture in which they have found themselves. Sexuality is regulated through regulation of the body, not only through covering but also through a series of organized behaviors, movements, and attitudes in order not to attract attention, looks, and gazes.

Gazing as Penetration

The significance of gaze in the Turkish cultural imagination, combined with the *nazar* (strong eye),[4] complicates the culture of *mahremiyet* as an institution of privacy, and it convolutes the layers of privacy even further, more deeply and in a more entangled way, so that it is quite difficult to fully comprehend Turkish everyday life through theories on gaze and looking in the Western world. An important component of the literature on gaze appears in performance studies in Western scholarship, which often call for a visit to the Foucaultian gaze in relation to the visual domination in the operation of power and its relation to space (Urry 1992: 176–7). Yet the Foucaultian gaze provides little basis to understand how gaze operates in self-formation in intersubjective relations. From the psychoanalytic perspective, practices of looking are considered to be an important part of the processes in the formation of the subject. Gaze was one of the terms Lacan used (*le regard*, almost exclusively translated into English as "gaze") when he referred to looking or staring, often with desire. Thus, the concept Lacan uses is more than just seeing—it conveys a relationship between the one who looks and the one who is looked at. Moreover, Lacanian gaze is both physical and imagined. As he states in *objet Petit a*: "The gaze that I encounter … is not a seen gaze [that is, not an eye that I see looking at me] but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other …" (Lacan 1981: 84, 82). In Turkish culture, on the other hand, gaze has non-human agency, with its capacity to bring misfortune or illness through *nazar* as it can touch on people (*nazar değmesi*). The physicality of the gaze, therefore, is much more concrete, so it creates powerful and ambient rules, emotions, or beliefs around itself.

While I was writing this chapter, a new video campaign was popular on social media amongst feminist circles of Turkey.[5] This video was created by Whistling Woods International, to raise awareness of rapes in India. The video did not try to achieve its goal by sharing statistics on rape and sexual harassment. Instead, it depicted various scenes where men are staring at women's bodies with strong desire, in a harassing manner. Then, the women put a mirror in front of whatever parts of their bodies men were staring at, and the men felt *uncomfortable* when they saw their own reflections. The gaze was reversed, and the message was conveyed—except the video was against rape, not public harassment. Moreover, none of the men in the video were harassing a woman with their words or by touching. Still, the *gaze*, and especially the *male gaze*, had a particular sexual significance in the culture where this video was made (India) and where it was being shared (Turkey), so that women were able to see a direct relationship between rape, sexual harassment, and the male gaze. In that sense, the video treated the male gaze like a micro-reflection of rape.

Gaze and gazing at bodies produces a sexual script. Gazing penetrates when it trespasses the *mahrem* borders, therefore violating the privacy of the seen. Once it trespasses these set borders, the gaze becomes penetration and therefore sexually active—a perspective that has existed in Turkish understanding of sexuality for centuries, according to Dror Ze'evi (2006). In his historical account, Ze'evi refers to such duality of the aggressive, masculine, and penetrating versus the meek, feminine, and penetrated in Ottoman society. The *mahrem*, the forbidden private one, is enclosed; it veils, covers, and hides, whereas the masculine stares, trespasses, opens up, and enters. Ze'evi says: "The body, by virtue of its composing substances rather than any divinely appointed soul, would have a strong or weak sexual urge, a feminine or masculine, active or passive, penetrating or penetrated type of sexuality" (2006: 22). The curious, penetrating gaze, therefore, is a micro-level reflection of the cultural heterosexual imagination of the masculine position. It satisfies curiosity, gives victorious pleasure to the gazer—the pleasure to transgress—and creates a strong discomfort in the one who guards the borders, especially if those borders are on that person's own body. Even if the *seen* is not aesthetically appealing, the satisfaction of breaking the boundaries may involve some pleasure of trespassing into prohibited zones.

One of the main components of the regulations derived from this principle is visible in space-related arrangements in history. *Harem*, for instance, was a space where female guests were hosted, and occasionally blood-related male relatives were allowed in. In houses where there was *harem*, it was often the case that *harem* was located at the interior of the house, where insiders could see outside (garden, street, main room) but outsiders could not see inside. As opposed to the common misunderstanding, *harem* actually refers not to the zone of women per se, but to the domestic sphere where male relatives can socialize with the female ones, such as fathers, daughters, sons, and siblings. Moreover, seeing appears as a central component of this space regulation. Insider-outsider-ness or regulating who can see whom has been an important component of the spatial structure of *harem* (Lad 2010) and has parallels with public-domestic dichotomies in other contexts as they simultaneously feed each other and secure the existing system (Strathern 1987, 1990). In Lad's analysis, the gazing relationship between outsider and the segregated zone is to "cautiously avert" the gaze from there, "rather than steal a glimpse inside" (2010: 147). Schick (2010) suggests a Foucaultian reading of *harem* from the perspective of space and power. He incorporates the possibilities of thinking about the ways in which certain Islamic heteroerotics are enabled with the use of spatial regulations to mediate seeing.[6] It is therefore important to analyze the significance of gazing in contemporary Turkey, where visual culture filled with revealing images is so widespread. Moreover, how should one understand the institutions and technologies of intimacy in contemporary Turkey?

Vignette 1: Headscarved Cover Girls as the Daring Mahrem

It is a humid day in Istanbul and I am sitting in the café of a shopping mall with a key interlocutor from the field. Her name is Firuze and she is giving me information about the latest trends in the lives of the Islamic bourgeoisie of Istanbul. During our conversation, she says, “So, have you seen *Âlâ*?” I first thought she was speaking about one of the soap operas on Turkish TV, so I was disappointingly indifferent to her question. Realizing my disinterest, Firuze pointed out a fashion magazine lying on the table of two young women sitting two tables away from ours. She insisted that I check it out and asked permission to borrow the magazine from the two women.

Firuze is a pious woman, sensitive about her spiritual life, and does not want to fall behind the trends within her circles, mostly upper-class Islamic circles of Istanbul. She connects with her high-school friends, her neighbors, her friends, and her family through weekly religious meetings (*sohbet*), as well as through social media, mainly Facebook, twitter, Foursquare, and Instagram. According to this pious middle-class housewife, *Âlâ* represents a non-pious stream and a trend-setting popular culture icon in Islamic circles, which is something she finds almost entertaining. She thinks that *Âlâ* is not simply a non-pious magazine, it is also curiously successful: “It was sold out within the same week,” she says, looking right into my eyes, with a surprised face. *The New York Times* characterized *Âlâ* as “Vogue of the Veiled,”[7] referring to the fusion of conservative Muslim values and high fashion.

Âlâ started its publishing life in June 2011 and sold the first volume during June and July. The volume Firuze fetched from the next table had a young woman, looking like a teenager (I later was informed by the editor of the magazine that she was 21), posing with a sweet smile in her white jacket and pink scarf on its cover. The issues covered in this volume included the art of stylish head-covering (silk scarves dossier and “Covering is Beautiful” essay contest), and homosocial enjoyments (having a holiday on a boat with an all-female crew).

Firuze was very curious about my response to the magazine, partly because she did not know how to feel about it. I was quite puzzled myself that I could not really formulate my thoughts or my feelings about it. It was obviously interesting as a research subject, the girl on the cover was pretty, but there was something uncanny about it. Later on, I realized that it is this feeling *Âlâ* gives in its first encounter that is worth looking more closely at. It was confusing, bemusing, and for many, disturbing. Most people I talked to in Istanbul, whether pious or not, had strong feelings about the magazine, not necessarily because they have read it, but because they saw what I saw, somewhere at a shopping mall, on their neighbor’s coffee table, or at the hairdresser’s: a headscarf-wearing cover girl. The feelings they shared, albeit strong, were mostly unsure and bemused. In several other instances, when I carried the magazine around the city before or after an interview, I recognized negative responses. Once, I was sitting in a coffee shop in Maltepe, interviewing an interlocutor. The woman sitting beside us said, “Look at that,” to her friend out loud, pointing out the magazine on our table. She continued: “How meaningless it is, what they do. They both cover their heads and pose in these magazines.”[8] As a non–headscarf-wearing woman, she was trying to convey her message to two headscarf-wearing women—us. Her discomfort was not coming from a secular sentiment, either, as she was taking up the same criticism that Islamist authors in Turkey have articulated several times: that the women in the magazine were both covering their bodies and exposing them to the public eye (Gün 2007, Barbarosoğlu 2005). Whether secular or Islamist, women’s public sexuality is expected to avert the gaze, especially the male gaze, which seemed to be a shared masculinist perception. I then thought about the meanings of posing, veiling, and revealing as fundamental parts of public female sexuality in Turkey and realized that the discomfort people had about the *Âlâ* cover girls is worth ethnographic attention.

The Uncanny *Âlâ* Girls: Headscarved Women Posing with Pride

Women's headscarf is assumed to be a visual acknowledgment of the power relation of gazing and hiding in the culture of *mahremiyet*. In her extensive work on headscarf-wearing women in cities in the 1990s of Turkey, Nilüfer Göle visits the historical development of the public debate regarding the female body in public spheres from a sociological point of view. She says, "The female body, which long established the boundaries between the realms of *mahrem* and *namahrem*, still influences the social projects" (1996: 35). Göle convincingly demonstrates the continuation of women's privacy (*mahrem*) as something to be preserved, from the Tanzimat Period of the Ottoman Empire in the late 1800s till the Islamist movement of the 1980s. As I will argue here, the realms of *mahrem* and *namahrem* not only influence the social projects, but also, as Berlant and Warner put it, create and signify a community that "is imagined through scenes of intimacy." The public learns and relearns what might be characterized as the "normal" intimate, the *mahrem*, and is able to judge it with reference to the culture of *mahremiyet* that created its own norms.

Following Göle's account, a religiously headscarved female body is generally imagined to be the *volunteered mahrem*, a body that acknowledges the power of the *namahrem* male gaze as something to be avoided, both in the minds of the public, and in academic works (Kılıçbay and Binark 2002). Since the headscarf is almost immediately associated with acknowledgment of *mahrem* bodies as (potential and even volunteered) objects of male desire, recent fashion trends among headscarved women are difficult to understand. According to this secularist (and simultaneously masculinist) perspective, "the wearing of the veil ensures that the norms of publicness and privacy are absolutely subordinated to the power of the male gaze, the authority and privilege of which are granted and justified by Islam" (Çınar 2005: 77).[9] This perspective, according to Çınar, was often used by secularist feminists in order to rationalize headscarf bans at universities in the early 2000s.

What Çınar refers to as a feminist approach that expects avoidance of the male gaze as the inherent impulse of a veiled female body shares curious parallels with the Islamic conservative perspective, which reveals why I trace shared masculinist tendencies in both perspectives. They both locate headscarf-wearing as an idealistic act of a *mahrem* body, which should prioritize discreetness, according to several Muslim conservatives (Şişman 2006, Barbarosoğlu 2005, Gün 2007). In her book *Imaj ve Takva* (*Image and Piety*), Barbarosoğlu questions the rising interest in fashion amongst headscarf-wearing women. In Barbarosoğlu's account, fashion becomes problematic, not only in the bodies of headscarf-wearing women per se, but in the ways in which it is carried on the streets, in public life. In other words, it is a subject of criticism for Barbarosoğlu when headscarf-wearing women walk on the streets in colorful and tight clothes in an attractive manner. They attract gaze, mainly the *namahrem* male gaze, which is at the heart of Barbarosoğlu's criticism. She uses the term "*dikkat çekici*," which is the proper translation for "attractive," and it literally means "attention-grabbing." She starts her work by describing the centrality of avoidance from gaze, especially the male gaze, in relation to modesty and the religious headscarf, and explains how it is inherently problematic that headscarf-wearing women, who are supposed to avoid the gaze, are attracting it in today's world.

After over two decades of Göle's work and a number of other studies in Turkey on women and the headscarf in Turkey (Gökarıksel 2009, 2012, Kömeçoğlu 2009, Özcan 2012, Bilge 2010, Gökariksel and Mitchell 2005, Ozdalga 1998, Shively 2005, Navaro-Yashin 2002), it is premature to suggest that women wear the headscarf simply because they are fully submissive to the culture of *mahremiyet* as volunteer *mahrems* or accept the norms of the culture wholly. On the contrary, we keep witnessing moments that indicate a more complex dynamic between the culture of *mahremiyet* and headscarf-wearing women. They appear on TV, on the streets, and in the newspapers in colorful and tight outfits, in heavy makeup, using a daring body language. Those moments imply that women do not seem to be willing to fit into the social projects, and keep confounding, puzzling, and even troubling the norms, discourses, and perceptions about them. Indeed, *Âlâ*'s headscarved cover girls are covering parts of their bodies but simultaneously uncovering by posing for the gaze, thus following and violating *mahrem* norms at once.

The editor of the magazine, Hülya Aslan, explains to me that the cover girls are in fact professional models she personally selects from the portfolio of their agency. She dresses them up according to the theme and the colors of the volume. *Âlâ* became the topic of hot debate[10] when it invited Eastern European models to pose suggestively in luxurious haute couture and bright scarves.[11]

Yet as a photo-performance, whether they are of Eastern European origin or not, the headscarved cover girls go against the normativity of secular politics by representing Turkish women as unveiled/modern/progressive, and also against the pedagogy of Islamic appropriation of women's public embodiment and unruly sexuality. Their puzzling and perplexing performance promises a new becoming that refuses to hide itself from the public gaze and dares by posing. Moreover, models' use of their bodies as sites of expression and performance is meaningful, considering the ways in which women are expected to control their privacies when leaving the domestic space and entering the public arena. As Özyürek (2006) points out, the republican project also asked their women to control their privacy and sexuality in public. In other words, the culture of *mahremiyet* has been further reinforced by the secularist project as nationhood and its modern values have always been redefined and represented through appropriated female bodies.

The women of *Âlâ* are perplexing not because they are awkward, ungrammatical, or completely new. They are strangely familiar and yet unfamiliar, since they are almost misplaced, embodied oxymorons. The emotional response to their appearance is discomfort, if not anxiety, similar to the definition of "uncanny": "frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar" (Freud 1995 [1919]: 154). Uncanny refers to an instance of cognitive dissonance felt because of the paradoxical nature of feeling familiar and strange towards an object (or a person) at the same time. In the case of *Âlâ* women, the uncanny is not a material object like a living doll, but a living person, and the "spectator" is the position of looking at their uncanny images, which are both familiar, with their traditional and Islamic scarves, and strange, with their poses and their daring eyes that look directly at the spectator. The headscarf is "familiar," "native," "belong[s] to the home" in Freud's terms (1995 [1919]: 154), and this familiarity falls into the "inside" of the *mahrem* border. Yet the women's full lips with shiny lipstick and their smoky eyes look strangely unfamiliar, like those of an outsider. These confusing oxymorons evoke a perfect uncanny moment that is not necessarily a contradiction, but only a complication (1995 [1919]: 152).

There is a bodily uncertainty about the headscarved cover girls that provokes uncanny feelings from both the secular and Islamist worlds: they are not pious, nor do they fit into the secular ideals. Indeed, there are over 20 groups and pages on Facebook alone that condemn the fashionable and attractive outfits of young headscarved *Âlâ* women. The criticisms here do not arise from the fact that the new veiled women amalgamate two distinct appearances (Western and Islamic), but that they combine two opposing and conflicting positions on their female bodies. At the heart of these forms of discomfort lie the power and prevalence of the culture of *mahremiyet* in the minds of the public, which shape endless expectations about how women should behave, talk, walk, eat, laugh, look, or move. The reason *Âlâ* evokes controversy is that it violates the basic rules and expectations of this dominant culture of *mahremiyet*, thus instigating frowns, scorn, ridicule, and even condemnations. Nevertheless, as it will become apparent in the next vignette, arousing uncanny feelings is a mild reaction for a *mahrem* that dares to trouble the gazing/hiding dynamics of the culture of *mahremiyet*.

Vignette 2: Kissing the Mahrem in Ankara

On May 25, 2013, Ankara's Kurtuluş subway station witnessed Turkey's first kissing protest. The protest was called in response to a public announcement one week earlier at the very same station, which warned couples in the subway: "Please behave in accordance with public moral codes." The protest was organized and spread over social media, with demonstrators announcing, "We will be kissing in Kurtuluş subway!" Other slogans circulating on twitter and on Facebook were "God Damn Your Morals" (*Ahlakınız Batsın*) and "Time for Kissing in Ankara" (*Ankara için* öpüşme *vakti*, a witty remark that referred to Ramadan announcements for breaking fast, i.e. "*iftar* time for Ankara"). As was apparent from the slogans, the protesters were upset by the particular kind of Islamic moral codes slowly (but surely) taking over the public sphere and trying to regulate and intervene in private interactions between couples.

A counter-protest was immediately engineered by the Ankara youth branch of the AKP, the ruling government party, to "Stop the Acts against Public Moral Codes!" On the day of the protest, the angry counter-protesters brought out knives during the ensuing clash, and police intervened to quell the rising tension. That day from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., there were concentric layers of people on the scene: the kissing protesters, the media, a few citizens present to witness and record the public kissing, the police, the enraged "moral code defenders," and the curious public surrounding the hubbub. From these screening layers of crowd and discord, two moments from the television news stuck in my memory: kissing couples encircled by photographers, and bloodstains on the underground steps where a protester was stabbed by an irked "moral code defender." What remains baffling about this fragment is that an instant of public sexual and intimate expression could be met with such ferocity. What was at stake to have sparked such a hideous act of fury?

Berlant and Warner say, "Heterosexual culture achieves much of its metacultural intelligibility through the ideologies and institutions of intimacy" (1998: 553). Heterosexual kissing is an intimate act that, according to the culture of *mahremiyet*, ought to take place somewhere it cannot be seen. The structural construction of the culture of *mahremiyet* requires this intimate *mahrem* interaction to be hidden.

Kissing protests are a well known part of global LGBT activism, taking the form of same-sex kissing that triggers parallel "out-of-place" perceptions (Hubbard 2012) and are considered a "threatening act" against public norms (Morris and Sloop 2006). Kissing as a form of protest holds "*political* imperative" (Morris and Sloop 2006: 2, emphasis original), and the protests become commensurable through their ability to signify their messages in relation to the narrative, language, and the norms it stands up against. Due to the insider-outsider regulations and the boundaries embedded in the culture of *mahremiyet*, kissing of opposite sexes was also quite a "paramount political performance" (Morris and Sloop 2006: 3). In other words, the Ankara kissing protest was not aiming to challenge heteronormativity, but protesting the ways in which the culture of *mahremiyet* has started to dominate the regulation of the public sphere. The *mahrem*, in this case the private act of kissing, was being performed as a public protest instead of hiding itself. Indeed, kissing in public, as a *mahrem* act, irritates and troubles hegemonic masculinity because it takes the penetrating power away from the male gaze, rendering the gaze passive and feeble through a public performance.

A curious moment that serves for further analysis, however, was when we witnessed one female couple kissing as part of the protest in Ankara. The female couple appeared towards the end of the protest. Interestingly, the two women were not the main cause of vexation. Very few newspapers put their photo on the hard-copy papers, and some of them uploaded their photo as part of the "photo stream" of the news on their websites. It was almost as if few were willing to look at the two women's protest. Their kissing was not a threat to the *mahrem* public scenery, and was ignored by the moral code defenders. For the female couple, the *namahrem* gaze looked away, not to avoid an unruly pleasure, but to deny.

The Daring *Mahrem*

In *mahremiyet*, covering and hiding the *mahrem* against the gaze of the sexual superior (male over female, outsider over insider) is the main component of the gazing relationship. The curious gaze that has the power to penetrate, to monitor, and to be hidden from is therefore a micro-level reflection of the cultural heterosexual imagination of the masculine position in this heterosexual culture. Yet the culture is built on permeability. It is a border-making mechanism, yet the boundaries it creates are inherently porous, while the public nature of the privacy itself leads us to understanding the mechanisms that create such dichotomies.

Nevertheless, in contemporary Turkey, the penetrating gaze is no longer able to kill, as we observe on the covers of *Âlâ* and during the kissing protest. *Mahrem* is performing and daring publicly, thus disempowering the gaze. It can no longer create discomfort, and it is the *mahrem* that takes this power away from the gaze by public performances. When the boundary is not defended by the *mahrem*, the power to penetrate is taken away from the gaze, hence it loses its masculine position and is left impotent, disabled, eunuch.

A public display of a *mahrem* sexual subject or act undermines the power of the masculine position in the heterosexual imagination. In both of the cases above, both the headscarved cover girls of *Âlâ* and the public kissing protest, we observe not necessarily hiding or veiling but daring *mahrems*. They deny their presumed female inferior position by performing, ignoring the gaze. By doing so, they publicly avert the gender binary, stealing away the penetrating role and disempowering a penetrating, active, and masculine type of sexuality and pushing it to the other end of the spectrum: penetrated, passive, and feminine. Having said so, posing is an act of reversing the power relationship between the gaze and the *mahrem*, in the way the relation places gaze with the masculine and the *mahrem* with the female. Such an act, whether in the form of a magazine cover featuring a headscarved woman or in the form of a kissing protest, triggers aggression.

Parallel with the prevalence of gaze, the culture of *mahremiyet* is still influential in regulating women's behaviors and movements in public spaces in contemporary Turkey. It influences the social projects and public encounters between state agents and individuals, as well as how intimacy rules in everyday life are created and re-created in the minds of urban residents. Therefore, the culture of *mahremiyet* continues to exist as a boundary-making mechanism in social life. The limits and the boundaries it create, however, are changing.

Conclusion

As Moore points out, "[b]odies are the site where subjects are morphologically and socially constructed, they mark the intersection of the social and the symbolic; each subject's relation with his or her body is both material and imaginary" (1999: 168). Thus, in order to observe and analyze a change in sexuality culture enabled through and operated on bodies, it is crucial not to ignore the particular morphological, social, and symbolic constructions of the body in the context of Turkey. As explored throughout this chapter, in the context of Turkey, the way gaze operates in the *mahrem* culture, that is both material and imaginary, that is able to touch and even to penetrate due to physicality attributed to gaze, reifies sexed bodies.

The contemporary shifts in the culture of *mahremiyet* in Turkey, which have been enabled by a new visio-sexual culture, have spawned a new era in which the new veil is emerging, kissing protests are taking place, and headscarved women are posing with pride on the covers of fashion magazines. In Turkey, there has been a new rising sexuality culture that deserves to be further studied ethnographically. Although the change has not been referred to with any particular term, the curious subjects of the change have been a topic of popular conversations. The one popular culture reference I liked the most was "*süslümanlar*,"[12] which combines the words *süslü* (adorned, embellished) and *Müslüman* (Muslim), referring to (almost exclusively) women who embody upper-class trends, Western styles, and signifiers of Islam (often simply headscarf) simultaneously. That new era has almost been organically linked to the changes taking place in Turkey in relation to the rise of new relationships with Islam, neo-liberalism, and the expansion of the Turkish economy, combined with the continuous habit of investing in women's bodies as a marker of change (Kandiyoti 1989). In fact, *Âlâ* was one of the most conspicuous markers of this new era. Headscarf-wearing women, even the ones who did not buy the magazine,[13] were talking about it as a symbol, as it denoted an almost unforeseeable change to headscarf-wearing women and girls posing on the cover of a fashion magazine with their colorful scarves and their young and cheerful faces.

In Ankara, however, the discomfort was greater than a simple disgust. This time, the conflict between protestors and furious party members was exacerbated due to the heterosexual institutions of privacies that were in operation as well as the political and affective nature of the protests. Consequently, it was more than a simple threat of masculine position in the mundane life of heterosexual normalcy. The protest was directly targeting the hegemonic masculinity and causing a momentary crisis to everyday masculine position in the culture of *mahremiyet*, thus the outburst of rage. Considering how the troubled normative boundaries result in violent rage in the context of Turkey, with honor crimes and trans murders, a political protest against the state intervention (the announcement in the Ankara metro) to contemporary and secular forms of intimacy and privacy, in the case of Ankara kissing protest, becomes a new form of the abject and therefore is confronted with the violent face of heteronormative privacy.

As I argue in this chapter, *süslümanlar*, *Âlâ* magazine, and the kissing protesters in Ankara are, in fact, the visible markers of the changing sexuality culture, the culture of *mahremiyet*, as they both challenge the power dynamics embedded in the culture. One important component of this new sexual culture is that it prioritizes the privacy of the individual over the privacy of an institution, such as the family or the state. Also, it tends to celebrate intimacy publicly, rather than cover or hide it. As in the case of *Âlâ*, even when there is a certain level of covering, the images perform sexuality within the limits the individual sets, as opposed to those set by the family, the state, or (a particular interpretation of) religion. Despite the differences in class background or political views, the conspicuous markers of the new sexuality culture, the daring *mahrems*, are able trigger the discomfort of the same normative supremacist gaze.

What we are witnessing is a more structural shift, a fundamental change in the culture itself. The long-established institution, the culture of *mahremiyet*, has been under relatively new, rising, non-traditional threats. A change in heterosexual culture in Turkey was previously documented by Ozyegin (2009), where she looked at the perspectives of virginity norms amongst heterosexual young women and observed a normative shift in their accounts of sexuality. A similar observation and thus argument is present in this chapter. The change at stake is conspicuous at particular fragments, approaches in virginity, on the cover of a magazine, or during a kissing protest, yet the change is about the shifting and transforming boundaries of the institutions of intimacy, of which there are many in today's Turkey. The change at stake, as Ozyegin once put it, create "complex ambiguities of the moving boundaries of permitted and prohibited" (2009: 119).

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[1] A much shorter version of the kissing protest section of this chapter is published on the Cultural Anthropology blog under the title “Kissing the Mahrem in Ankara.” *Fieldsights—Hot Spots,* Cultural Anthropology Online, October 31, 2013.

[2] The ending “iyet” in *mahremiyet* acts like a derivational noun suffix and turns it into a categorical term.

[3] In fact, the literature of anthropological studies has attempted to go beyond the public-private dichotomy to further understand socialities and proximation in non-Western societies and question the applicability of such dichotomy, not only in non-Western, but also in Western settings. Edward T. Hall, for instance, suggested the term “proxemics,” non-verbal communication in intersubjective relations in multiple social settings.

[4] Despite the common misunderstanding and mistranslation, *nazar* in fact refers to a strong look at another, whether it conveys envy or love.

[5] Kanupali, Deepa, “This Ad from India Shows Men Exactly How Creepy They Are when They Stare at Women on the Street,” Upworthy, http://www.upworthy.com/this-ad-from-india-shows-men-exactly-how-creepy-they-are-when-they-stare-at-women-on-the-street?c=cur1 and Whistling Woods International, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDYFqQZEdRA.

[6] In his former and more extensive work framed by the ontologies of sexuality and space, Schick (1999) develops an elaborate analysis of multiple (often eroticized) depictions of *harem* that he refers to as “alteritist” (rather than orientalist) and symbolic violations of the *mahrem* borders by “*making transparent* of its walls” (emphasis original, 15). What Schick refers to as walls are what I call *mahrem* borders in this research. By problematizing the voyeuristic nature of those previous works, Schick simultaneously points out the gaze as something that penetrates those borders for pleasure.

[7] Bilefsky, Dan, “A Fashion Magazine Unshy About Baring a Bit of Piety,” *The New York Times*. March 29, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/29/world/europe/a-turkish-fashion-magazine-ala-is-unshy-about-showing-some-piety.html?_r=0.

[8] Field Notes, 22 January 2012.

[9] I would like to note here that in spite of the common understanding, women’s veiling should not be read solely based on restricting sexual desire. Muslim veiling is adapted not only in the presence of *mahrem* opposite sex, but also during prayer, which indicates that it has a spiritual aspect as well. My discussion here, however, aims to focus on the intersubjective aspect of the culture of *mahremiyet* and its impact on particular normative sexuality.

[10] *Âlâ* has a history of sparking controversies and attracting criticisms, including the disquiet of religious scholars about the flaunting of femininity, the discomfort of the secular Turkish public at what they perceive to be a case of hypocrisy of mixing religion with extravagance, and the annoyance of Muslim intellectuals at the extremes of conspicuous consumption and commercialism.

[11] Aslan explains their choice to me in purely professional terms—how it is important for the magazine to have to pick the model from the portfolio to fit into the coming volume and dress the models up as they wish. She also mentions that Eastern European models are able to stay positive and provide good photos even after extended hours of shooting.

[12] “Kim bu Süslüman’lar?” *Gazeteci.tv.* May 19, 2003, http://gazeteci.tv/kim-bu-suslumanlar-170125h.htm.

[13] Lower-class women were not able to afford the magazine, whereas upper-class women did not find the style in the magazine “tasteful.” The class dynamics playing around the formation of the particular taste my upper-class informants were referring to is quite interesting to look at more closely, although it is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Chapter 14
Sexing the *Hammam*: Gender Crossings in the Ottoman Bathhouse

Elyse Semerdjian

> The *Hammam* is a sexually overestimated place. It may be seen as a uterine environment … Entering the *hammam* is to plunge into mystery. It is a return in dream to the mother's breast.
>
> —Abdelwahab Bouhdiba

> The *Hammam* symbolizes many things … *Hammam* comes from the word *hamim* that means 'warm' or 'intimate,' it also means 'hot.'
>
> —'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi

From classical Muslim treatises to more contemporary expressions in the Tunisian film *Halfaoune* (1990), the public bathhouse (*hammam*) has been portrayed as a crossing place in a variety of texts. It is where boyhood transitions into manhood, and where morality and gender norms are inverted in ways that threaten social order. The common theme of forbidden sexuality is manifest in the bathhouse, and sometimes dangerously normative within its steamy walls. While these narratives may read as sexual escapism—or simple Orientalism wherein Muslim women and even young men were objects of such fantasies—for historians of gender and sexuality, we must search for deeper meaning. Portrayals of the bathhouse as a sexualized space inspire us to ask, Why does the bathhouse, from a symbolic standpoint, elicit such sexualized and gendered responses? Historically, how did Ottoman discourse sexualize the bathhouse and simultaneously seek to stabilize and regulate this suspicious space? Finally, why is the bathhouse in particular portrayed as a liminal space where transformation and boundary-crossing are possible?

This study, modest in scope, seeks to examine the troubled relationship of gender and sex in the Ottoman bathhouse by examining more closely the ethical and judicial issues at stake.[1] Certainly, conservative male elites complained about women in public spaces throughout the centuries, but they were not able to completely bar women from bathing due to its utility for both religious purity and social hygiene. By definition, this dual purpose of the bathhouse meant it was consistently an ambivalent space. Religious purity was often at odds with sociability, especially as bathhouse consumption thrived in eighteenth-century Ottoman leisure culture and bathing practices expanded to include an entire micro-economy within the bathhouse. The religious implications of bathing also show why it was often a source of anxiety for not only Muslim male literati, but occasionally Christian clerics, who also found the institution abominable. In the end, this chapter will show that there is a long historical trajectory to viewing the bathhouse as a suspect space that prompted state and clerical authorities to regulate it more heavily in the eighteenth century. Finally, using the field of anthropology of religion, I will show why the bathhouse has remained morally suspect due to its symbolism as a threshold delineating binary distinctions between private/public, cleanliness/dirt, sacred/profane, and Muslim/non-Muslim. Therefore, it is the liminality of the bathhouse in particular as a boundary marker that made it morally worrisome for many male literati and Ottoman authorities, prompting intervention.

Bathhouses and Body Regimes

Like the Romans before them, Muslims adopted the bathhouse as a marker of civilization during early Muslim expansion, creating thousands of embellished structures, many still used throughout the region.[2] Bathing practices in the Ottoman Empire were the product of a combination of religious and social rituals overlapping communal and gender boundaries. For Muslims, traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, such as "cleanliness is half of the faith," religiously mandated caring for the self through washing and grooming.[3] Enshrined in daily ritual, this requirement prompted wealthy Muslim donors to endow bathhouses throughout centuries of Muslim rule. It was within this multi-religious milieu that Ottoman baths were donated to non-Muslim neighborhoods, revealing that in practice bathing moved beyond pure religious obligation.[4] Jewish women were also bound to a strict set of religious laws that required them to bathe in a *mikvah* bath under strict conditions to restore ritual purity after menstruation. At least one public bathhouse in Ottoman Damascus, *Hammam al-Yahud*, contained a *mikvah* basin to accommodate Jewish women.[5] Although not subject to such religious requirements, Christians acquired similar bathing and grooming practices while living in a multi-confessional Islamicate habitus.[6]

Bathhouse culture became part of an overall set of ethical practices in which men and women, regardless of religious denomination, cared for the self by maintaining bodily hygiene. In this sense, Mary Douglas's statement rings true: "The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries that are threatened or precarious."[7] In the strictest religious sense, caring for the body was a way of caring for the community of believers. In its social aspects, bathhouses were adopted to preserve hygiene within Islamicate empires, a particular concern in the early modern period where bouts of plague frequently appeared.[8] In other words, in the practical aspects of empire building, bathing came to move beyond religious ritual and into the sphere of civic concern.

By the eighteenth century, Ottoman bathhouses were associated less with religious ritual and more with sociability within a vibrant, globally connected consumer society. Discussed frequently by European and Ottoman contemporaries, Ottoman subjects spent long hours in bathhouses engaging in the favored pastime of leisure (*kayf*). Leisure practices lent themselves to Orientalist stereotypes, but for its time, consumption was a marker of Ottoman bourgeois identity. It was in this context that women are described as coming to the bathhouse in groups rather than as individuals to spend large parts of the day bathing and socializing. Bathing consisted of a number of regimes, including massage, exfoliation of dead skin, and removal and trimming of unwanted body hair. Long-term Aleppo resident, Alexander Russell provides a detailed description of the kinds of services available to both men and women in the *hammams*, including the application of depilatory cream made of quick lime to remove body hair, henna to the fingers, perfumes like sandalwood after bathing, and kohl to the eyes.[9] Even more intimate procedures were performed by attendants requiring fees: pubic and armpit hair removal, massage, and bone cracking. After these preparations were complete, bathers would leave the hottest chambers of the bathhouse interior and partake of the light snacks of fruit and sweets they had often brought with them—water pipes (*nargile*), increasingly popular in this period, were also available for post-bathing leisure.[10]

In stark contrast to social bathing, ritual purification was required prior to prayer in Islamic societies and fundamental to religious practice, with strict guidelines put forth in the *sunna*, the body of Islamic customs modeled after the Prophet Muhammad. Prayers conducted in a state of uncleanliness (*janaba*) are not accepted if the means to purify are readily available. As with most Islamic traditions, there are exceptions to many of these rules, one being that clean sand can be used for purification in a ritual called *tayammum* when fresh water is unavailable.[11] When it comes to sexuality, some forms of contact are considered polluting, while others are not. For example, forms of affection like kissing or fondling are not placed in the category of impure acts. Semen emission during sex is considered pollution (*hadath*) and therefore is placed in the same category as other bodily secretions, such as menstrual blood, urine, and excrement. Yet the rules regarding bodily secretions are complex in Islamic doctrine. In an important intervention, Kevin Reinhart corrects Julie Marcus's assertion that Islam's definition of defilement is "matter out of place" that crosses "the margins of the body."[12] He notes that there are many secretions, such as tears, sputum, mother's milk, sweat, and semen (exited rather than entering the body), that are not considered defiling but have been similarly voided from the body.[13]

In Islamic law, there are two definitions of pollution, major and minor (*al-hadath al-asghar/al-hadith al-akbar*), and each has its own method of purification; the major requires a full and thorough washing, while the minor requires the typical preparation of ablutions (*wadu*) for prayer. Sexual intercourse is placed in the category of a major impurity.[14] Since purification takes place pre-coitally as well as post-coitally, bathing (*ghusl*) rituals prepare one for both sex and prayer. Thus, bathing itself brackets the sex act, making general references to bathing suggestive of either preparation for the sex act or having recently had sex, since prayer is performed so frequently throughout the day.[15]

The general cultural attitude that bathing is suggestive of recent sexual activity is best demonstrated in an actual court case from Aleppo's Shari'a court archives. On November 28, 1734, a group of eight elite men from Zuqaq al-'Aynayn in Aleppo appeared at court to file a complaint against fellow resident Mustafa bin Muhammad al-'Attar, who worked in a shop in front of the neighborhood bathhouse (*tujaha' al-hammam*). They stated in front of the judge: "Every time women enter the aforementioned bathhouse and they leave its safety he says to them in front of men, 'the husbands of these women pimp them out!'" Such a comment veered towards an unproven accusation of unlawful intercourse (*zina*); such accusations constituted the crime of slander (*qadhf*), punishable by 80 lashings in the Shari'a, though criminal offenses of this order were often commuted to expulsion in Aleppo's Shari'a courts. In addition, the record tells us that Mustafa was reported as saying, "This woman's husband had sex with her once last night and this (one) her husband had sex with her twice!" Such comments may seem odd, but they refer back to the societal notion that bathing itself is an indication of being in a state of uncleanliness (*junub*) that happens after sex, making the implications of his remarks quite literal and defamatory. The record states that the comments are an “obscenity (*fahisha*) that keeps men and women away in disgrace” and that residents had “warned him several times” before about such outbursts. Mustafa was ultimately expelled from his shop in the quarter for “spreading harm” among the residents, a euphemism for disturbing public order by his offensive remarks.[16] Mustafa’s remarks bring to the surface larger questions about perceptions of the Ottoman bathhouses evident in the writings of literati and Muslim and Christian clerics.

The Bathhouse as a Sexually Transgressive Space

Despite the religious mandate in Islam for ritual purity, I would suggest the bathhouse was a morally and sexually transgressive space for three reasons: first, the bathhouse was continually described as a space of illicit sexuality in both religious and cultural writings; second, nudity within the bathhouse posed specific, yet sometimes contradictory, juridical problems, especially within a co-confessional Ottoman context; and third, debates about women’s role in public spaces were ongoing among some traditionalist Muslim male elites, who spurred conservative reprisals.

From Abbasid poetry to Ottoman writings and European travel accounts and paintings, the bathhouse was imagined as a space of potential illicit sexual activity. For the early modern Ottoman period, this is evidenced in Damascene jurist ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi’s (1640–1731) writings on dream analysis, *Perfuming Humanity by Interpreting Dreams* (*Ta‘tir al-anam fi ta‘bir al-manam*), in which he instructs male readers who see a bathhouse nocturnally that “the *hammam* symbolizes many things.” He notes that *hammam* is a word originating from the word *hamim*, which means “warm” or “intimate.” Throughout the discussion, the *hammam* is a space of possible chaos and, not surprisingly, gendered female. He interprets moving water that cannot be turned off by the male dreamer as meaning “someone is cheating with his wife. He is trying to stop him but is unable to.” Furthermore, “if the hot water is mingled with moderately warm water, he will get angry with his wife,” indicating more marital trouble. “If someone sits in the *hammam* and visits and speaks ill of women (*yufjar*), the whole world knows the story because the *hammam* is the place where the *awra* is exposed.” In this instance, the exposure of the *awra* is not a literal exposure of one’s nakedness, but the violation of a woman’s modesty that happens through shameless gossip. He wrote, “If someone sees [in a dream] an unknown *hammam*, there is a woman there whom men visit,” reaffirming the bathhouse as a space of illicit sexuality aided by “an atmosphere of heat, humidity, and lust.”[17] Al-Nabulsi’s interpretation is telling of the ways that the bathhouse was perceived as a threat to Muslim male order. From the perspective of the Damascene scholar, the bathhouse threatened the foundations of the patriarchal household with its promotion of female immodesty and the extreme danger of cuckolding the husband. This threat to patriarchal order is manifest when the *hammam* appears in the male subconscious.

Al-Nabulsi’s female gendering of the bathhouse did not detract from its long association with homoerotic sex between men in literature and art.[18] Abbasid poetry, particularly that of the homoerotic variety, took the sexuality in the bathhouse to the level of actually describing erotic sex acts between men within its walls. Ottoman literati warned bathhouse keepers not to employ beardless youth (*ghilman*) in the baths to avoid temptation, while others encouraged their employment and penned poems dedicated to beautiful bathhouse attendants. One eighteenth-century poet wrote a flirtatious poem for a boy attendant: “With water the *addax* of our bathhouse was generous, and he poured it pouringly on the adorer. And he said to me, ‘Do you care for cool [water]?’ ‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘from your fresh mouth.’”[19] Yet, in the Ottoman-era documents surveyed in this study, including the Shari’a court archives of Aleppo, no records were located that sought to monitor or control the contact between men and boys in bathhouses.

Another reason bathhouses were considered a sexually transgressive space in this period was the juridical problem of nudity, a problem that held both religious and social dimensions. First, for non-Muslims, the removal of clothing automatically created social anxiety—stripping clothing removed the only indication of social hierarchy, as physiological differences were not always apparent; the exception to this could be uncircumcised Christian men, who may have borne physiological markings of difference. In Ottoman law, Muslims were to be distinguished from Christians and Jews, and the penalties for violating these laws, especially in the eighteenth century, could be lethal.[20] Second, for Muslims, there was a clear requirement to cover the parts of the body considered nakedness (*awra*), and jurists debated the exact location of those parts.[21] To be effective, bathing requires that one wash and groom the intimate parts of one’s body, and the Shari’a mandates that those private parts be cleaned repeatedly throughout the day; however, this necessity found itself at odds with other parts of the Shari’a that simultaneously mandated that those same parts of the body stay covered. This ruling is based upon *hadith* sources that go so far as to require that one cover one’s privates while relieving oneself in front of others.[22] In the most conservative understanding of appropriate covering, a woman was to cover all but her hands, feet, and face while bathing, an act that would greatly affect her ability to engage in the full spectrum of cleansing rituals: scrubbing, hair removal, and exfoliation.[23] Architects tried to accommodate these rules by creating privacy nooks (*khalwa*) that could accommodate men and women as they washed their intimate parts. Ottoman regulations make reference to these architectural features meant to provide privacy and instruct women, in particular, to use them when non-Muslims (*dhimmi*) are present.[24] This inherent contradiction between the Shari’a requirements and thorough bathing—removing one’s clothing in order to clean the polluted parts of the body—made it so that this orthopraxy was sure to fail.

The bathhouse, however, was hardly private. Group bathing assured that absolute privacy was impossible, and knowledge of this was anxiety-producing for men, who policed moral order. The nature of the bathhouse as a space off-limits to men during women’s bathing times lent itself to anxiousness about that which could not be observed, that which was hidden from view. Historically, the *muhtasib*, a supervisor of trade and public morals, was charged with monitoring public spaces, including markets and bathhouses. Similarly, Ottomans regulated the bathhouses with imperial laws and court edicts that protected the perimeter of the public bath. Yet the character of the bathhouse, on the border of public and private, meant it could only be monitored from its threshold and not controlled directly from within.[25] It was virtually impossible to secure complete enforcement of the patriarchal male order within the bathhouse walls, since official policing was a male domain.[26]

Lastly, the bathhouse carried with it a poor reputation because walking outside the home placed women in the male-gendered public sphere, and for conservative Muslims this very act transgressed social order. Debates about women in the public space abound in the historical writings of Muslim clerics. For example, in an earlier period, a conservative fourteenth-century Maliki scholar, Ibn al-Hajj, cited the following tradition, attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, to support his strict vision: “A woman is permitted three exits: one to the house of the husband when she is married to him; one when her parents die; and one when she is carried to her grave.”[27] He advocated that this tradition be adopted in order to protect society from the dreaded chaos caused by women’s frequent presence in public spaces. This ruling was a continuation of earlier policies implemented by Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim (d. 1021), who forbade women from venturing into bathhouses, marketplaces, and visiting tombs. Huda Lutfi has noted that women in Cairo protested this extreme edict by hanging an effigy in the street of a veiled woman holding a piece of paper riddled with insults against the caliph.[28]

As for women’s presence in bathhouses, Muslim jurist al-Ghazali (1055–1111) similarly applied restrictions to women’s usage in his treatise on bathhouse etiquette, in which he argued that the “entrance of the *hammam* was unlawful for women unless they were ill or in childbed.”[29] Such attitudes are evident in the writings of jurists who advocated that women be confined to the private sphere, as “the exclusion of women from the outside world of men was informed by a sexual ideology that viewed the presence of the female body as threatening to the order of the male world.”[30]

Practically speaking, it was virtually impossible to ban women in public outright, as doing so shut down essential services offered by the female work force who comprised a sector of the economy. It would have also caused a crisis for women who sought to purify themselves due to the lack of proper baths in private homes. Thus, it was a difficult balance between the patriarchal interests of men, on the one hand, as they sought to protect the sanctity of women, and affording women the opportunity to ritually purify themselves as required in the Shari’a on the other. While some jurists found the bathhouse lawful, most conservative jurists approved of it only for women who had recently given birth, and reserved the rights of husbands to bar their wives from attending.

These restrictions extended to non-Muslims in particular as the eighteenth-century Aleppo courts banned mixed confessional bathing for women. There were certainly juridical sources that could support such bans, many of them grounded in *hadiths* of the Prophet Muhammad and the Caliph ʿUmar ibn Khattab, who reportedly barred polytheist (*ahl al-shirk*) women from entering bath areas with Muslim women. Yet polytheists and non-Muslims were not always distinguished from one another, even in different versions of the same tradition.[31] Although *mushrikūn* in this context are clearly polytheists, historian Janina Safran argues that Muslim writers often applied these prohibitive verses more broadly to encompass Jews and Christians (*ahl al-kitab*).[32] Although the *Hanafi* school, the adoptive school of the Ottoman Empire, did not invoke such prohibitions, some Ottoman elites, especially during periods of heightened religious conservatism, clearly disapproved of non-Muslims attending bathhouses. Commentary by seventeenth-century Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi praised Cairo’s bathhouses as the cleanest because they forbade entry to non-Muslims, suggestive of the author’s underlying fear of contamination.[33]

Ottoman jurists continued the debate over women’s presence in public spaces—especially during a period of religious revivalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth century—but they were unable to ban women in public outright. Madeline Zilfi writes, “Conservatives’ strictures on women venturing outside were generally more a matter of preference than of law. They were, in any case, premised on an unrealistic, even bourgeois, imaginary in which static families stood on rock-solid foundations of male bounty.”[34] In fact, she notes that, especially for common women, daily tasks demanded that they leave the home and enter the public space to fetch water or work in a number of professions as midwives, property owners, cooks, weavers, and servants.[35] Such “women’s work” required women to cross the boundaries of male-gendered public space and female-gendered private space. Added to these forms of labor is the exclusively female economy operating within the Ottoman bathhouse in which attendants provided services (exfoliation, scrubbing, massage, food, drink, and waterpipes) in exchange for payment. These tasks could never be performed by men because they were conducted within women-only spaces.

Ottoman Bathhouses, *Dhimmi* women, and the Male Gaze

Angst over public bathhouses was not reserved for Muslims alone: Christian moralists also issued grievances about bathhouses and real and perceived behaviors associated with them, such as nudity and immorality. While traveling through Aleppo in the seventeenth century, Polish-Armenian priest Simon of Lvov condemned bathhouses as a space of moral transgression when he wrote:

> [Arab women] are also loose and shameless. They are not ashamed of one another and walk naked and disgracefully. They go to the bath naked and without cover. The bath attendants lay them down and wash the private parts of men and women.[36]

Lehatsi spent a great deal of time with Levantine Armenians, and it is possible that his attitude was influenced by his local Christian informants. Certainly, the priest’s observation underscores a perception of loose morality encouraged by the state of nudity within the bathhouse that parallels the concerns of Muslim moralists.

Similarly, eighteenth-century Greek Orthodox priest Mikha’il Burayk of Damascus expressed disdain for some of the behaviors exhibited by Christian women of his time. Describing the increased affluence of Christians, Burayk offered a gendered critique of moral corruption in Damascene society:

> As for Damascene Christian women, they saw this occasion of calm from the government, may Satan cheat them. They crossed [acceptable] boundaries in their clothing, and they began to act like the Köprülü household [i.e. like Ottoman elites],[37] God curse them, especially in their smoking of tobacco in homes, bathhouses, and gardens, even along the rivers while people were passing by. Every Saturday afternoon, on the excuse they would visit the dead on the hill [where the dead were buried], they gathered in groups to drink ʿ*araq* and [other] alcohol, eat food, and drink coffee. Young men were successful in comingling among them.[38]

In this excerpt from his chronicle, Burayk associates women's socializing in the public space with a series of escalating moral transgressions, including public drinking and cavorting with young men. He includes his condemnation of women smoking tobacco, a substance that had yet to be socially acceptable among men in this period, according to historian James Grehan.[39] In this sense, bathhouses, along with other forms of sociability, encouraged the "crossing [of] boundaries," a term used by Burayk when discussing his inventory of immoral behaviors committed by Damascene Christian women. Unlike Simeon Lehatsi, Burayk blames Christian women for their own corruption rather than using Arab or Muslim women as a foil.

Therefore, contemporary Christian observers were not unlike their Muslim counterparts; they shared similar contempt for the transgressing of moral boundaries by women who frequented public baths. Such brazen nudity was a moral problem for Christian clerics just as much as it was for Muslim jurists. Ottoman authorities shared this concern, and it is therefore not surprising that the issue found its way into the Aleppo courts as the state increased regulation of the bathhouse space for female bathers and, to a lesser extent, men.[40]

Responding to these and other moral concerns about public bathhouses, Ottoman authorities regulated public space through imperial law (*kannuname*), guild regulations, and court orders issued from Shari'a courts, but could not exercise complete power over the bathhouse, especially its private interior, due to its location on the boundary of public and private space. In the eighteenth century in particular, the Ottoman authorities in Aleppo responded to this ambiguity and sought to tighten regulations on the bathhouse, as I have discussed elsewhere.[41] Men, regardless of religious denomination, were permitted to bathe together so long as non-Muslim men wore distinguishing towels or objects, such as necklaces or bells, serving to notify Muslim men of their presence. The rules were different for women: the state sought to enforce separate bathing times for Muslim and non-Muslim women without exception.

Separation of women (in the Douglasian sense of separating that which is holy from that which is not) is especially symbolic.[42] Court orders affirmed that the separation between Muslim and non-Muslim women was meant "to prevent violating Muslim women's sanctity" (*al-nisa' al-muslimin daf'an li-l-hurma*).[43] The court sought to enforce separation by religion, but also, not surprisingly, by gender when such violations occurred. One court order issued during the holy month of Ramadan in 1718 reaffirmed that women were only allowed to bathe during the day until sunset. The bathkeepers' guild reported that women were circumventing the norm, venturing to the baths after dark during men's bathing hours, and that some members of the guild were actually allowing men and women to bathe at the same time. Not only did the record point out the immorality of women venturing to the bath at night, but it suggested that the bath was serving as a house of prostitution, as scantily clad men and women comingled within its walls. In response to the court order, the guild representatives vowed to halt the practice.[44] Eighteenth-century Shari'a court records reveal repeated attempts to assert control over the ever-elusive happenings within the bathhouse interior.

Yet the order male elites sought to impose was endangered by the category of non-Muslim woman who could slip into bathhouses appearing physiologically the same as a Muslim woman blurring established hierarchies. In the eighteenth century, the Aleppo courts repeatedly ruled that *dhimmi* women were not to bathe at the same time as Muslim women. In one alarming ruling from 1762, the Aleppo court judge argued: "The *dhimmı* woman is like an unrelated man [*ka-l-rajul al-ajnabı*] and it is [therefore] most correct that she should not gaze upon any part of a Muslim woman's body."[45] This judgment reveals that there is much more to the bathhouse than what meets the eye, evoking Mary Douglas' famous line "where there is dirt, there is a system."[46]

One juridical treatise exposes more deeply the ideological underpinnings of these rulings. "The Treatise Regarding Pronouncements about the *Dhimmi* Woman's Gaze on Muslim Women," by Ottoman jurist Haci Emirzade (d. 1789), contains a number of rulings similar to those of the Aleppo Shari'a court; he wrote that non-Muslim women "are like men and boys who desire women."[47] He affirmed that a *dhimmi* woman is gendered male at the moment she views a Muslim woman in a state of nudity, relying on a close reading of Qur'an 24:30–31, which requires women to guard their modesty. The verses order that women not display their "nudity (*awra*)," a term that literally means "pudenda" but encompasses much more, which is to be covered at all times, regardless of the company one keeps. According to the Qur'an, women are to "draw their veils over their bosoms" and not display their nudity to anyone except immediate male kin within defined boundaries.

With regard to the non-Muslim woman, Haci Emirzade held that it was the most correct position to not allow the Muslim woman to expose her nudity in front of non-Muslim or polytheist women. In the Qur'anic framework, the exceptions to this rule are *dhimmi* servant women and children, who are free of desire. Yet Haci Emirzade sought to restrict even children from viewing nude women, citing Imam Shafi'i, who wrote that there can be "desire (*shahwa*)" among children, and when they do experience desire they are transitioning into puberty (*baligh*).[48]

While jurists reflected on the transitional gender of *dhimmi* women from female to male in the instance she viewed a nude Muslim female, Haci Emirzade offers exceptions to this ruling in a hypothetical scenario. "If a Muslim woman dies while traveling among men and there is not [Muslim] women among them except a *dhimmi* woman [is present]. She shall wash her and not let a man look at her [corpse]."[49] In this circumstance, it is permitted for the non-Muslim woman to view a Muslim woman's nude corpse in order to fulfill the ritual cleansing required prior to burial, a higher good in this instance.

Anthropology of religion is useful in the interpretation of Ottoman discourses on bathing especially as archival sources suggest issues of ritual purity as another underlying impulse for bathhouse regulation. In particular, the Shari'a courts outlined the separation of water basins for bathers, separate towels and razors, and the locking of water closets to assure the efficacy of ritual bathing. An extended quotation from a 1762 bathhouse order in Aleppo instructs bathkeepers:

> When entering [the bath], Christian and Jewish men should wear first a towel with a black stripe known as a *mazar* free of any distinguishing mark, and when leaving the hot room give to every Christian and Jew two of those towels with black stripes on the side distinguishing it and known by it. On the condition that a lock is put on the door of the hot water basin (*khazzana*) nightly [in case] someone enters into the water before washing so that it becomes used continue with this agreement and do not break it for any reason. Whoever breaks this agreement will be punished and reprimanded by the judge.[50]

Other sources indicate that bathkeepers were to keep not only separate towels, but separate sundries and razors for Muslims and non-Muslims to use. When viewed in combination, the requirement to lock the water basin at night indicates a fear of ritual pollution that must be examined further.

Mary Douglas once wrote, "uncleanliness is matter out of place," and as such pollution signifies the demarcation of inclusion and exclusion or self and Other.[51] Scholars have examined the applicability of her findings, grounded in the study of Jewish law, to authoritative works of Islamic jurisprudence.[52] From Douglas's standpoint, pollution poses a danger to the bounded society. While Muslim jurists also discussed pollution, Kevin Reinhart has argued that "in the *taharah* [purity] system, no human being is ever contagiously dangerous"; therefore, there are limits to the applicability of Douglas's theory in Islam, where there is impurity, but no danger.[53] Among Reinhart's examples, the most compelling is the recommendation of most jurists to not immediately purify after pollution; instead, purification is required only prior to prayer. In this sense, Reinhart argues that purity is "not so much a denigration of the human body and its functions, as it is an exaltation of Islamic ritual," for there is no danger in being impure.[54] He concludes, "ritual cleansing is only a cleansing for ritual."[55]

With this in mind, it appears that the presence of religious minorities within the bathhouse was ritually dangerous only in that it threatened the purity of water necessary for ritual cleansing. Yet this impurity, from the standpoint of eighteenth-century Ottoman juridical rulings, was also combined with the understanding that *dhimmi* women posed a specific threat to Muslim women's modesty. This is based on an assumption often shared in Muslim writings that *dhimmi* women would surely report to men[56] what they had seen within the bathhouse, violating the modesty of Muslim women.[57] In both instances, the "sanctity" of Muslim women needed to be secured through physical separation from the danger to modesty posed by the *dhimmi* woman in public bathhouses. This was supposed to be achieved through the bathing schedules ordered by Aleppo's Shari'a courts, although the repetition of the court injunctions suggest that there may have been trouble in instituting the practice.

To conclude, this chapter has shown that there was a long tradition of describing the bathhouse as a suspect space due to its position on the boundary of public and private. While authorities legislated the space with imperial codes and court orders, the opaque positioning of the *hammam* kept authorities from being able to monitor it as thoroughly as they would have liked. The opacity of the bathhouse space is evidenced in the fact that no women appeared at court to testify as to what was happening in the bathhouse during women's bathing times. Therefore, only male discourses about what was allegedly happening within the *hammam* are legible in Ottoman-era documents.

In the multi-religious context of the Ottoman Empire, mixing and blurring of boundaries between communities prompted a number of interventions in Aleppo's bathhouses throughout the eighteenth century. The liminal space of the bathhouse lent itself to hypervigilant regulations regarding the separation between Muslim and non-Muslim women, who were considered suspect. This was especially true in the context of blurred boundaries between social classes in a period of increased consumption as the Ottoman Empire was absorbed into the global economy. The *dhimmi* woman, in particular, was a very unstable category; she was of low status, lower than a *dhimmi* male. But, as shown, in the circumstance of viewing the nude Muslim woman, some jurists argued that her gender shifted from female to male at the moment she gazed upon a nude Muslim woman because she served as a conduit to the male gaze. This prompted jurists to debate and legislate the movement of *dhimmi* women in the bathhouse space where Muslim women were most vulnerable to her gaze. In the process, the figure of the Muslim woman was filtered and subsequently re-consecrated through earlier religious discourses on polytheists and non-Muslims that juxtaposed pure/impure women against each other. In the end, this discourse worked to crystallize communal identities in a period when religious boundaries were being ossified and disciplined by the early modern Ottoman state.

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2 Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1985), 160–61.

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4 The Bahram Pasha bathhouse was constructed in the burgeoning Christian district of Judayda Aleppo by the Ottomans in 1583 specifically to service the growing Christian community. It was established with a religious endowment (*waqf*). See the full registration of this *waqf* in the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Archives, EV.VKF 4:11, 991 H Zilhicce 29/13 Jan. 1584.

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6 Here I combine Pierre Bourdieu's term "habitus" and Marshall Hodgson's term "Islamicate" intentionally to reflect a cultural milieu rather than religious ritual. Marshall Hodgson, *Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1971), 40–43, and Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," *Theory and Society* 14:6 (1984): 734–9.

7 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966, reprint 1999), 116.

8 Alexander Russell, *A Natural History of Aleppo*, 2 vols (London, 1756). Russell documents five periods of plague and local responses to the outbreaks in his account of eighteenth-century Aleppo.

9 Ibid., vol. 1, 109–13, 134.

10 Ibid., 137.

11 Muhammad Ali, *A Manual of Hadith*, 64–5.

12 Julie Marcus, "Islam, Women, and Pollution in Turkey," *Journal of the Anthropological Association of Oxford* 15:3 (1984): 207.

13 Kevin Reinhart, "Impurity/No Danger," *History of Religions* 30:1 (1990): 10.

14 An extensive discussion of purification and impurity can be found in Frederick Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006), 105–7.

15 For more discussion on the boundaries of ritual purity and sexuality see Carol Delaney, *The Seed and the Soil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

16 Syrian National Archives, Markaz dar al-watha'iq al-tarkhiyya, Aleppo court records, *SMH* (*Sijillat al-mahakam Halab)*, 55:48:162 2 Rajab 1147H/November 28, 1734, Damascus, Syria. In a similar case several neighbors from Aqyul filed a complaint against Musa b. al Musar'a, who threatened people with a knife but also sat before the bathhouse in the quarter and harassed women. See SMH 2:159:673 21 Rabi' II 1119H/July 22, 1707.

17 Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 112. See specifically Chapter 4. All other information in this paragraph has been translated by the author and is obtained from al-Nabulusi, *Ta`tir al-Anam fi Ta`bir al-Manam* (Cairo: Dar Ihiya' al-Kutub al-Arabiyya, 1972), 1: 156.

18 Ibid.; Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, 167, 172.

19 Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 43.

20 A 1758 case of a non-Muslim apprehended for wearing yellow leather boots, a color designated for Muslims alone, resulted in execution. See Madeline Zilfi, "Goods in the Mahalle: Distributional Encounters in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul," in *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550–1922: An Introduction*, ed. Donald Quataert (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2000), 301.

21 Fadwa el Guindi, *Veil: Privacy, Modesty, and Resistance* (Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), 140–41, and Semerdjian, "Naked Anxiety."

22 A series of *hadith* relate to rules regarding proper toilet etiquette. Listed by al-Bukhari, *hadith* prescribe that believers not touch or wash their private parts with the right hand, that they not urinate or defecate while facing the direction of Mecca (*qibla*), and that they perform these acts in private so that the private parts are not visible to others. Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, "Kitab al-Wudu'" (Beirut: Dar al-'arabiya, 1985), 106–12, and Brannon Wheeler, "Touching the Penis in Islamic Law," *History of Religions*, vol. 44, no. 2 (Nov. 2004), 89–119.

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25 Roy Mottahedeh and Kristen Stilt, "Public and Private as Viewed through the Work of the Muhtasib," *Social Research* 70:3 (2003): 737.

26 Informal policing was the way in which authorities were informed of happenings within neighborhoods and private spaces in general. See Elyse Semerdjian, *“Off the Straight Path”: Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

27 Frederick S. Colby, “The Rhetoric of Innovative Tradition in the Festival Commemorating the Night of Muhammad’s Ascension,” in *Historicizing “Tradition” in the Study of Religion*, eds Steven Engler and Gregory Price Grieve (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 33–5, and Huda Lutfi, “Manners and Customs of Fourteenth-Century Cairene Women: Female Anarchy versus Male Sharʿi Order in Muslim Prescriptive Treatises,” in *Women in Middle Eastern History*, eds Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 99.

28 Lutfi, “Manners and Customs,” 101–2.

29 Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, 166.

30 Lutfi, “Manners and Customs,” 100.

31 Ismaʿil ibn Amr ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur’an*, 2:1329 and Ibn al-Jawzi’s account of the same tradition, in *Ahkam al-Nisa’* (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, n.d.), 32, designate Jewish and Christian women (*nisa’ al-yahud wa-l-nasara*), rather than polytheists, as the target of ʿUmar’s ban.

32 Safran, “Rules of Purity,” 198–9, 205, 210.

33 Febe Armanios, *Coptic Christianity in Ottoman Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 17.

34 Madeline Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 56.

35 Ibid. These occupations are well documented in the classic studies of Haim Gerber, “Position of Women in an Ottoman City, Bursa, 1600–1700,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 12 (1980): 231–44, and Ronald Jennings, “Women in Early 17th Century Ottoman Judicial Records—The Shari’a Court of Anatolian Kayseri,” *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 18, Part 1 (1975): 53–114.

36 Simon Lehatsi, *The Travel Accounts of Simeon of Poland*, trans. George Bournoutian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2007), 200.

37 Here Burayk is specifically referring to the Köprülü household that controlled the office of Grand Vizier for nearly 100 years through the mid-eighteenth century. My sense is that he is using political corruption as a metaphor for moral corruption.

38 Mikha’il Burayk, *Tarikh al-Sham*: *1720–1782* (Damashq: Dar al-Qutayba, 1982), 74.

39 See James Grehan, *Everyday Life and Consumer Culture in 18th Century Damascus* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 150.

40 Semerdjian, “Naked Anxiety.”

41 Some of the arguments found in this chapter and more detailed examination of data collected from the Shari’a court archives in Aleppo can be found in Semerdjian, “Naked Anxiety.”

42 Mary Douglas, *Purity in Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 7.

43 SMH 143:86:291 9 Shawwal 1209 AH/April 1795.

44 See SMH 45:73:177 19 Ramadan, 1130H, 15 August 1718.

45 SMH 94:52:91 28 Jumada II 1175AH/January 1762.

46 Douglas, *Purity in Danger,* 35.

47 Alim Muhammed b. Hamza Haci Emirzade, *Risale fi beyani nazari’z-zimmiyet’l-müslime*, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi 393/5, 12.

48 Ibid., 13.

49 Ibid., 11.

50 SMH 94:52:91 28 Jumada II 1175AH/January 1762.

51 Douglas, 41.

52 See Reinhart, 1–24, and Marion Katz, *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002) for examples.

53 See Reinhart, 15.

54 Ibid, 21.

55 Ibid.

56 The original doesn’t tell us this if this referred to Muslim or non-Muslim men, it just reads “report” without telling us who. Telling any outside men would be a violation of her modesty.

57 Ibn ‘Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar* (Quetta, Pakistan: Maktaba Majidiyya, 1404H/1983–84), 5:263.

PART 4

The Desiring, Protesting Body and Muslim Authenticity in Fiction and Political Discourses

Chapter 15

Women's Writing in the Land of Prohibitions: A Study of Alifa Rifaat and Female Body Protest as a Tool for Rebellion

Miral Mahgoub Al-Tahawy

Arab women's writing has a long history of social and political rebellion against prohibitions that curb women's freedom. The female body, with all its sexual and emotional needs, tops the list of prohibited subjects that Arab women's writing has dared to address. This literature has long struggled against the values of conservative Arab societies that, in attempting to safeguard the female body, subject it to a host of extreme traditions as well as to oppressive, gender-based sexual norms.

Careful scrutiny of Arab women's writing—and specifically of Egyptian women's writing—reveals that it has surpassed all expectations and broken many taboos by addressing the female body and sexuality, at times going so far as to explicitly describe the details of sexual relationships. Such daring has given rise to debates about the shocking nature of literature and its effect on society's values. It has also raised the question of the extent to which "racy" literature—and the deliberate use of explicit language, images of sexuality, and homoerotic desire—is a protest against and/or direct challenge to a conservative society. Clearly, such explicit writing at least expresses, through the body, a fundamental conflict between an oppressive society and its victim: the oppressed female body.

This chapter considers Arab women's writing to be the link between protest through nudity as a political expression and explicit writing as a shocking tool of rebellion against traditional patriarchal society. It also investigates women's explicit, direct, outspoken writing about female sexuality to examine how this writing approach is a protest against a conservative and patriarchal culture. The focus of its analysis is the Egyptian writer Alifa Rifaat (1930–1996), whose collection of stories entitled *Who Could the Man Be?* very clearly demonstrates the relationship between nudity protest (a physical form of political expression) and explicit writing (a tool of literary rebellion against prohibitions and social taboos that have long confined the female body) for the purpose of directly challenging traditional patriarchal society's values as well as ultra-conservative religious rhetoric.

The Human Body as a Means of Protest

Throughout history, the human body has been used as a physical tool of protest; it also has been used politically, subjugated through torture and oppression. That same human body, however, has also been used by those who are oppressed: the more those in authority oppress or repress that body, the more likely it is that victims will employ their bodies to rebel and protest, whether by committing suicide by self-immolation or by going on a hunger strike.

In Arab societies, violence against women is what makes female bodies such powerful tools of protest. Body protests by Arab women have included self-immolation in reaction to being forced to take a husband or to being treated badly by a spouse. During the recent uprisings in Egypt (the Arab Spring), self-immolation even crossed gender lines to reflect all oppressed Arabs' frustrations. This marked the first time Arab men have borrowed body protest from Arab women, and is therefore also a testimony to its effectiveness as a protest. The Arab Spring, particularly in Egypt, witnessed the noticeable presence of women and their subsequent sexual violation. Sexual harassment has even become a political tool used to violate and oppress women during demonstrations. Such humiliations escalated after conservative religious groups took power in the wake of the Arab Spring, rendering the female body a fundamental element of current socio-political and religious conflict in the Middle East.

Recent violence against the female body cannot be separated from the rise of Islamist fundamentalism, and the *salafi* movement that began to permeate Egyptian political, social, and cultural life in the 1970s played a role in changing society's view of women by holding the female body in contempt and making it synonymous with the word "sin." Despite attempts by enlightened scholars to reinterpret Islamic texts to explain women's value and position in modern Muslim society, the Islamist extremists' perspective on women's bodies (*awra*) is that they are a source of shame and a sexual temptation. As a result of that rhetoric, radical change has been noticed in Egyptian society regarding women's bodies, such as stricter dress codes and great emphasis on covering them up.

Nawal el Saadawi argues that this religious extremism and the fundamentalist movement are the biggest threats to women's liberation in Egypt. Her view supports the idea that the radical orthodox rhetoric expressed recently in the Middle East has actually given rise to more controversy over women and their bodies. This conservative perspective has been revived, and over the course of a few decades it has curbed the gains of women's liberation movements.

Jan Goodwin has also observed this phenomenon: "As Islamic radicalism rose at the beginning of the last decade, the pendulum for Muslim women swung the other way again. Once more women were to be hidden behind veils; a development that seemed to legitimize and institutionalize inequality for women." Nasr Abu Zayd concurs. According to his observations, the extremist radical rhetoric that began in the 1970s has become a far-reaching setback where women's bodies are concerned, indicative of modern society's inability to live up to civil values. He notes that rhetoric in the contemporary Arab world is racist and sectarian, and that in pre-Islamic eras:

> Women came to be seen only as a creature that excites lust, tempting the instincts and leading men astray to the ways of Satan. According to pre-Islamic tradition, the only solution is to bury females alive at birth, thus preventing the problem. Now society buries women inside closed black attire, with openings only for the eyes. Either way, the act denies women's right to be. It is equivalent to "burying women on the surface of the earth."

Nudity, Writing, and Protest

Recently, Arab women's movements have increasingly used the nude female form to challenge society's views and express their rejection of the conservative movement and its violation of women's bodies. Plastic artist Hala Faisal, for example, stood naked in a public square to protest war in Syria. Similarly, in protest against the position of women in Egypt in the wake of the January 25 revolution (in 2011) that failed to change conditions for women, blogger Aliaa Al Mahdy published her nude photo in Egypt. Several Tunisian activists took similar action. Amina Tyler, for instance, posted topless photos of herself on the Internet. Moroccan artist Latifa Ahraralso also went nude in front of an audience to protest the image of art that Islamists present. Naturally, this phenomenon has shocked Arab society, stirring controversy about the relationship between nudity and protest. The new Arab women's movement employs nudity to protest the conservative rhetoric, and it has linked these body protests directly to rejecting that conservative perspective of women's bodies.[1] Nudity—including explicit and erotic writing—has therefore become a means by which Arab women can both condemn a society and claim their own identities.

I argue that Arab women have long had to innovate to find creative self-expression in a society that demonstrates hostility toward their gender, and that history shows that the more extreme the rhetoric demonizing women—and the methods for oppressing, subjugating, mutilating, or covering their bodies—the more extreme their protests become. Through writing, many women have used their demonized bodies parallel to nudity protest. In the Arab Women's Movement there is a long history of females writing to liberate their bodies. Their explicit writing about female sexuality parallels the protest acts of nudity by using the female body as a tool to break down prohibitions and challenge social taboos.

Since its inception, Arab women's literary history has been linked to revealing, exposing, and liberating a world that is covered, and thus hidden in secrecy. In his study of women and language, Abdallah Al Ghuzami analyzes the relationship between writing and nudity through a number of Arabic texts from the literary heritage.[2] Such texts link writing to shame, seeing it as a form of concubine debauchery, and this has prompted some men to prohibit free women from learning or writing. It is known that only concubines were allowed to appear uncovered before strangers; they were not expected by the society to wear the veil, and in Islamic history, only concubines were allowed to write (something that enhanced their value). Al Ghuzami points to Tawadud, the concubine in the *One Thousand and One Nights*, as a metaphor confirming the symbolic relationship between women's writing and exposure of the patriarchal world. Tawadud debated men to prove that she was more cultured than all the caliph's entourage, and every man she defeated in debate would take off his clothes and leave the palace naked and shamed, since she had proven herself to be more cultured than men. Finally, all men end up nude before Tawadud, an act that Al Ghuzami considers to be *taraia* ("an act of exposing or stripping male culture," and discrediting to it).[3]

Early on, Egyptian women's liberation movements also exploited the relationship between removing the veil and the right to get an education and practice writing. If, historically, women's writing is an open expression of revelation and exposure in general, then writing about the taboos of physical desires is protest writing that clashes with social values in a daring manner that equals nudity protest. Alifa Rifaat's work is a great example of such daring writing that deals with the female body and sexuality, and that has broken many taboos and shocks readers by her daring attitude toward social prohibitions.

Writing as a Body Protest: Alifa Rifaat's Confrontation of Social and Cultural Values

Modern Arab women's writing emerged with the political and national liberation movements,[4] during which Arab countries were heavily involved in national resistance against European colonial powers. The writing was characterized as rebellious and daring in its criticism of traditions and customs that were restrictive to women.[5] Despite the fact that some Arab women used writing as a tool to protest against conservative culture and unfair tradition, however, many of them were still keen to reconcile with some social and religious values, especially those linked to bodies and sexuality. Fedwa Douglas believes that the Arab woman writer "must work through this complex of inherited values, even when subverting them."[6]

For this reason, and despite the development and diversity of Arab women's voices, their writing remained cautious in addressing the body, unable to openly express its desires and emotional needs. The reason is linked to cultural prohibitions: at that time, writing about sex was one of the main taboos in Arab societies. Syrian critic Abu Ali Yassine explains:

> In our society, there are two taboos that cannot be critically addressed … or scientifically studied under any condition, otherwise the author must face non-publication, confiscation of the book or newspaper, or prosecution—in all cases absolute rejection by the people and the society. The two taboos are religion and sex.… Individual and social censorship, social norms and traditions impose a burden on freedom of expression, especially with women writing.[7]

That wariness of social censorship in the early generation of Arab women writers is also noted by Susan Nagi in her comprehensive study on Egyptian women's narratives. She states that:

> Much of the 20th century literature does not go beyond the previously set image of the society of women, and they avoid talking about the emotional or psychological aspects. In other words, these writers tread on the same intellectual path drawn by male writers for them. To avoid taboos, women writers closed themselves inside what society and its norms allowed. In awe of the new experience, female writers would opt for safety and familiarity rather than venturing out of the traditional wall.[8]

This phenomenon does not, however, negate the fact that some Arab women writers actively rebelled against many taboos; indeed, their frankness and daring when writing about women's experiences, and their bodies, seem all the more remarkable as a result.

Alifa Rifaat is considered one of the most important and uncharacteristically frank voices in speaking about women's bodies and their sexual needs. Many critics stand in awe of Rifaat's subtle yet explicit tackling of the female body with all its sexual desires and frustrations, along with the forms of social oppression and suppression exercised against it. Leila Ahmed, for example, in her analysis of Rifaat's story "My World of the Unknown," suggests that Rifaat's "remarkable directness appears not only to document but also to be emanating from a different vein of Arabic thought on bodies and sexuality."[9] And Barbara Olive argues that "not only does Rifaat write through the bodies of her female characters, she addresses myths that legitimize the colonizing of women’s bodies.”[10] Similarly, Y. Al-Sharuni notes that “Most of [Rifaat’s] stories evolve around the emotional needs of women, and the favorite topic they address is their hidden fantasies in a stifling environment. Her stories could belong to what is termed protest literature—protest against the conditions of women in an environment that does not allow them freedom of choice.”[11] Topping the list of issues that Rifaat addresses are female sexuality and double moral standards, body violations in the name of Shari’a (Islamic law), circumcision, pedophilia, and lack of sexual fulfillment.

Not only was Rifaat’s work ahead of its time for Arab women’s writing in addressing the subject of women’s bodies, but it was recognized in Western academic circles as well. She became known early on, after a selection of her stories was translated into English.[12] Rifaat’s story “My World of the Unknown,” for instance, deals with a female homosexual relationship in a fantasy framework; it is considered an example of women’s writing defending sexual liberty for lesbians. Some scholars went so far as to claim that Rifaat was ahead of Western feminists in this respect, stating that “nearly 14 years before Lesbian Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldua published these words, Egyptian writer Alifa Rifaat published in Arabic fiction form the literary equivalent to Anzaldua’s physical, spiritual, and indeed homoerotic reclamation of the female body.”[13]

Rifaat’s audacity in expressing women’s sexual oppression and homosexual relationships is undoubtedly impressive, but it also raises the question of how we are to reconcile her revolt and her straightforwardness with the Islamism or conservative attitude that is also observed in her work. Denys Johnson-Davies noted this in his translation of Rifaat’s work, and writes that “most of her stories express, implicitly rather than explicitly, a revolt against many of the norms and attitudes, particularly those related to woman and her place in society. Her revolt, despite the frank terms in which it is expressed, remains within a strictly religious, even orthodox, framework.”[14] Critics interpret this element of her work in a number of different ways, claiming, for instance, that Rifaat’s work indicates interrelated levels of Islamic feminism;[15] that her discourse is preoccupied with Islam’s position, especially within the context of Islamic feminism—which reinterprets and reads into religious texts in the interests of women; or that her discourse is a precursor to Islamic feminism, or may be thought of as belonging to that group of Arab feminists who advocate a view of women that does not stray from Islam.[16]

Analyses of Rifaat’s work as Islamic feminism seem to have missed or ignored the literary contexts in which she wrote in 1970s and 1980s Egypt. Unlike some daring and exceptional women writers of her generation, Rifaat led a traditional life and was exposed to very little Western literature.

Rifaat’s writing was not influenced by the women’s emancipation movement with its Western influences. Consequently, attempts to draw similarities between her experience and that of a number of other Arab female writers have not been successful. Yet accepting that Rifaat does not intellectually belong to the Western feminist movement, as Nawal Saadawi and other rebellious writers do, raises baffling questions about her perspective in addressing homoerotic desire and expressing positive notions about sexual love between women, or at least playing with the idea of the impossibility of men fulfilling women sexually.[17]

Leila Ahmed investigates Rifaat’s writings within the context of Arabic literary tradition, arguing that her text may be influenced by the female eroticism found in the medieval Arabic and Islamic written heritage, such as *The Arabian Nights*. She argues that:

> Rifaat's work is presumably grounded in her culture's notions about sexuality, and is in dialogue with those notions even when it undercuts them. One needs, therefore, in order to explore her work and read its implications and resonances, at least a preliminary topography and archaeology of Arab conceptions of women's and men's bodies, and of sexuality.[18]

However, there is no indication in Alifa Rifaat's texts that her work belongs to this Arabic erotic heritage, or that her language or divergent perspective were influenced by this heritage in any way.

I believe that the Egyptian oral heritage, folklore, and local tradition significantly influenced Rifaat and are reflected in her frank approach. Compared to written culture, Egyptian oral rural tradition, or *Fallahi*, is more open about the body and sexual expression, perhaps because traditional oral culture is owned by everybody and has no known inventor. Alifa Rifaat's writing is definitely informed by that open oral culture. Her upbringing and travels with her husband in the Egyptian countryside helped her get to know that heritage very closely; she even includes folk songs from that heritage in her texts.[19] This folk cosmology and peasant's worldview have had a great impact on modern Egyptian literature.[20]

Rifaat's works—I believe—cannot be read except as part of the Egyptian writing of the 1970s generation and beyond, which reflects par excellence the contradictions and polarization of Egyptian society. Her writing reflects the personality of Egyptian local society, in which females and males alike express their sexuality more openly and use explicit or obscene language in addressing sexual subjects, "naming names" despite local society's simultaneous strict adherence to Egypt's social and religious values. Rifaat's works also reflect a social conflict over the woman's body during an era of polarization in Egypt (1970s–1980s). It is this conflict between the extremist radical rhetoric and openness to Western cultures that lies behind many of the contradictions in tone within Rifaat's narratives.

The dispute over the perspective from which Rifaat's work renounces her culture's attitude toward female sexuality, and especially toward female homoerotic relationships, hinges on two factors. The first is that not all Rifaat's work has been translated. Most analyses have focused on only one story, "My World of the Unknown."[21] The second factor is the dearth of information about Rifaat's personal life, although she did grant a few interviews in which she directly expressed her perspective about her body as a traditional religious Egyptian woman. Her commitment to Islam was the most important thing in her life,[22] and she claimed that her stories criticize men and women for neglecting Islam.[23] While Rifaat's stories do not always seem to bear this out, analyzing her work in light of the Shari'a (Islamic law), or considering it primarily as a female perspective on Islam's religious texts, might support this assertion.

The various interpretations of Rifaat's works—combined with the controversy as to whether they are works of Islamic feminism or instead reflect pre-modern Arabic literary tradition and female eroticism—have led to her creative work being classified without first being studied in light of the political and social changes and literary contexts of both the writer and her writings. I would argue that we cannot examine Rifaat's works in isolation from the changes that affected her artistic vision over the course her lifetime, not to mention the changes that have taken place throughout Egyptian society since the 1980s. The rising tide of Islamist political movements, in particular, has seen a radical change in the perception of the woman's body. The reading that I adopt to Rifaat's writings takes into consideration three elements:

> 1) The writer's biography and the developments or changes that took place in her notions, which in turn governed her conceptualization of existence and her desire to rebel against or surrender to social pressure;
>
> 2) Social changes in Egyptian society and in its perception of woman and her body in light of the changes in many values relevant to that perception; and
>
> 3) The historical literary context in which the writer's experience was molded, and how aesthetics are viewed and appreciated within such a context.

Undoubtedly, literary realism had a great influence on Rifaat's writing, and her language is an explicit and direct reflection of that ugly reality. She makes no effort to beautify or tone down its ugliness through the use of symbolism. Her employment of the vernacular, her inclusion of folklore, songs, and social beliefs, and her focus on marginalized women are all forms of body protest: she reveals women's lives by depicting them in all their naked brutality.[24]

Where its language, style, and courage are concerned, Rifaat's writing belongs to the general context of realism in Egyptian literature, which is keen to depict reality as it is. According to Ed de Moor, that trend contributed to "Erotic Awareness,"[25] a body awareness that is connected to realism and that supported the development of and openness to free expression of emotional and physical relationships. During the 1970s, many texts became more open about depicting such relationships, and intentionally included shocking pornographic scenes where explicit language was used. The trend was explained as a kind of expansion of realism and desire to express reality with all its beauty, ugliness, and pleasure, and may also have been emulating international texts, including those of Henry Miller and D.H. Lawrence, that had been translated into Arabic and critically acclaimed.

This phenomenon of explicit writing coincided with the rise of political Islam in the Egyptian streets, and a widespread radical Islamist movement dedicated to prohibiting relationships between the sexes and to demonizing the woman's body. That polarization led to the conflict between culturally liberal and religious rhetoric that dominated the 1980s and had an impact on Egyptian literature. As Stephen Guth notes: "Egyptian novels of the seventies and eighties tend to make use of 'pornographic' elements, [and] these passages should be read as a surface phenomenon of discourse of extreme polarization in Egyptian society. This polarization has reached a point where the *whole* truth must be told. Implicit in that is a concept of reality and realism that no longer permits one to be silent on aspects of human existence."[26] This erotic consciousness has come to celebrate the body and its sexual desires as an inherent part of human nature that cannot be overlooked.

Therefore, what some critics see as a conservative religious or Sufi tone in Rifaat's late work does not in fact reflect any dimension of Islamic feminism, and might have been expected to retreat in the face of the religious flow inside Egyptian society and the return of Islamic influence starting in the 1980s, especially among middle-class women. This trend was seen as a setback to women's liberation—and it prompted many middle-class women to return to the home and commit to the Islamic model, as well as severing all ties with Western culture. In addition, the word “feminist” started to carry negative connotations, to the extent that some liberal writers, such as Safinaz Kazzem, denounced their previous thoughts so as to deny any relationship to the term. The changes in that religious rhetoric had a great influence on the way women regarded their bodies and sexuality. It also left its mark on women writers, who practiced a kind of self-censorship at times, while others rebelled in a hardline way in rejection of that same rhetoric. For example, many texts were characterized by unprecedented daring in expressing hitherto suppressed ideas within Arab culture, and this was not always linked to women’s liberation movements; rather, it was a reaction to the rhetoric of Islamic extremism in Egypt during that time.

Reading about the personal background of Alifa Rifaat, we see the oppression she suffered as a writer and a wife, and how her writing came to be an action of protest against the authoritarian male. She wrote her first story in 1955. It was about her sister, who committed suicide because her husband was unfaithful. Alifa Rifaat’s own husband did not allow her to write again for 25 years, though his prohibition only pushed her to write secretly and publish under a pseudonym. *Who Could the Man Be?* came out in 1981, when, after more than two decades of silence, her husband finally allowed her to publish. Her collection’s openness in addressing many taboos in Arab society, however, was a shock to Arab readers. All the stories concern conditions of women who are physically and spiritually oppressed under the heavy burden of tradition.[27]

Rifaat’s collection “daringly expressed the feelings of woman and her suppressed burning desires inside a skin that she never chose for herself.”[28] Following its publication, Rifaat’s husband seems once again to have exerted a suppressing influence on his wife’s writing, but Rifaat never stopped. Instead, her literature and characters took on new dimensions. She went on pilgrimage twice, and began wearing the veil, after which she wrote her story “Away from the Minaret,” which describes a wife’s failure to reach sexual gratification with her husband and her resorting to prayers to find satisfaction. Some considered this an example of women’s religious writing, and Rifaat’s output then came to embody the influence of Sufi heritage.[29] Sufi trends, however, came late in her writing.[30]

Rifaat’s Short Story Collection *Who Could the Man Be?*

Alifa Rifaat’s *Who Could the Man Be?* offers a complete picture of how she regards the female body and relationship with a man. The collection’s central point is liberation of the body and social protest against male authority, which Rifaat repeatedly and unreservedly emphasizes by depicting women’s sexual desires and rebelling against religious and social values. It demonstrates body protest by laying bare the humiliating reality of female bodies.

Rifaat opens her collection with the story “Hazehi Laylati” (“This Is My Night”), in which the narrator depicts the wedding night of an arranged, forced marriage. The narrator says, “‘This is my night’ has come … to find myself sad and broken … wings clipped … heart seared with fear and beating in turmoil,”[31] and she sees the flowers surrounding her seat at the ceremony as nothing but “a coffin stuffed with frozen flowers that would take me to a dark grave.”[32] She continues to tell of her misery and sense of suffocation due to a marriage forced on her simply because her father wanted to marry off one of his daughters—to “lay off some of his financial burdens because she is the elder daughter and must be married first, as tradition dictates.”[33] The bride-to-be sees succumbing to tradition as her duty: she must sacrifice her body to a man she describes as “my husband and master.” By succumbing, she pleases not only the family and society, but God. Still, she fears the moment of her surrender in compliance with what her mother, her society, and Shari’a dictate. She says, “He pulled the bed covers away from me and pulled me, tremors of fear possessed my body as I closed my eyes in surrender, my mind went to the story of Ismail when he surrendered Abraham, to slaughter him in obedience to God.”[34]

Though the narrator’s surrender resembles a sacrifice at the altar of masculinity, the husband fails to take her virginity; he stumbles during the sexual act and the scene becomes one of shame for his manhood and libido. The narrator, however, does not see shame. Instead, she sees the beginnings of a human relationship, and says, “Let’s get to know each other.”[35] She thinks love can create miracles and change intercourse into a human connection between two bodies.

In the story “Sharaf” (“The Honor”),[36] Rifaat addresses virginity and the social traditions that emphasize it as proof of a family’s honor. The story also tackles how a man deals with the female body as though he owns it by right of marriage. Safiaa, the narrator’s sister, refuses to marry her cousin, but her family forces her to accept the marriage. In the story, the narrator is Bahia, the younger sister, who attempts to learn the truth behind Safiaa’s rejection of her suitor. Safiaa considers the sex act a violation—a drilling by the male organ—and screams, “I do not want Ismail to touch me … he is going to drill me from the inside as we do aubergines.”[37] But her marriage is finalized because rejecting a suitor is a scandal for the family.

In her quest to know the truth, Bahia discovers that Safiaa has a lover, Tarek, who is the son of a rich family and whose child Safiaa is carrying. Safiaa seeks her lover’s help to rescue her from the arranged marriage, but he rejects her, denies any relation to the baby, and chastises her for surrendering her body to him. Safiaa resorts to seeing the old woman of the village, Haja Widdad, a midwife who also helps men take their wives’ virginity. Haja Widdad gives her an abortion and promises to help her on her wedding night, with the payment being Safiaa’s gold wedding bracelets.

On the wedding night, the midwife fools the groom with a handkerchief prepared with bloodstains. Ululations sound everywhere, announcing that the bride’s honor is intact, and rural songs express pride in the man’s virility. These songs include “The Bull Has Broken the Stool,” which has metaphorical connotations about the powerful husband who breaks all barriers, including the hymen. Safiaa tells her sister afterward, mockingly, “Bahia, I wish you had seen Haja Widdad yelling at Ismail and telling him not to be childish; she confused him so much that he had to seek her help.”[38] The narrator calls the bride “the Chaste One,” mocking the rotten social values linked to women’s bodies and the way that concepts such as chastity and honor are confined to virginity and some drops of blood.

In Rifaat’s short story “Who Could the Man Be?,” from which her collection takes its title, female circumcision is revealed as a form of mutilation and oppression that denies the female body its humanity. Female circumcision is a pre-adolescent ritual that women see as preparation for marriage—as preparation for the female body to come into contact with the male body. Rifaat addresses this tradition in an unprecedented manner in two stories in *Who Could the Man Be?* In the title story, the two sisters (Bahia and Safiaa) are circumcised without anesthetic in the presence of many women, who ululate during the bloody ritual and sing songs such as, “Come on, oh Bride, … complete half of your religion and go on pilgrimage with me.”[39]

Circumcision is traditionally regarded as a completion of one’s religion and as an essential practice of Islam; but it is also the social tool for oppressing, curbing, or controlling a woman’s desire so she can endure sexual unfulfillment within marriage if the man cannot understand or satisfy her sexual needs. When Bahia asks her mother and grandmother, “Why did you slaughter me, even though you love me?,”[40] her maid promptly answers, “For you [to be] beautiful, for men to chase you, and [so that] when you get married, should your husband be away from you, you would not know suffering.”[41] Bahia asks sadly, “Who could the man be for whom my body is mutilated and my soul oppressed, only to satisfy and win his pleasure and confidence in my chastity?”

Circumcision and sexual harassment as a culturally sanctioned exploitation of women’s bodies is a main theme of Rifaat’s writing. In “Anaqeed al-Inab” (“Vine Grapes”), the second story in her collection that addresses this issue, Rifaat depicts Bahia the child, newly circumcised, in pain: “The wound hurt for a long time, and the place of the mutilation remained inflamed and swollen.”[42] When she walks in her garden, Bahia encounters a guard who is excited by the way she walks from the pain of her wound; he attempts to touch her body, and when she refuses, tries to lure her by giving her a ripe peach, telling her to eat it so her breasts will become like peaches. The child shakes her head in disgust at his sexual innuendoes, and he tells her, “Eat something, or else you will remain skinny and you will never mature or become a bride.”[43] The girl cringes in fear as he carries her and feels her up. The smell of the fresh wound urges him on, and he tells her, “Oh, I wish we could play together every day. In a month’s time you will see, you will be a beauty.”[44]

Bahia’s harassment continues even after the guard’s wife discovers the situation. His wife works as a housemaid and admonishes him more than once, chastising him and describing Bahia as “just a child.” Bahia describes one incident in particular, where the guard “carried me in his arms, lifting my dress up …; one more time we were surprised with his arms around my waist, and she wrenched me from his grip, yelling, ‘Behave yourself, man!’”[45] “Vine Grapes” ends with Bahia going back to her room, the pain in her wounded genitals increasing. Her bitterness also increases with the image of the man desiring her blood as female prey, associated with male sexual obsession. The fact is that most of Rifaat’s texts highlight this side in the male, depicting a man who is obsessed with showing off his manhood and who sees nothing but genitals in the female body, even when that female is a child. Since a man would usurp her body, his excitement and satiety are linked to female oppression.

Homoerotic relationships appear in three interrelated stories in Rifaat’s collection. The first is “Sadiqati” (“My Girlfriend”).[46] In this story, a young heroine hoping to become a star singer meets a socialite who forces her into a lesbian relationship. This offers Rifaat’s characters a chance to break free from male dominance through a homoerotic female relationship. Yet the physical relationship seems to be a kind of mutual exploitation, which the writer condemns.[47]

Homosexuality is also at the core of the second interrelated story, “Al haduta” (“The Story”), which draws another framework for a homosexual relationship—namely, a consensual one. Such a relationship is held in contempt and rejected by both religious and social rhetoric, and not tolerated whether written by a male or female author. “The Story” is about a young girl, Doria, whose mother prepares her for marriage by buying her colorful lingerie. This heroine knows nothing about the world of men except for the flirtations of the street vendor who comes to her window to sing in praise of her beauty. She regards his songs as “the calling of primitive males … all of them are Adam, devoid of any modernity.”[48]

Doria feels that she has grown up with men’s eyes appraising a body that her old nanny massages every day, telling her that “the girl has grown up and her treasures have become unhidden”—words from a folk song that is sung at weddings. The maid also tells Doria bedtime stories that her mind links with the tickling that excites her body and heralds her femininity. The old nanny, however, refuses to continue telling her childish stories after she has grown up. Instead, she talks about Doria’s future marriage and the role such a mature body can play in the sexual act. The description of the act disgusts the girl, who says, “The words spread out from the old woman’s mouth as she was engrossed in her body shaping … she described how a male touches his female … disgusting, repulsive words,”[49] and screams at her nanny to stop: “That is horrible … horrible.” The primitive image of the act disturbs the girl for a long time.

When they prepare Doria for marriage by removing her pubic hair, she screams in pain and cannot bear the idea that her body would be a source of pleasure for her husband. The second main female character in the story, the actress and socialite, then appears. By coincidence, she is a guest of the girl’s mother and witness to the screaming. This woman sees the girl send the nanny out (“Get out, Nanny; I swear I won’t get married and the man’s brutal hands will not touch me”).[50] The actress then interferes, saying that removing hair is not necessary. She approaches Doria coquettishly, is taken by the girl’s mature body, and, under the pretext of calming her down, touches Doria passionately; the girl—stretched out on her bed—enjoys the caresses, and then asks the woman to take her with her, saying she does not want to get married. In this context, female homoerotic relationships are not seen as a sin or forbidden pleasure, but as an enjoyable relationship and as rejection of a physical relationship with men, whom the protagonist regards as brutal.

Homoerotic themes also appear in Rifaat’s story “Alamial Maghull” (“My World of the Unknown”),[51] which has received the most feminist attention in the West and is also Rifaat’s best-known story in the Arab world, perhaps because it addresses homoerotic relationships and is one of Rifaat’s stories that has been translated into English (as mentioned earlier). In the story, Rifaat describes a heroine who travels to a remote village with her husband and sons. She lives in an old house where cracks in the wall allow a serpent to enter; folklore identifies that reptile as the spirit of a queen of the *jinn*. The *jinn* appears to the wife as a beautiful snake. At first the wife fears for her children, but then she hears an inner voice that ties her to the house. The husband takes precautions to protect his wife and children after that, filling the holes and cracks and repainting the walls, but the snake comes to seduce his wife, who falls in love with the woman inside the body of the snake.

The protagonist admits that the snake excites her, and wonders, “How can craving be quenched, the delights of the body be realized, between a woman and snake?"[52] The heroine cannot see any reason or aim in life but to wait for that sexual encounter with the snake as she flirts with her: "My craving for her would be awakened, and I would wish for her coil-like touch, her graceful gliding motion."[53] The act is realized as the snake says to her, "I am love, O enchantress":

> I felt her, soft and smooth, her coldness producing a painful convulsion in my body … extremely painful and exciting and hurting me to the point of terror. I felt her as she slipped between the covers, then two tiny fangs, like two pearls, began to caress my body; sipping the poisons of my desire and exhaling the nectar of my ecstasy, till my whole body tingled and started to shake in sharp, painful, rapturous spasms, and all while the tenderest of words were whispered to me as I confided to her all my longings.[54]

The protagonist unites sexually with the snake, but a question about that forbidden pleasure haunts her. She asks the serpent, "But it is natural for you to be a man … seeing that you are so determined to have a love affair with me." To this the serpent responds, "Perfect beauty is to be found only in women … So yield to me and I shall let you taste undreamed of happiness; I shall guide you to worlds possessed of such beauty as you have never imagined."[55] The symbolic use of the serpent to represent femininity and sexual gratification is a challenge to the stereotypical images of women and to religious rituals, subverting the story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise (the serpent tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit).

Rifaat's story uses the serpent metaphor for sexual satiety—the forbidden fruit. It is the only way the serpent knows, and she knows how to give the protagonist that satiety which she has missed with her husband. But that forbidden pleasure does not last, for soon the husband interferes, killing a snake from the kingdom of the sacred serpent; this time, then, the god's pledge collapses, broken at the hands of the man (rather than the woman, as in the story of Adam and Eve). The wife returns to cruel reality after the queen of pleasure disappears: she returns to the male world that oppresses the needs of her body. As Diya Abdo writes: "This ending suggests two things. Firstly, that the masculine understanding of Islam will continue to impose itself and succeed: no matter how much the sacred can empower, misreading of the sacred renders empowerment void. Secondly, women need to take responsibility for their lives and arm themselves with knowledge of the sacred and their needs."[56]

In fact, female sexual relationships in Rifaat's works appear within a general context where the oppressed, unsatisfied body is humiliated. "My World of the Unknown" reveals the extent of Rifaat's rebellion against conservative society's values, and the story gave rise to a long academic debate on homeoerotic relationships in non-Western writing. Rifaat condemns men's misinterpretations of the Qur'an, especially where women's social and sexual rights are concerned; in the intense love scene between protagonist and serpent, for instance, Rifaat daringly expresses the needs of the female body and the oppression it suffers, dealing specifically with women's social and sexual rights and traditional norms suppressing Muslim women's sexuality.[57]

The homoerotic in Rifaat's stories thus seems to protest against sexual frustration in a relationship where, under unfair and strict social conditions, a woman can be forced to marry a man without love, after having her body ritually prepared by her own mother or grandmother (who reiterate that satisfying a man's needs is every female's basic duty); can be forcibly circumcised and massaged as though she were a meal to satisfy the whims of a man; and can be readied as prey to offer pleasure to a male god at the altar of marriage. Rifaat broke the silence long imposed on women about these rituals, and in so doing, was able to express the sexual desires of female protagonists who were otherwise hidden away in silence.

Rifaat's stories raise many thorny questions related to women's sexual gratification, men's failure to understand women's bodies, homosexual impulses, and explicit acceptance of love between women. Yet she also presents courageously daring images of women's sexual denial and the social marginalization of their needs. Each of her stories offers a protest against the rhetoric imposed by traditional patriarchal societies and fundamentalist religious groups. The story "My World of the Unknown" is the clearest example of such body protest, challenging such societies and groups by asserting a woman's right to experience sexual fulfillment even within a fantasy framework.

Conclusion

Alifa Rifaat's writings in the 1970s caused a great deal of controversy, and her ability to openly express ideas is a rare example among writers of her generation. Rifaat's work broke all social taboos, particularly those surrounding sex and women's sex drive, and she accomplished this by using explicit language, refusing to cloak sex in either figures of speech or symbolism, and demonstrating no fear of reprisal. Her writing clashes with social values and is as metaphorically daring as physical nudity is in the public square. Her work therefore challenges traditional and restrictive images of women by exposing the female body; it is a demonstration whose corpus is paper rather than flesh, and whose words shake off values that restrict women's freedoms.

Rifaat's work reveals the unspoken life of the Arab female and her relationship with the desires of her body. It is a metaphorical body protest whose nakedness runs parallel to physical nudity protest, or to protest at more than one level. The first level is that both explicit writing and nudity protest dare to tread on taboos and forbidden areas, so as to shock and shake up the values imposed by society on women's bodies. The second level is that both of them use the body as a symbol to free the female identity from fear—fear of the dictator, fear of traditions, fear of social shame.

In a society that often turns a blind eye to the reality of women as a marginalized and oppressed group, the phenomenon of using the female body as a tool to attract attention employs the body as a subject to protest such oppression. This kind of protest uses the body not only as a natural biological component, but also as a cultural one laden with symbolism within political, cultural, and social contexts. That body is no longer merely a source of lust but a source of rebellion in the political and social sense. No more are women's bodies only a means of satisfying the lust of the paternal society; they have become a means with which to disobey and rebel.

Rifaat's experience essentially connects with nudity protest movements because both stand up against fundamentalist religious powers that target women's liberation: in this context, nudity is a protest against religious extremist rhetoric that exaggerates hostility against women.

Just as Arab women activists have now stigmatized all forms of authority that oppress the body, so Alifa Rifaat was in the avant-garde; 50 years before the Arab feminist movement (Femen), she dared to publish *Who Could the Man Be?* and to pay the price of her rebellion. There was a cost for being the first to engage rebellion in this way. She has been labeled in Arabic literary circles as a writer of erotic lesbianism. The price for her audacity also included her husband's forbidding her to write again and her being branded a controversial figure. As Ramon Salti wrote:

> Many of Rifaat's books and short stories created controversies that have spread throughout the Arab world, causing dissatisfaction among many religious leaders as well as other authors. *Man Yakun al-Rajul?*, for example, was banned in certain Arab countries because its content was seen as going against Islam. As a result, Rifaat earned a reputation not only as a feminist—a dreaded word in itself in parts of the Middle East—but also as a former Muslim.[58]

In being willing to bear the consequences of writing explicitly and nakedly, Rifaat showed significant bravery in her rebellion, quietly achieving the goal of all body protest: laying bare the invisible realities that might otherwise be ignored by those who prefer to look away.

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[43] Rifaat, “Anaqeed al-Inab,” 107.

[44] Ibid., 111.

[45] Ibid., 114.

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[49] Ibid., 94.

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Chapter 16
Rewriting the Body in the Novels of Contemporary Syrian Women Writers

Martina Censi

This chapter analyzes the meaning of the body in three novels recently published by three Syrian women novelists. Each novel deals with different aspects of contemporary Syrian society. In *Rā’iḥat al-qirfa* (*Smell of Cinnamon*,[1] 2008) Samar Yazbik represents problematic gender divisions and the gap between social classes; in *Ḥurrās al-hawā’* (*Guardians of the Air*,[2] 2009) Rosa Yāsīn Ḥasan deals with themes of political repression and minorities; finally, in *Imra’a min hāḏā al-‘aṣr* (*Woman of Modern Times*,[3] 2004)’ Hayfā’ Bīṭār addresses the broader theme of the dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity in contemporary Syrian society. These novels share a common feature affecting their themes and characters: the body is the site of the struggle between the individual and collective claims. And all of these authors focus on the struggle of the individual to assert his/her rights in a society marked by tradition, religion, and dictatorship.[4]

Here I demonstrate that the dialectical relationship between the individual and society is at the core of these recent Syrian novels.[5] Focus on the “individual” is not a new phenomenon among Syrian intellectuals and novelists. During the 1980s we saw a deep and crucial change occurred in the Arab intellectual scene.[6] The Arab intellectual, until then typically engaged and affiliated to left parties, began to experience a disillusionment that caused a detachment from the formal politics—perceived as a commitment to political parties—and a shift to focus mainly on the individual.

Consequently, the orientation of engagement reversed: from the concept of “homeland,” the Arab intellectual started to focus his/her attention on the concept of “society”; from the concept of “collective” he/she addressed him/herself to the concept of “individual.” Thus, the relation between the individual and society found a new inverted balance: intellectuals came to understand that the liberation of the collective would not realize the liberation of the individual; on the contrary, only the liberation of the individual will lead to the liberation of the society.

Contemporary Syrian novels of the last decade remain focused on the representation of the tension between the individual and the collective (represented by nation, ethnic groups, kinship, political power, and traditions) and they—directly or indirectly—question the meaning of membership. Characters’ bodies become the physical and symbolic site of the dialectical relation between the individual and the collective. The novels represent characters who are looking for their position in society and fail to find it. And these characters’ difficulty in finding a position in society is a way used by Syrian contemporary novelists to question the meaning of membership. In their novels, the authors represent a society in which membership seemingly refers to the idea of conforming to norms: to become a member of a collective, the individual has to renounce her/his difference and so his/her uniqueness. Furthermore, in the case of women novelists, the issue of the individual is complicated by the emphasis that women novelists put on the female body, whose “difference” is used to resist multiplicity of repressions and to refuse to conform to norms.

Following the arguments of theorists of difference, such as Luce Irigaray (1974), Hélène Cixous (1975), and Rosi Braidotti (2002), I claim that the female body expresses a difference while the male body is considered the norm. Feminist theorists of difference criticize universalism in which the “other” is considered inferior to the norm. For these theorists, the concept of difference must be reconsidered as an asset, although it historically acquired a negative connotation—used to marginalize and exclude minorities because of their presumed difference from the norm.[7] Difference involves power and violence because it can cause the oppression of the other, but difference is also the key to subversion and to the rebirth of the individual. Consequently, difference must not be erased, but re-signified and established as a potential. Drawing on her difference, a woman can deconstruct the logic of binary oppositions through which the dichotomy between man/woman, civilized/uncivilized, white/black, West/East, and in general, norm/other has been naturalized, legitimizing Western power structures which represent “civilized” white men as the norm.[8] Theorists of difference and of postcolonial studies introduce the idea of an embodied subject, embedded in a social context. A woman’s body with its own specificity contradicts the universality of the Western subject, suggesting the possibility of a global re-signification of the definition of an “individual” who is no longer just a body defined through identity with other bodies, but is defined through its own unique difference.

Through the act of writing, a woman asserts her difference, challenges patriarchal norms, and sets herself against the myths that surround her body. The body is not used only to represent the oppression exercised by the patriarchal system on the woman, but it is more generally considered the main location of the individual and of his/her struggle against multiple forms of oppression. During the writing process, the woman writer draws on her own experience, creating a *kitāba muḍādda* (counter writing).[9] In relation to women writer’s objectives, Fadia Faqir asserts that: “The task of women writers, therefore, becomes extremely complicated and instead of effecting a single translation, they have to carry out a multiple translation of the darkness, espoused with a search for a new language free of the religious and dominant.”[10] In the past, in an effort to circumvent patriarchal censorship, the woman writer was forced to hide behind a language that was not hers and divide herself into parts so that the reader did not guess her real body in the text.[11]

This chapter analyzes the ways in which Samar Yazbik, Rosa Yāsīn Ḥasan, and Hayfā’ Bīṭār represent aspects of contemporary Syrian society through a rewriting of the female body to suggest alternative narrations that draw on difference. As we will see in the novels below, the body is the narrative device chosen by these novelists to represent key aspects of Syrian society that reflect negatively on the individual. Here the feminist issue tends to include the broader issue of the individual in the Arab world. The woman draws on her difference not only to claim women’s rights, but also to engage in a broader struggle for individual affirmation in a society in which the subject tends to identify him/herself with the collective, represented by nation, ethnic groups, kinship, political power, and traditions. To assert the female difference written on the female body becomes a way to assert the difference of each individual and to question the very meaning of identity and membership to a collective.

I begin with an analysis of each of the chosen works, in order to highlight the peculiarities of each. I focus on the main issues addressed by the authors and on the role of the body in representing different aspects of contemporary Syrian society. Then I undertake a comparative analysis of the corpus, drawing on the description of female masturbation, which appears in all three novels. This comparative analysis allows me to explain the role and the meaning of body and difference in these novels.

Rewriting the Body

Smell, whose events take place in Damascus, is based on a true story. Samar Yazbik was inspired by the story of a young woman she met in a Syrian juvenile detention center who had been detained for killing her mistress, who had abused her.[12] In *Smell* the protagonists are two women belonging to opposite social classes: Ḥanān belongs to the rich, conservative bourgeoisie and ʿAliyā, her housemaid, comes from a poor family. Through these characters, Yazbik explores the increasing gap between social classes in Syria. In an interview she explained that:

> Actually I wanted to talk about the changes in Syrian society, the disappearance of the middle class and the great difference between the world of the upper classes and that of lower classes …. I wanted to make a comparison between rich people’s world and that of poor people.

One can assume that these events take place after the 1990s, during which neo-liberal economic policies and the deterioration of living standards exacerbated community divisions and social inequality.[13] Syria has a deep social stratification; there is marked class consciousness. This vertical organization of Syrian society is extremely effective in blocking economic and social mobility and reproducing the power of elites.[14]

The two protagonists meet each other when ʿAliyā’s father sells her daughter to Ḥanān to work as a maid. The little girl and the woman immediately establish a bond that soon becomes passionate and sexually intimate. But the body of the lover is just a refuge to escape an oppressive environment in which there is no possibility to establish free relationships between men and women. As Yazbik explains:

> Ḥanān has lived in a conservative Islamic environment. She has no children and has many deficiencies on a personal level. She was not allowed to mingle with the male world. And for women belonging to the upper classes it happens that they have affairs between them. Even Ḥanān’s relationship with ʿAliyā is complicated. It is a relationship of revenge and it is not a choice … it is a complex, complicated and contradictory relationship reflecting the nature of the society in which we live.[15]

Here, Yazbik references another important aspect of Syrian society: gender segregation. She describes heterosexual relations only through violence, because heterosexual relations are based on the impossibility of each knowing the other. Gender separation and the consequent lack of communication between men and women lead to the emergence of violence, derived from the fear of the unknown. As theorized by French feminist Simone de Beauvoir,[16] the human being, unable to establish a healthy relationship with the different (the other sex) which is unknown, tends to develop an aggressive drive toward him/her and violence dehumanizes individuals, making the man a beast and the woman an object.

This is particularly explicit in the case of ʿAliyā, who grows up with a father who beats his children and abuses his wife. ʿAliyā is also raped by her neighbor. Similarly, the other protagonist, Ḥanān, is forced by her family to marry her older cousin, whom she does not love. Yazbik uses the affair between the two protagonists to represent the oppressive drive that rules the relations between different social classes and genders. In the novel, the protagonists' relationship develops the same oppressive force and undergoes an evolutionary path: it first represents a mother-daughter bond, then it transforms into the initiator-disciple bond, then it becomes a relationship of two lovers, and at the end it becomes a rivalry. Only during a very short phase does this relationship succeed in not being about the imposition of one's power over the other, and thus become a mutual bond. The characters' universe is divided between those who suffer oppression and those who exercise it. ʿAliyā, who only feels powerful in a sexual context, decides to seduce Anwar, Ḥanān's husband.

The novel opens on the scene in which Ḥanān hears moans coming from her bedroom and finds ʿAliyā lying with her husband. Consequently, Ḥanān throws ʿAliyā out of her villa. This is one of the more significant scenes in the novel because it represents the unveiling of oppressive power that underlies passionate relationships. The main passionate relationship is that between Ḥanān and ʿAliyā. The sexual encounter with Ḥanān makes ʿAliyā (who up to that moment has been nothing more than property) aware that she possesses something—namely her body—and that her body could be the source of her power. She makes the decision to exploit it, not only in the relationship with her mistress but also in that with Ḥanān's husband. Yazbik clearly describes the relationship with Anwar as driven solely by ʿAliyā's desire to move from a sphere of submission to one of power.

In *Smell*, oppression and inequality underlie all the human relationships. In the affair between ʿAliyā and Anwar, her power is premised on his sexual impotence, because a mutual relationship between a man and woman is not possible. Anwar's sexual impotence is described several times in the novel. For instance, we read that ʿAliyā "did not succeed in making him get his masculinity back"[17] and Ḥanān is described as "staring at the ugliness of his phallus hanging like a rag."[18] The meaning of his sexual impotence is twofold: on the one hand, it is employed to represent his disempowered stance toward ʿAliyā, and on the other, it is the author's way of asserting that a model of masculinity different from that constructed by the patriarchal system is not possible in her society. A man renouncing his power and not exercising it through violence is no longer a real man. Consequently, the symbol of his masculinity, the phallus, does not work. On the contrary, ʿAliyā's father, who conforms to the patriarchal model of masculinity, has a phallus which "is big and needs four women."[19]

But even if Yazbik seems to use the protagonists' same-sex love affair to provide a positive alternative to violent heterosexual relationships, the reader soon discovers that violence and oppression also underlie lesbian relationships. For instance, to describe the first encounter between ʿAliyā and Ḥanān, Yazbik chooses a vocabulary drawing on the language of power and mastery.[20] We notice the occurrence of verbs of command, such as *ʾamara* (to order/to prescribe) and *qāda* (to lead), or verbs expressing violence *šadda* (to tighten) and *ʿaḍḍa* (to bite), to refer to the realm of pleasure. The combination of these two opposite semantic fields points to the dialectical relationship between love and power that is the core of the novel. The convolution of love and power is ubiquitous in sexual relations between men and women, but also pervades those between women.

In *Guardians*, Rosa Yāsīn Ḥasan also uses sexuality in dealing with delicate aspects of Syrian society—themes of political repression and minorities—through the love story between a young Alawite woman and her Druze partner. ʿAnāt, the protagonist, is a 30-year-old Alawite woman who works as an interpreter for asylum seekers at the Canadian embassy in Damascus. Ǧawād, her Druze partner, is a communist militant who has been detained in prison for 15 years for having participated in political activities against the repressive regime. The theme of political repression is represented by the author through the lovers' bodily separation. The void left by this separation is replaced by a bodily memory with language drawn from the protagonist's female body. This emerges in the following passage, in which ʿAnāt, walking in the streets of Damascus, remembers passionate encounters with her lover before his imprisonment:

> Oh my God, how much I desire you! Wherever I go, it seems to me that I feel your smell mixed with the smell of coming rain … I feel your fingers wrapping my limbs, defining the shape of my breasts. Gasping, you whisper in my ears dirty words that excite me, while you greedily lick the viscosity that is still on me … How often have you enjoyed plunging your nose in my soft pubic?!? I felt your tongue begging him, moving nimbly while you were searching it. Then you plunged your tongue in my humid inner cavities that have a scent of cypress tree on which it has just rained.[21]

In this quotation the woman's body is the very source of her own memory.[22] ʿAnāt is a living and speaking body, capable of producing sensations and memory regardless of the man's absence. Her own body is the location of female desire. We note that the author explicitly refers to the erogenous zones of the female body: female difference is then claimed through language. The female body represents an alternative language to the dominant male body, marked by phallogocentrism.[23] The author focuses on senses like touch and smell in an attempt to escape the monopoly of the male gaze on the female body. In their definition of "écriture féminine," Luce Irigaray[24] and Hélène Cixous[25] claim that if the woman has been given a body from the symbolic (the language), it is an imaginary body, forged on masculine parameters, because language has been historically marked by male monopoly. Consequently, speaking about mucus, secretions, touch, and vaginal lips contributes to the deconstruction of the derivative sexuality of the woman—who is defined by her otherness in relation to the norm (the man)—and introduces the culture of the woman's body in the symbolic order.

However, in *Guardians* the author does not only represent the woman's body, but also provides a representation of man's physical sensations and feelings. Ǧawād describes the relationship with ʿAnāt after 15 years of separation:

> That night, on the bed of that stranger room, I knew again the details of your body, or maybe I knew them for the first time. Your body was exciting, warm and feminine to the maximum degree, but in spite of that it was a foreign body, on which time had begun to leave its mark. And I felt that the past few years turned me into another man who did not look

> like the guy who I was … That day, I felt my body as if it had been that of a strange man I did not know!
>
> You were looking at the wrinkles around my eyes, you noticed them. You were feeling the wrinkles on my chest, formed by a tired skin. Your hand scoured my male attributes, as if you were making sure that they were still alive and not dead, as the light in my eyes.[26]

The separation of the two lovers is represented through the stories of the separation and reunion of their bodies, which, after years of distance, no longer recognize each other. Identity, rooted in memory, disintegrates in the present, therefore becoming unrecognizable. The body becomes the map of individual suffering caused by the experience of imprisonment. The man no longer recognizes himself, as if the long period he spent in prison has irreparably changed him into a stranger. In the passage quoted above, we notice that the character's body is, as Adrienne Rich (1994) asserts, the surface where the physical, the symbolic, and the social intersect.[27] Physical traces like wrinkles and tired skin form a language of suffering that prevents the man from restoring his former relationship with his lover. The liaison between the two protagonists was in fact based on love and pleasure and not on suffering. Thus, in an authoritarian society that oppresses the individual, the body is no longer the locus of the relationship with the other, but it becomes the site of a personal quest for the self. The body is the only location of which the individual cannot be deprived. A warehouse of feelings (metaphor for the body) belonging to the past allows the individual to bring her/his personal history back to life. Personal history and not History: in fact, in the novel, the body represents the individual memory's location rather than the bond between the individual and the community. This personal quest stands between the public and the private: it is a private quest because it involves the individual, but it acquires a public and political connotation. The character—in this case Ǧawād, who was affiliated with a dissident political party—after being released from prison, does not look for membership in a political group anymore. He seeks for a new identity through which he can represent himself as an individual and not just as a member of a group. The previous quotation in the novel represents a reformulation of political commitment: emphasis is put on the individual who, through his/her liberation, can achieve that of the whole society.

In the third novel, *Woman*, the woman's body is represented through the dimensions of illness and suffering. Maryam, a divorced Syrian woman in her forties, finds out that she has breast cancer. Her mastectomy marks the beginning of the novel. Her chemotherapy triggers a memory process that becomes part of the treatment. Each chapter corresponds to a session of chemotherapy, during which she remembers one of the men of her past. Hayfā' Bīṭār chooses a part of the female body (the breast) to represent Maryam's second *bildung*[28] process. In fact, after the mastectomy, Maryam needs to reinvent herself as a woman because the loss of her breast affects not only her individual life, but also her relations with men: she explicitly declares that after the mastectomy she can no longer easily expose her mutilated body to a man.[29]

As the title *Woman of Modern Times* suggests, in this novel the author aims to question the very meaning of modernity in her society. Bīṭār criticizes her society, which is divided between the contradictory desire to conform to a stereotypical idea of modernity and the commitment to tradition. Through the choice of a troubled female character, Bīṭār focuses on the difficulty of gender relationships in contemporary Syrian society and on the difficulty for woman to find a position and become a member of this society. The female body is the place where the dialogue between tradition and modernity strongly appears. The dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity emerges, for example, in the protagonist's liaison with one of her lovers, al-Baḫīl (The Miser)—whose name is meaningful—to whom she has never been attracted. The tension between tradition and modernity is expressed in a passage in which Maryam explains the reasons that led her to embark on this affair:

> I was passing through that difficult age during which I was trying to convince myself—or in spite of myself—to be a modern woman, a child of her time; a time of sexual revolution and of an explosion of the senses … Pleasure is the beating heart of life: that is what our century tries to inculcate in our heads, through satellite channels and Internet … and all the advertisements that begin with sex and end with sex.[30]

The polemical style of the quotation expresses the protagonist's controversial point of view. On the one hand, she wants to conform to the stereotype of a modern woman, while on the other, she takes a critical stance toward modernity. Verbs like *rassaḫa* (to inculcate) and *ġazā* (to invade)—used to represent modern society—refer to semantic spheres of authority and violence. Maryam has a contradictory stance, because freedom—related to the concept of modernity—cannot be based on conforming to something. Maryam's division is explicitly asserted: "I tried to convince myself—or in spite of myself—to be a modern woman, a child of her time."[31] In Maryam, the author manages to give the reader "a problematic, torn character who seems the natural product of a deceptive, disturbed, conflicted social milieu that accepts in private what it publicly condemns."[32] These kinds of women characters, who "strongly condemn the authority and injustice of men, despite their need for them and their desire to have an intimate experience with men that is unrestrained by customs or tradition,"[33] are widespread in women's Arabic fiction of the 1970s and the 1980s.

Maryam's relationship with the Miser is not based on a substantial freedom: on the one hand it is a reaction to a repressive and moralist society, and on the other it is the protagonist's way to represent herself as a modern woman. From this affair, Maryam does not even gain physical pleasure: "I looked at his excitement and desire that seemed to me a healthy creature clearly materializing in front of me; while my desire was apparent and inconsistent, I almost doubted its existence, because it was like a suggestion and a mirage."[34] Between the two lovers, only the man is represented as a creature capable of feeling pleasure, while Maryam does not and refers to her desire as "inconsistent."

Maryam's cancer, and the consequent second *bildung* process she undertakes following the loss of her breast, is used by the author to represent the themes of identity and the individual in contemporary Arab society. Maryam's body is the ground of the protagonist's search for a new identity. After losing a part of her body she needs to rebuild herself as a new individual. Thus it is the difference of the woman's body that triggers this *bildung* process, during which the protagonist seeks her own identity as a modern Arab woman. In fact, the breast is one of the symbols of woman's difference.

In this novel the theme of Arab identity is pivotal and draws on the dialectical relationship between East and West. To better understand the complex relationship between the Arab identity and its love-hate stance toward the West, we can consult Wen-chin Ouyang's definition of the Western role in regard to the Arabic novel: “The West undeniably played an instrumental role in stimulating modernization in Arab culture, but it also participated in rupturing the Arabs’ relationship with their past. The discourses on the Arabic novel are haunted by this perceived rupture with ‘tradition,’ and the consequent problematic of an ‘authentic’ Arab identity.”[35]

Maryam is a woman looking for a model of femininity that enables her to assert her female difference but which is not simply imported from the West. In *Woman*, female difference is not positively re-signified and established as a potential and the protagonist does not succeed in finding her position in society. Conforming to the model of the victim, she does not succeed in subverting the logic of binary oppositions like man versus woman, tradition versus modernity because the logic underlying her behavior reflects patriarchal logic. Her choices are not driven by pleasure and freedom but by her will to conform to a stereotype: the stereotype of a modern woman who needs/wants intimacy with a man.

In comparing these novels, we note that in *Smell* and *Woman*, the emphasis is on women characters, while male figures are marginal because they are only functional to the development of women characters. By contrast, in *Guardians*, the author provides a more accurate psychological representation of men’s universe, in which the lovers’ separation is described through the man’s feelings. However, these novelists focus especially on the woman’s body because the woman, who suffers a double repression—by the patriarchal system and by political and religious authorities—becomes the symbol for individual liberation.

After highlighting the main features of each novel in relation to the representation of the body and its meaning, I will now undertake a comparative analysis of the novels. In doing this, I have chosen to compare the descriptions of the women’s masturbation, an act that appears in all three novels. As noted, in *Smell* the separation between women’s and men’s universes is sharp. Man is considered woman’s oppressor and consequently is unable to give her pleasure. A woman’s masturbation is then a sort of feminist manifesto advocating a woman’s right to experience pleasure:

> There is no man able to make you enjoy as soft fingers coming from your heart do, fingers which do not come from man’s body. Warm extensions. They blossom within you, they grow up, assuring you what is outside and inside you, to make you the lady of yourself. They give you your femininity back in a quiver … Fingers are suspended, endless letters coming from the depth, hovering in the air. They caress the void with their quivering, generating an eternal pleasure which begins and ends at the same time. Fingers give different pleasures …. Your fingers do not look like my crocodile’s limp member.[36]

A woman’s masturbation is the only alternative to the failure of sexual intercourse with a man. A woman’s fingers—the personification of female pleasure—are a symbolic alternative to the dominant phallogocentrism. Man is compared to the animal through the metaphor of the crocodile. A woman turns to her body, which becomes the very source of a new signification. The language draws on a woman’s body to escape from a male-dominated world. The body is the center of feminine intimacy that only a woman, with her fingers, may revive. As Yazbik states, in her society, sex

> does not imply freedom, because it is forced in several names: in the name of marriage, of religion, of shame, of rape, of

> violence, of dishonor. Everything is violence. The language of violence in sex represents the language of violence in the whole society … Sex belongs to the violent nature of social relations: relations of domination.[37]

Female sexuality is used, in this novel, to represent a society in which a woman is not yet considered a subject in her own right.

In *Guardians*, female masturbation is used by the author to represent the separation between the two lovers. Ğawād fails to restore the ancient bond of complicity that used to bind him to ‘Anāt, because even after his release, the painful experience of prison persists in the present. The author explains that the experience of imprisonment first leads to an individual’s alienation from his society, then irreparably undermines his closest relationships. Ğawād is not able to find a new place in his society and his family, so he decides to leave Syria and go abroad with the aim of finding a better environment for himself and his wife. After his departure, ‘Anāt finds out she is pregnant, but decides not to reveal it to him. During this second separation, ‘Anāt feels new sensations related to the experience of pregnancy:

> During the first months of her pregnancy, there was still a bit of her former desire, that her body—inside which the fetus began growing—was hiding. Recently, that desire had come back violent and persistent … The day before, she put her fingers inside, touching the damp viscosity of her lips, as she used to do formerly, then she started touching the hot damp of her bud. But the fetus had moved for a moment! And without realizing it, she quickly withdrew her hand.[38]

‘Anāt’s body is a speaking body that produces desire. It is a surface of drives that carries not only the female specificity, but also the individual’s personal story. ‘Anāt’s individual memory makes her directly accede to her body, or rather to her personal identity. Masturbation is a way to claim that a woman is not only a mother, the receptacle of another body, but also the very subject of her own desire. This is how Yāsīn Ḥasan represents the sharp contrast between the desiring subject and the subdued. The latter is the human being who—under the pressure of authoritarian power—has been removed from the sphere of language and has lost the ability to represent him/herself as an individual. In the quotation above, the woman describes her body, organizing it through the language.[39] It is a woman’s language because it draws on the difference of the female body, but it is also a personal language because it is tied to the individual’s personal history. The direct style in the description of ʿAnāt’s masturbation comes with an allusive terminology. Components of the female anatomy are named metaphorically: clitoris is *‘bur‘uxm* (bud), vaginal lip are *šafr* (edge). However, the way in which Yāsīn Ḥasan combines these elements has a highly erotic effect. The woman’s body is thus a living body: regardless of a man’s absence and the fetus’s presence, it is still the main location of the female subject and of her desire.

The description of Maryam’s masturbation stands in sharp contrast to that of ʿAnāt’s, because Maryam considers her body an enemy:

> After long months of exile, my body’s hunger began invading and tormenting me. So I was forcing myself—in spite of myself, defeated and dejected, aware of my weakness’ extent—to satisfy it through masturbation. I masturbated imagining that Aḥmad was attached to me, remembering his young and attractive body. I’d never known instinct’s insolence before. It barked in the middle of the night, in the crush of work and in the crowd, invoking its right to be satisfied. It was not ashamed to demand and the more I tried to repress its ferocity, the more it increased.[40]

During Maryam’s *ġurba* (exile) phase—in which, after her divorce from Aḥmad, she goes to Dubai to stay with her brother—she experiences a double separation: she is far from her home and her daily life, and she is also far from her body. In the quotation above, the semantic sphere is linked to physicality and animal instincts. Therefore the woman's body, rather than being the location of desire, becomes a beast in which the woman is a prisoner. The female body is described in the language of violence and instinct, like that characterizing the novel's male characters.

In this case, therefore, the body represents the other, against which the woman, in opposition, is represented as a victim. The female character is described through a series of expressions belonging to the semantic field of victimhood; we note from the verbs that the author chooses to represent Maryam's physical sensations as forces that "invade" and "torment" her. Her body is not that of an individual who can finally act in freedom, for his/her satisfaction. Female homoerotic experience is not proposed as an alternative to that with man, because it is informed by the same logic. The core of Maryam's character, therefore, remains unaltered throughout the whole course of her path: she continues to be a victim.

Conclusion

To conclude my analysis, I argue that the issues raised by these women novelists are part of the wider debate about women, difference, and membership, a debate that involves more than just contemporary Syrian society. The concept of difference is the core of the international debate about the status of minorities and women, also involving concepts of identity and membership.[41]

In the novels analyzed, I have noted that none of the women characters succeed in finding their location within their society. These women cannot identify themselves with a community (religious or ethnic) because membership in a community does not consider and respect a woman's difference. Nor can they identify themselves with the nation-state, because in Syria it is represented by dictatorship. Thus, in their reality, the concept of membership is inherently tied to different sorts of oppression. Surely this is not just a problem for women in the Arab world. Women suffer a double oppression: they are oppressed on political and religious levels as members of a society ruled by a dictatorship, and they suffer oppression from the patriarchal system. A woman's body is the physical and symbolic surface on which this oppression appears. But a woman's body also becomes the place in which resistance to oppression can be fulfilled. A woman's body is, in fact, the symbol of an embodied difference that questions the very meanings of the individual and of membership. As Yuval-Davis explains: "individuals cannot be considered as abstracted from their specific social positionings."[42] Consequently, the body can be considered the main location of the individual and a woman's bodily difference becomes a way to question and deconstruct the concept of equality. In fact, the concept of equality determines an exclusive/inclusive definition of membership. In other words, the ideal of equality could lead to the exclusion of every component considered different from the community standard. As a result, to claim woman's difference becomes a way to claim the individual's difference in a society in which the individual does not manage to find his/her positioning.

The characters in the corpus analyzed suffer precisely because they do not find their position within their society. The absence of a feeling of membership appears strongly in the impossibility, for the female characters, of establishing healthy relationships. In *Smell*, the assumption that lesbian relationships are a positive alternative to heterosexual ones proves to be unsuccessful, because here, homosexual relationships are not based on free choice but on the impossibility of communication between a man and a woman. Although a woman finds spaces in which she succeeds in satisfying her desire, lesbian relationships are based on the same violence and will to mastery that underlie heterosexual relations. The woman's body is used by Yazbik as a metaphor for a society ruled by a patriarchal logic that maintains a strict separation between men and women. But female difference does not succeed in overcoming patriarchal logic, which intrudes even into the women's sphere. Consequently, the poetics of senses—which is central in the novel, as we can see from the title, *Smell of Cinnamon*—underlying lesbian relationships becomes the violence that underlies heterosexual relationships. As a result, lesbian relationships become the metaphor of a society that does not recognize the individual, and thus prevents the creation of human relations based on freedom and respect for otherness.

Gender separation is partly overcome in *Guardians*, where heterosexual relationships are initially based on an equal interchange and on mutual understanding and affection. However, in this case political repression intrudes into intimate relationships, leading to the impossibility of communication between genders. Repressive power operates at several levels: it does not just destroy the bond between the individual and his/her community, but it also invades the privacy of his/her emotional ties. Losing contact with one's history, individuals also lose their ability to recognize and represent themselves, as appears from the passage in which Ǧawād describes his body's changes. Failing to regain his former identity, the individual is not even able to relate to otherness, in this case represented by the woman. However, Yāsīn Ḥasan lets in some light in the novel's end, which closes with protagonist giving birth to her son as if to indicate that the answer for a renewal of the status of the individual in her society must draw on female difference. Despite her social, political, and emotional conditions, the woman's body still manages to produce life, meaning, and pleasure.

In *Woman*, the impossibility of relations between the two sexes is more clearly established. The failure of heterosexual relationships leads to the protagonist's failure as an individual. The woman's body is never represented as one that experiences pleasure; rather, it remains always tied to the language of suffering. Since relating to the other is impossible, the woman is not able to develop her own language drawing on her body's specificity. In fact, Maryam still considers female difference as a limit[43] and does not assert it as an asset.

The woman's difference asserted—successfully or unsuccessfully—by these women characters becomes an attempt to undermine a theory of membership drawing on a process in which the individual conforms to the community. It represents a global questioning of the power dynamics that determine membership in the society. As noted, the questions raised by these Syrian writers can be related to the theoretical framework of feminist theorists of difference and of postcolonial studies. Female difference—which is an embodied difference—contradicts the uniqueness of the white male subject considered the norm and suggests a re-questioning of the concept of the individual. The subject is no longer unitary but is identified through difference. In this way, these women writers contribute to the deconstruction of normative discourses—produced by the dictatorial regime and the patriarchal system—and to the re-signification of concepts of difference and membership. If the binary opposition "norm/other" which determines membership to the territory of the nation-state is deconstructed, it follows that the membership itself can no longer be established through a process of inclusion/exclusion. Consequently, revaluation of difference may represent the starting point for inclusive policies of subjects considered "deviant," thus leading to an overall re-signification of the concepts of the individual and of her/his membership in a collective.

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1 Henceforth referred to as *Smell*, the novel has been translated into English under the title *Cinnamon* (London: Arabia Books, 2013).

2 Henceforth referred to as *Guardians*.

3 Henceforth referred to as *Woman*.

4 Cf. Lorenzo Trombetta, *Siria. Dagli Ottomani agli Asad. E oltre* (Milan: Mondadori, 2013). The Assad regime has been in power in Syria for more than 40 years; an internal oligarchy—including the president—who directly belongs to the family or to a clan allied to that of Assad has always acted behind the scenes. Assad's power has always been based on a holistic system of internal repression, which was politically legitimized by the presence of an external enemy: Israel. At the legal level instead, Assad's repression has relied on a series of laws enacted with the specific purpose of eradicating all forms of dissent.

5 For a detailed study about the Arab novel and its relationship with nationalism, see, among others, Wen-chin Ouyang, *Poetics of Love in the Arabic Novel: Nation-State, Modernity and Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

6 Cf. Rūzā Yāsīn Ḥasan, "Ayna al-muṯaqqafūn al-Sūriyyūn min al-ṯawra?" *Jadaliyya*. Accessed Nov. 2, 2013: http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4523; miriam cooke, *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Najati Tayyara, "Chronique d'un printemps," *CONFLUENCES Méditerranée* 44 (Winter 2002–2003): 47–54.

7 Rosi Braidotti, *Nuovi soggetti nomadi. Transizioni e identità postnazionaliste* (Bologna: Luca Sossella Editore, 2002), p. 92.

8 See, for instance, Claire Colebrook, "Feminist Criticism and Poststructuralism," in Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (eds), *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, pp. 214–34 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

9 Anīsa 'Abbūd, *Kitābat al-nisā' bayna al-šakwā wa-l-iḥtiǧāǧ*, in Māhir 'al-Šarīf, wa-Qays al-Zarallī (bi-išrāf),' *al-Siyar al-ḏātiya fī Bilād al-Šām*, pp. 207–20 (Damascus: Dār al-Madā, 2007), p. 209.

10 Fadia Faqir (ed.), *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers* (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 1998), p. 22.

11 'Abbūd, p. 209.

12 I refer here to the interview conducted with the author in Paris on October 6, 2011. Translations from Arabic to English are mine.

13 Fabrice Balanche, *La région alaouite et le pouvoir syrien* (Paris: Karthala, 2006), p. 285.

14 Ibid., p. 284.

15 Interview conducted with the author in Paris on October 6, 2011.

16 Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

17 Ibid., p. 15.

18 Ibid., p. 11.

19 Ibid., p. 52.

20 Cf. ibid., pp. 128–9.

21 Translations from Arabic to English are mine. Ḥasan, pp. 48–9.

22 In this novel, memory is a central element that involves all the main characters. It is mainly a physical memory. For instance, the case of Ḥasan—ʿAnāt's father—is emblematic. He is convinced that a young Spanish woman whom he met through the Internet is his first wife's reincarnation. *Taqammuṣ* (reincarnation)—which is part of the Alawi belief system—represents the *par excellence* concept of bodily memory, since a dead person reincarnates in a living body. See, for instance, Ğamāl Šiḥayyīd, *al-Ḏākira fī-l-riwāya al-'Arabiyya al-mu'āṣira* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Našr, 2001), pp. 199–203.

23 Cf. Hélène Cixous, *Le rire de la Méduse* in *Le rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* (Paris: Galilée, 2010).

24 Cf. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum. De l'autre femme* (Paris, 1974), and idem, "Quand nos lèvres se parlent," *Cahiers du Grif* 12 (1976): 23–8.

25 Cf. Cixous.

26 Ḥasan, pp. 48–9.

27 Drawing on Rich's theory of location, Rosi Braidotti emphasizes the importance of the body as the location where several individual and social variables intersect (pp. 74–5).

28 Here I refer to the literary genre of *Bildungsroman*. Since this genre developed in specific social and historical conditions and involved the formation process of a young male hero, it would seem to be difficult to apply the same definition to contemporary novels by female authors. Nonetheless, as Adriana Chemello has highlighted in *Una Bildung senza roman. Donne in divenire*, in Paola Bono and Laura Fortini (eds), *Il romanzo del divenire. Un Bildungsroman delle donne?*, pp. 14–33 (Rome: Iacobelli, 2007), if we consider the Bakhtinian definition of the *Bildungsroman*, we can imagine applying it to novels by women authors. Bakhtin, in *Il romanzo di educazione e il suo significato nella storia del realismo*, in Clara Strada Janovic (ed.), *L'autore e l'eroe* (Turin: Einaudi, 1988), emphasizes the "becoming dimension," which involves a protagonist who

undergoes a series of changes that lead him to become a different person. While maintaining this “becoming dimension” but changing its contextual conditions, the *Bildungsroman* pattern can be used to analyze women’s literary production. At the center of the plot there is no longer a young male hero who leaves his home to seek his fortune and realize his ambitions, but a female character whose path is an inner journey, during which she tests herself through the conflict between norm and rebellion. According to this definition, shaped on women novelists’ experience, the protagonist of *Women* can be considered an evolving character who tests herself and matures “in the *intus*, through acquiring self-awareness, of her power and her will” (Chemello, p. 21) rather than in the social sphere. Through this introspective journey, the woman becomes the master of her own destiny.

29 Biṭār, p. 15.

30 Ibid. Translations from Arabic to English are mine.

31 Biṭār, p. 32.

32 Subhi Hadidi and Iman al-Qadi, “Syria,” in Radwa Ashour, Ferial J. Ghazoul, and Hasna Reda-Mekdashi (eds), *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide 1873–1999*, pp. 60–97 (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008), p. 84.

33 Ibid., p. 83.

34 Biṭār, p. 47.

35 Ouyang, p. 4.

36 Yazbik, pp. 72–3.

37 I refer here to the interview conducted with the author in Paris on October 6, 2011.

38 Ḥasan, p. 132.

39 I refer here to Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory. He asserts that outside language, it is impossible for human beings to understand reality because it is only through language that they organize reality. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 2005 [1916]).

40 Biṭār, pp. 87–8.

41 About this subject see, for instance, Nira Yuval-Davis, “Women, Citizenship and Difference,” *Feminist Review* 57 (1997): 4–27.

42 Ibid., p. 22.

43 I refer, for instance, to feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, who looked at equality with men—and therefore rejection of female difference—as a prerequisite to liberation. The man represents the norm against which we have to identify what is different. But for theorists of difference, the notion of equality is intrinsically modeled on masculine parameters. As a result, to “claim the difference means detaching it from the logic of binary oppositions … to make it expression of the positive value of being ‘other than’ a norm” (Braidotti, p. 73).

Chapter 17
The Virgin Trials: Piety, Femininity, and Authenticity in Muslim Brotherhood Discourse

Sherine Hafez

The Virgin Trials

Fourteen Egyptian women members of the Muslim Brotherhood organization stood behind bars in an Alexandrian court in November of 2013. They prepared to stand trial for allegedly inciting violence in Alexandria in the preceding month.[1] They were young. Seven of them were only 15 and 17 years old. The girls were uniformly dressed in white, with white veils covering their hair. Their youth, purity, and innocence were accentuated by the anxious scrubbed faces peering from behind the bars. Their age, gender, and dress prompted newspaper reports to call them "virginal." In fact, in no time at all, the trial and its subsequent proceedings were dubbed "The Virgin Trials." Looking straight at the cameras, smiling, and turning to talk and giggle with their friends, these young girls seemed like any other regular teens their age. Except that they weren't. This group of young women swathed in white standing trial in an Alexandrian court were not perceived like other teens their age. They were accused by the state of being members of a terrorist organization, blocking roads in the city and inciting violence against the government during the protests of October 31.

In news footage and captured photographs of the young women, two discourses emerge in direct opposition to each other—a binary of two realities competing for people's hearts and minds. On one hand is the power of the collective image of 14 young women dressed in white, representing everything that is pure and pious, while on the other there are allegations of violence, mayhem, and insidious sabotage.[2] White is worn for *haj* or pilgrimage to Mecca and is also the color of the *kafan* or funerary shroud that followers of Islam are buried in. While the Egyptian legal system requires white clothing as a form of dress for the accused, white is also a symbol of purity and of purification and has connotations related to the young age of the detainees, many of whom were minors. The virgin trials epitomized how vying political projects in Egypt today are played out over women's bodies. The competition over women's bodily comportment is not new in the Arab region, as liberation movements, post colonialist nation-states, and Islamist groups have traditionally engaged in a perpetual symbolic war to define it (Baron 2005, Hale 1996, Kandiyoti 1991, Lazreg 1994, and others). Modernity, Islamist piety, modesty, authenticity, and purity have both defined and restrained the body in the Arab world. This is even more poignant in today's revolutionary Egypt, where women's bodies have increasingly become the site of struggles for power and hegemony over public discourse. What do the bodies of these youthful, pure, and pious "virgins" tell us today? What statements do they make about piety, femininity, and authenticity? And what are the implications of these statements on the political scene in Egypt at the time?

After the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi in July of 2013, contentious debates over who is right and who is wrong in Egypt pointed to a growing fact—a trend, if you will—which can be described as the emergence of increasingly uniform notions of selfhood that strengthen their consistency within divisive and distinct group dynamics. Witnessing how forms of ideology are inculcated and disseminated in Egypt today, how they are aimed at honing consistent, uniform, and homogenous selves, begs the query into the ways women's bodies are placed on display, utilized, and often deployed in public to further political aims and hegemonize public discourse. Piety, authenticity, and femininity are factors that play an important role in establishing group boundaries. The case of the virgin trials points to how consistency and uniformity are communicated through women's bodies to a Muslim majority public in Egypt today to counter state hegemony and challenge its domination over the public sphere. The criminalization and demonization of these bodies, on the other hand, characterize the state's response to militant Islamism. In the wake of large-scale massacres of Islamist followers by police, the state desperately clings to its legal rhetoric to undermine protests and vilify its opponents. The unity of the message of piety and innocence thus becomes a graphic battle cry in the discursive struggle over bodies, public space, and political dominance.

Women's bodies act as conduits of subject production. They relay important messages about authenticity, piety, and justice. They create loyalties and instill norms and demarcate social, political, and religious boundaries. The physical and the social bodies are, as Mary Douglas states, in dialogue with each other. Meanings are relayed through the expressive ability of the body to convey them. She maintains that "The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always mystified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other. As a result of this interaction the body itself is a highly restricted medium of expression. The forms it adopts in movement and repose express social pressures in manifold ways." In similar ways, women's bodies navigate this tension between the physical and the social, producing meaning in the process while simultaneously being produced. I would offer that this duality Mary Douglas refers to in her quote is fluid rather than reified. The social and the physical are collapsed into one by the powers they negotiate. The meanings bodies produce are a continuum of fluid messages that respond, negotiate, and produce discourse.

One of the young women who was protesting on October 31 and was arrested and tried in November with the rest of the young "virgins" can perhaps provide some insight into how women's bodies are often socially projected in ways that produce notions of femininity that demarcate political boundaries.

Portrait of a Virgin

Ola Ezzat is now a 19-year-old medical student at Ein Shams University. Her family lives in Alexandria and she herself was born there. Ola comes from a family of Muslim Brotherhood devotees. She grew up in a home in the neighborhood of Sidi Bishr where many leading figures of the Muslim Brotherhood were often read and discussed. Although Ola's arrest in October of 2013 was a traumatic event for her family and herself, she is bound and determined to continue protesting. Her parents are understanding when it comes to Ola's activism, since to them, being part of the Muslim Brotherhood is akin to being part of a large family. Their eldest son, Ola's brother, participated in the *Rab3a* sit-in and various other family members have been to prison over the years or are still there now. It is a way of life for the Ezzats, one that mirrors their beliefs and somehow enables them to see hope for the future that they envision for all Muslims—a strong and unified Islamic "umma," or global Islam, *al 'alamiyya al islamiyya*, where Islamic culture and traditions can bring back justice for everyone.

Ola belongs to the *zahrat*, which is the plural of "flowering flower," a clearly feminized descriptive which refers to the beauty and freshness of a socially perceived natural symbol of femininity. On the other hand, and rather predictably, young men are called *ashbal*, which is the plural of a cub—a gendered metaphor of strength in the making and a future as the ruler of the jungle, the lion who presides over nature and protects his herd. The young recruits are trained and prepared for full membership later on in life by being placed in these smaller groupings. Ola Ezzat recalls the events that led to the protests that put her in jail quite differently from the way police reports have described it. She insists that she never blocked the road or incited violence, as she was accused of doing. "We were simply protesting. That is my right." And what were they protesting? Ola and her fellow *zahrat* came out with *al mas'ula*, or the supervisor of the group, to protest the deposing of former president Mohamed Morsi. To her surprise, they were all arrested.

Ola and her fellow *zahrat* were put in jail, and the state and its judiciary prepared to make a case against them. They were described as dangerous women who incited violence and destroyed public property. Police claimed they attacked the security forces and damaged the glass windows of several shops. The state message ran in contradistinction to the corporeal statement made by the young women in their white, virginal garments of innocence. Rather than view the girls' youthful faces, purity, and pious dress, the court chose to evoke their wild, disruptive, and even violent potential. While on one hand the physical attributes of the 14 women behind bars laid claim to a reality that precluded their accusations, their social and political affiliations as members of the Muslim Sisters framed them as guilty. The court delivered a harsh sentence against the women, ordering them to spend 11 years in prison and sending the minors among them to juvenile detention, where they were to remain until they reached adulthood.

The court's harsh ruling made headlines, and Ola and her friends' pictures were plastered all over the news and social media. The youthful faces of the young detainees sent strong messages to the public, while their white garments emphasized their purity and piety as well as their liminal status. Here were these young women, or "virgins" as some put it, who were unable to escape the wrath of the system. Muslim Brotherhood (MB) campaigns to free the young *zahrat* occupied social media for several days. The campaigns pointed to the innocence of the young women and made a strong bid for their freedom. Their plight became the occupation of the general public, who were outraged at the arrests. So successful were these media campaigns that both liberal and secularist groups who opposed the Muslim Brotherhood sympathized with the young women and objected to the severity of the sentence.

The detention of the young women was, in fact, part of a widespread series of arrests of supporters of deposed former president Morsi, which amounted to 2,000 arrests. Despite the serious allegations and the 11-year sentence for a few of the MB women, the courts reversed the verdict only two weeks later after considering their lawyers' appeals. Within days, the government proposed the "no protest law," which prohibited individuals from protesting without permits. It was clear that the court's initial approach was not conducive to public stability, but clearly the virgin trials were enough pretext to push forward the much-hated protest law.

The dynamics of political conflict and the struggle over the definition of women's bodies exemplified in the virgin trials emerges from a long history of the Muslim Brotherhood as an 80-year-old organization that has been often persecuted and marginalized by the state in society. Although by no means a binary opposition, these two forces, Islamists and the Egyptian state, are stacked on either side of a political debate that serves to create a deep and unequivocal rift in a country often plagued by larger issues, such as rampant poverty and lack of basic human services. A major contender for power in Egypt in recent history, the Muslim Brotherhood has helped define the character as well as the political orientation of the Egyptian streets for decades. So where does the MB place women? And, what role, if any, does the organization play in this discursive corporeal struggle over articulating the meanings produced by female bodies?

The Muslim Brotherhood, Gender, and Mobilization

In the past few years, since the Egyptian Uprising of 2011, much attention has been directed at the Muslim Brotherhood group, which emerged as a major contender for power in Egyptian politics. Despite its sweeping victories in the presidential, parliamentary, and several national elections, however, the MB's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) was unable to match its popularity with success in administration. Regardless of the so-called role of the "deep state," which posed a major impediment for the elected MB regime, the group—estimated to include 500,000 to 600,000 registered members (and an equal number of supporters and funders)—struggled to implement its promised agenda and was soon toppled by a popularly supported coup. The traumatic events that took place during and after the MB government came to power have caused much of the attention gained by the MB to be directed at the reasons the group has been seen to fail. Analyses and speculation about the hierarchical and somewhat conservative organization were a few of the reasons popular among observers for the "failure" of the Brotherhood and their former president, Mohamed Morsi. Yet the plethora of books, articles, and journalistic reports paid no attention to what the MB actually did well. And this marks a sad omission, for the MB have demonstrated time and time again that if they have failed in almost everything, they have demonstrated an extraordinary ability to organize and mobilize in the blink of an eye. Their recordkeeping, painstaking communication systems, and careful accounting of each and every member of their group have gone largely unnoticed. The recruitment, training, and organization of the Muslim Brotherhood are deliberately aimed at creating uniformity and homogeneity among its members (el Kherbawy 2013). It is this consistency that presents a public persona that epitomizes the doctrine of the group and serves to mobilize, galvanize, and deploy large numbers of its members despite internal conflicts and external challenges.

Processes that shape subjectivity are often illustrated in scholarship through the examination of state institutions, such as schools, the military, and hospitals (Foucault 1977). Specific ideologies among the MB create matrixes of organization that serve to inculcate particular forms of subjectivity. These forms of subjectivity, although paralleling state organizations in their ability to indoctrinate and mobilize, challenge state authority and work to trouble state hegemony. Gender dynamics and gender ideology within the organization best illustrate how these processes of subject formation underlie matrixes of organization.

Scholarly work on gender in the Middle East and Muslim majority countries has demonstrated how power systems undergird organizations and state systems (Joseph 2000, Hale 1996. I will draw upon this work as I examine the memoirs of Intisar Abdel Moneim, whose book *Hikayatī maa’ al-Ikhwān: Mudhakirāt Ukht Sābiqa* (*My Stories with the Muslim Brotherhood: The Memoirs of a Former Sister*) came out in print during the early days of the revolution of 2011. Perhaps they can help shed some light on the internal organization and gender ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Gender Ideology in the Muslim Brotherhood: An Evolving Picture

The Muslim Brotherhood was established in 1928 by Hassan Al Banna and had great appeal to the lower strata of the society, many of whom, isolated from discourses informed by Westernization, marginalized by a capitalist market economy, and excluded from social transformations, increasingly sought solace in an indigenous movement that called for an Islamic state in Egypt (not to mention their counter-colonialism). In contrast to the perceived corruption of the upper class, morality was stressed, and Islamist values and authenticity were reinforced. Their teachings maintained that the patriarchal system, in which gender differences are clearly delineated and men have authority over women, is the ideal system for the Muslim family. In 1933 the Muslim Sisters group was established, and its leadership was soon entrusted to Zeinab Al Ghazali, the daughter of a cotton merchant from a well-to-do conservative family. With a reputation of being a “soldier of God” among Islamist women and men, Al-Ghazali had a tremendous following. Her career focused on establishing the framework for women’s activism in the Islamist movement in Egypt. She is said to have regrouped the Brotherhood after government imprisonment had fragmented its ranks.

The role of women as mothers and tutors to future generations is central to the Muslim Brotherhood discourse. To founding women like Al-Ghazali, there is no women’s issue in Islam. She finds that Islam views women and men in a unified sense, with clearly defined roles for each. To her, while women are the “indirect builders,” the building is entrusted to men. Al-Ghazali attributes the debate over women’s issues and rights to be caused by the disruptive forces of the West, which she describes as a conspiracy. The West, she claims, has robbed women of their right to have children. According to her, Western women “… became a distortion and a commodity available for the lust of the wolves" (Al-Ghazali 1982). This kind of critique of Western women continues to be employed in Islamist discussions about women's roles in society. Islamic women's chastity is seen as the desired opposite of a demeaning Western freedom for women. There is a shift, towards the latter part of Al Ghazali's career, from singularly perceiving women as mothers and wives to seeing women as individuals with the freedom to choose what suits them, whether it be a career outside the home or a career inside it. It is also worth mentioning the fact that Al-Ghazali may not practice what she preaches, since she herself divorced her husband when she found that he impeded her Islamic mission.

In the MB organization in Egypt, the numbers of women have climbed since Zeinab Al Ghazali (one of the key women figures in the early days of the organization) started representing the female branch of the group in the 1950s and '60s. At present, women constitute 25 to 30 percent of the MB's membership, but despite their efforts to raise levels of representation, they have yet to gain the right to vote within the group. Despite this glaring limitation, however, women affiliated with the MB have run for parliament as independents and as members of the Brotherhood's FJP. In the year 2000 Jehan Al Halafawi ran as an MB candidate, as did Makarem Al Deiri in 2005, and in 2010 the MB boasted 12 candidates who were women. One popular FJP female candidate, Dr. Susan Zaghloul, has met with considerable success in parliament and Shura Council and is quite active in trade unions and scientific circles, yet she advocates a rather conservative agenda for women. Like Al-Ghazali several decades before her, Zaghloul claims that women's rights is a non-issue, maintaining that it is men who are the ultimate support for women. Her views emphasize the complementarity of the sexes, in that each gender retains its identifying elements to create cohesion in society as opposed to absolute equality, where genders have competed with each other to the detriment of the family members.

Although Muslim activist women engage politically and participate in mobilizing, representing and endorsing their Islamist organizations, they do not do well in male-led organizations. Overall, women often play a rather proscribed role, carrying out the MB's gender agenda to enable the Islamization of the public according to the vision of the Islamist political parties. Despite what appears to be a disappointing picture, however, the persistent presence of women in several of these parties, beginning with the FJP in Egypt, is already shifting the balance of power in the larger organizations by pushing for a more autonomous space for women in their fold and more awareness of women's rights.

The Muslim Sisters: One Woman's Experience

Like the young *zahra*, Ola Ezzat, Intisar Abdel Moneim was born in Alexandria to a middle-class Egyptian family. In her memoirs, *Hikayatī ma' al-Ikhwān: Mudhakirāt Ukht Sābiqa* (*My Stories with the Muslim Brotherhood: The Memoirs of a Former Sister*), Intisar recounts her story as a former Muslim Sister, or *okht*. Although she begins by stating that hers is an individual experience and may not be the experience of all women who join the organization of the Muslim Sisters, her book relays a woman's candid insider perspective of the organizational and ideological structures of the group. She recounts how her father always gave her opportunities that pushed her to challenge gender boundaries as she was growing up. Fondly, she remembers how he taught her how to use a fishing rod, and later how to fish in the sea when this was traditionally a boy's hobby. Although Abdel Moneim's upbringing did not exactly break gender molds, it provided her with a basic ability to understand gender differences and to be aware of the subtleties of gender oppression. In her memoirs, she maintains that women in the Muslim Brotherhood organization are not afforded opportunities to realize their potential and are in fact often expected to obey and to carry out orders. Women, she writes, often play a perfunctory role, dictated by a conservative gender agenda to enable the Islamization of the public according to the vision of the Islamist political parties. Within this restrictive framework, however, the few opportunities to assume leadership roles were only available to a select few whose kinship relations to male MB leaders and venerated heroes placed them in a position of trust.

However, the gender conservatism that Abdel Moneim became aware of in the Muslim Brotherhood organization was not an unchanging ideology. She explains that to the Brotherhood, women's bodies act as public statements and are often deployed to reflect changes in strategy and political deliberations. For instance, she describes how, in the elections of 2005, when the Mubarak regime allowed groups such as the MB to run as independents, the organization grabbed at the chance to mainstream their image. This meant that there would be unprecedented changes in women's dress, women's public image, and women's political participation in the Brotherhood. Here Abdel Moneim details the processes that the leaders of the group put in place to ensure that both their members and the public would begin to see, accept, and envision the Muslim Brotherhood as a politically friendly group with modern, progressive leanings: "And when it was time to be open and to prepare for a new political maneuver, it became necessary to find *sanad shar3i* (a legitimating source from the *shari3a* or Islamic law) … conservative ideas changed just like the clothes to suit the awaited media campaign" (2011: 40). Top-down orders from MB leaders directed the women of the organization to remove the *khimar*, or face cover; women were now encouraged to shop at famous fashion stores and to dispense with the semi-uniform look of the *isdal*, which refers to the topcoat many women in the MB used to wear. The Brotherhood began to invite women to attend their public meetings. A few were chosen to sit side by side with the male leaders, and several MB wives were hand-picked to run for parliament.

According to Abdel Moneim, rethinking women's dress and their public appearance depended on the political moment. The Muslim Brotherhood employed the female corporeal form as a strategy to mark a progressive period or a conservative one. As long as it was needed to establish an image of progressive politics, women's faces remained uncovered and their bodies sported fashionable attire; during times of political repression, when the Muslim Brotherhood came under attack, conservative measures took over and women's bodies once again went under the long *isdal*.

It was during such repressive times that the Brotherhood began to see the necessity for homogeneity and uniformity. After the army deposed its candidate, Mohamed Morsi, from the presidency, the Brotherhood was subjected to a series of repressive and often brutally violent measures.[3] More attempts to regroup, to sustain group cohesion, and to ensure a consistent and uniform image were presented to the public. Yet more than ever before there was an emphasis on homogeneity in the group and a return to uniform ways of dress, which communicated to the public the Muslim Brotherhood's authenticity, piety, and innocence of any allegations of violence. The virgin trials epitomized this uniformity and succeeded in galvanizing the public to support the MB for quite some time.

Authenticity and Consistency among the Muslim Sisters

Women's bodies play an important role in processes of subject production, as they translate discourses of authenticity and righteousness to the public. Their bodily comportment signifies a great deal about the credibility of the Muslim Brotherhood, as they invite public empathy and simultaneously shape people's subjectivities by creating limits and demarcations for public behavior. The effects of this public power can be heard in Intisar Abdel Moneim's words as she describes what she thought of the Muslim Sisters on her college campus: "I had no idea how to be like them and I thought that wearing the *khimar* that they wore would make me a 'sister.' I hoped to be like them, a 'sister,' if only to avoid their derisive glances which ostracized me because of the way I dressed" (2011: 37).

Hence, women's dress and bodily comportment deliver specific messages about group boundaries and political climate and mark the public space as a space of Islamization (or secularization) through social notions of authenticity, piety, and femininity. Why, might we ask, are these factors important for political dominance? The answer is quite simply because historically in Egypt, the pact between a secular-style government and the Islamist trend has always revolved around the exchange of the space of politics for secularism in return for the space of the private sphere for Islamization (Hatem 1994). Yet as the events of the revolution of 2011 have propelled the Muslim Brotherhood into the public sphere of politics, their long sojourn shaping the private sphere has paid off. The social welfare activities, as well as the activism of the group itself in galvanizing and mobilizing the masses around the idea of an "authentic Islam"—exemplified by the slogan *al islam howa al hal* or Islam is the solution—enabled the success of the MB candidate Mohamed Morsi in the first presidential election after the revolution.

On the other hand, the state's response to the Muslim Brotherhood's growing hold on public morality and religiosity was to counter the message of innocence and victimization with its opposite, to criminalize and demonize the virginal bodies of the 14 girls behind bars in the trials in Alexandria. The state also employed brutal force to deal with Morsi supporters and end their sit-ins in Nahda and Rab3a. The massacres caused public opinion to question the state's proclamations of terrorism and accusations of the Brotherhood. The MB's consistent public message of piety and innocence was instrumental in affirming the public's outrage despite the loss of the group's popularity.

As the previous history of the struggle for independence, nationalism, and revolution in Algeria, Iran, Egypt, and Kuwait have demonstrated, women's bodies relayed similar assertions of authenticity and innocence. In fact, an important change in MB attitudes towards women took place in response to the coup that ousted their president. Brotherhood leadership began relying almost exclusively on women and children to organize and lead protests. Groups such as “Women Against the Coup” as well as “Girls Ultras Azhari” became instrumental in leading public protests against state violence and the removal of Mohamed Morsi from the presidency. Once again, the female body is dressed and staged to serve the purposes of two bastions of male hegemonic patriarchy in Egypt, the renewed militarized state and the Muslim Brotherhood.

As these young and virginal female bodies seamlessly shift from one category—the girl, the virgin, the pious subject, to another—the accused, the guilty, and finally the terrorist, social meaning and the body are collapsed into a fluid medium of discursive production through which struggles over power find expression. Once more, women’s bodies become visible markers of authenticity, piety, and justice. Their feminine corporeality establishes loyalties and demarcates sociopolitical boundaries. Their bodies seamlessly link the social and the physical. Hence, “virgin trials” epitomize the tensions between the so-called virginal femininity of the bodies of the girls on trial, which contrast with the case the state has prepared against them, while all the while attesting to the piety and authenticity of their political message as articulated by the Muslim Brotherhood. In this complex interchange of meaning, the centrality of the female body cannot be overlooked. The virgin trials reflect the seamlessness and fluidity between the so-called virginal femininity of their bodies and the piety and authenticity of their Islamist message. Thus, notions of authenticity, piety, group boundaries, and the exclusiveness provided by the gender ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood group all crystallized in the image of the young girls clad in white, standing behind bars on that cold November day in 2013.

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[1] Eleven adult women were also arrested and tried with the younger group. Only a few days after the verdict, an appeals court lessened the verdict—which was 11 years of imprisonment and juvenile detention for those under 18—to three years' probation for the girls and one-year suspended sentences for the adults, and allowed the defendants to go free with a warning not to break the law again.

[2] This was perceived as a travesty of justice that epitomized the state of unrest and instability in Egypt following the end of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) government after President Morsi was deposed on July 3.

[3] A popular-backed army coup deposed the Freedom and Justice Party's president, Mohamed Morsi, and held him under house arrest pending his trial. This action led followers of the MB to occupy the square in front of the *Rab3a al 3adawia* mosque in Nasr City, where thousands of MB supporters protested for six weeks. After repeated warnings to disperse, police raided the camps in July 2013, killing hundreds of remaining protestors. A number of MB protestors were also killed at Al Nahda palace. These deaths, as well the imprisonment of thousands of its members, have placed the Muslim Brotherhood in a state of crisis.

PART 5

Re-Theorizing Iranian Diaspora and “Islamic Feminism” in Iran

Chapter 18

Can the Secular Iranian Women's Activist Speak?[1]: Caught between Political Power and the "Islamic Feminist"

Leila Mouri and Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi[2]

Introduction

At a public lecture on "Faith and Feminism in Pakistan," held in February 2013 at CUNY,[3] Gayatri Spivak and Afiya Shehrbano Zia[4] discussed postcolonial feminist discourses on women, Islam, and nationalism and their theoretical pitfalls. According to one report, the talk centered on "the misguided prescription of those academic and developmental projects that advocate the instrumentalisation of Islam as an appropriate and 'authentic' approach in Muslim contexts."[5] Zia in particular launched into a scathing analysis of feminist theoretical postulations on Islamist religiosity. Elaborating the implications of demanding reform agendas by secular women activists, she remarked:

> Such women are accused of being westernized, inauthentic, disconnected from their own location and anti-nationalist or even imperialist or something called 'redux imperialist feminist.' I dislike the word redux simply because it's such a conceptual cop-out. The idea of grafting a theory with a specific historicism onto current events and social formation is, if not anachronistic, then, at the very least, unhelpful. In any case, as [Sumanta] Banerjee summarizes, these women activists emerge as the enemy of the nation.[6]

As an example, Zia referred to the favorable reception among Euro-American and postcolonial feminist scholars of Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety*, an ethnographic study on a group of Salafi women from Egypt's piety movement. Zia argued that they had neither critically examined nor considered the possibility that Mahmood's thesis on pietous agency could potentially authorize Islamist women to legitimately embrace illiberal and patriarchal religiosity. She maintained that the lack of debate on this matter likely stemmed from the knowledge production of "diasporics … who have the luxury of not on this matter testing or living in the theory they produce in politically relevant ways." Such works ignored how women, minorities, and lower classes could yield benefits from "modern, liberal, or secular struggles."[7]

This particular critique of feminist scholarship on the subjects of gender and piety in Muslim societies echoes many of the challenges faced by other secular women's activists seeking political and social reform under authoritarian, Islamist governments in the Middle East and North Africa region. Iranian women's activist and lawyer Shadi Sadr,[8] for instance, has raised concern over the emerging power dynamic she has observed between "diasporic" feminist scholars and women activists. In a 2013 interview, she expressed skepticism towards feminist academics and the body of knowledge they produce on Iranian women's activists:

"For them an activist is someone who has no brain or knows nothing about theoretical frameworks … They usually put you in a rigid, pre-made theoretical framework and if you don't fit [this framework], they will 'cut' you until you do. I think that many of these scholars are post-colonial, though their relationship with their subject [women's activists] is colonial."[9] This powerful critique is one aspect of a larger commentary about "diasporic" scholarship on gender and agency in Muslim-majority countries. From Sadr's perspective, the extant power hierarchy precludes a deeper understanding of the aims and methods of secular women activists on their own terms. Sadr's viewpoint resonates with Zia's critique of post-colonial feminist analyses on Islamist religio-nationalism, mentioned earlier. Their implications for secular women activists living under theocratic, Islamic laws have led—intended or not—to slander, labeling, and, in other cases, jail sentences.

Before we proceed, the terms "secular feminist" and "secular women activist" deserve pause. In the introduction of *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East*, Nadje Al-Ali explains her usage of this terminology: "'Secular' refers to the acceptance of the separation between religion and politics, but does not necessarily denote anti-religious or anti-Islamic positions. Furthermore, I suggest that secular women activists do not endorse Shari'a (Islamic law) as the main or sole source of legislation; but they also refer to civil law and human rights conventions, as stipulated by the United Nations, as frames of reference for their struggle."[10] Her characterization resonates with secular women's activism in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where women, since 1979, have challenged its discriminatory laws and practices by appealing to human rights platforms and instruments. When questioning the patriarchal nationalism inherent in state ideology, secular women's activists are dismissed and accused of holding anti-Islamic views and/or acting as imperialist apologists. The negative reaction to their defense of women's rights is similar to the backlash against their Pakistani counterparts; they too are also labeled inauthentic, theoretically uninformed, and members of privileged classes.

In state media, academia, and official discourses, women's rights defenders in Iran are discredited, silenced, and patronized. High-ranking officials in government have accused women's activists, secular and non-secular alike, of endorsing anti-Islamic, Western hegemonic practices and neo-liberal projects. Aside from the rebuke of women's activists is the problematic attempt by academicians to identify and categorize their activism. The conceptual term "Islamic feminist," a figure used to describe the projects and identities of local actors in the women's movement and born out of postcolonial feminist discourse on the contemporary Middle East, has gained currency since the 1990s.[11] Given the various academic publications and conferences interested in this subject—in addition to the growing body of anthropological and ethnographic literature on religious women in the Middle East—the methods, manner, and scope of feminist activities in the region are overwhelmingly analyzed through this conceptual lens.

Yet the figure of "Islamic feminist" is a contentious one; not only because its origins and applicability are questioned, but also because it has uncritically become the central protagonist and spokesperson to describe what is, in actuality, a hybrid movement of secularists, feminists, and the religiously devout, among many other characters and strains. Iranian civil society activists, including women's rights advocates, are often incorporated into the "Islamic feminist" category despite their clear objection to the term being deployed at academic conferences and on media programs outside Iran. Influential scholars, some of whom we discuss in this chapter, have promoted the Islamic feminist construct as the only interpretive and political frame in which to advocate women's rights causes in Iran. This preference of "Islamic feminist" as a focal point of women's activism in the post-1979 era has led to the drowning out of many voices from within Iran's secular women's activists groups. In lieu of constructive debates about theory and praxis as they relate to "the woman question" in contemporary Iran, there is a palpable silence and mutual distancing between Iranian activists and feminist scholars residing in America and Europe. For activist Sussan Tahmasebi, to be stuck in this predicament is akin to feeling "dismissed or not heard" as well as feeling attacked, especially when accused of working "in line with American and imperialist propaganda."[12]

Given the pressing dilemma now facing many of Iran's secular women's activists, how do we address both political power and the imposing theoretical paradigms in postcolonial feminist scholarship that are hastily applied to Iran's women's movement? In this chapter, we highlight the nature of the (power) dynamics between Iranian secular activists and feminist post-colonial scholars, taking into account the domestic political contexts and global forces that have mutually impacted this relationship. Our main objective is to demonstrate the conceptual domination of the category "Islamic feminism" over what we contend is a heterogeneous field of women's activism. We contend that such a term has resulted in a political and epistemic violence, silencing the speech and actions of Iran's secular feminists and women's rights defenders.

In Solidarity Yet Not Heard

At the 2010 Women of Courage Award ceremony, held annually in Washington, D.C., former secretary of state Hillary Clinton paid tribute to 10 women from around the world "who have endured isolation and intimidation, violence and imprisonment." Absent among the honorees was Shadi Sadr, who was then living in Germany.[13] Sadr presented her speech via a pre-recorded video and paired it with a photo slideshow.[14] The reason for her absence was based, in part, on a double calculation. She stated, "The award enables me to publicize the systematic human rights abuses in Iran, particularly the crackdown on civil society activists in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections …" She admitted, "To be honest, since the Iranian regime declares that all human rights activists and civil activists are spies and puppets for the West, particularly the United States, I initially worried that to dedicate this award to Shiva [Nazar-Ahari] alone might increase the pressure and hostility of her interrogators and the judicial forces and make matters worse for her." (At the time, Ms. Nazar-Ahari, a 27-year-old activist, was being held in Tehran's Evin prison.)[15]

Her absence at the ceremony reflects an ongoing trend among Iranian women's rights and human rights activists: they avoid any direct affiliation with the U.S. government in order to prevent any potential setbacks that this connection might have—especially given criticisms over the continued U.S. military presence in the Middle East. Two months after her award, Sadr was convicted by Tehran's Revolutionary Court of participating in actions against Iran's national security. The same year, she was sentenced in absentia to six years' imprisonment and 74 lashes; this was almost three years after she was arrested in March 2007 during a peaceful demonstration opposing the trial of five Iranian women's activists.[16] After her arrest, there were mixed reports about the charges against her. While BBC Persian reported that they were based on maintaining "financial relations with foreign countries,"[17] the guilty verdict read that she "[acted] against national security through gathering and collusion in order to disrupt public security, disturbing public order, and insurgence against officials."[18]

Sadr's precarious legal standing is neither unprecedented nor unique among Iran's secular women's activists. In another case, in May 2010, the Revolutionary Court sentenced Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh, another women's rights activist and filmmaker involved in campaigns like the "Stop Stoning Forever Campaign," to two and a half years imprisonment and 30 lashes for "acts against national security through conspiracy and collusion intended to disrupt public security, disturbing public order and defiance against government officers."[19] For both women, there are mounting concerns over their next professional steps, the long-term impact of their activism, and the dynamics between academics and other activists. Now residing among Iran's international diaspora community, they both face reproach for emphasizing certain women's rights issues. Certain left-liberal critics and officials within the Iranian government view their work as adverse to both state policies and theoretical analyses currently dominant in academic literature and political spheres.

Tense relations between Iran and the United States, ongoing since 1979, have only exacerbated this dilemma whereby suspicion of women's activists has escalated. In the post-September 11, 2001 era, marked first by terrorist attacks and followed by the execution of the "War on Terror"—a foreign policy campaign seeking to "promote democratic movements" in the region—the U.S. Congress and State Department approved specialized funds and projects to gain influence and form coalitions with Iranian civil society activists. Government support of women's causes has been touted as a national security priority.[20] According to the 2006 Congressional Research Report, this would ensure "greater political freedom" that could "undercut the forces of Islamic radicalism and indoctrination."[21]

In an effort to unpack the many outcomes of this government campaign, we now turn to a discussion on the strategic measures of the Iranian government to protect its own national security interests against American intervention by stifling a burgeoning domestic civil right's movement.

Saving Muslim Women: Bush and Ahmadinejad Methods

On October 7, 2001, the Bush administration launched "Operation Enduring Freedom," the official moniker for the military ground offensive in Afghanistan against al-Qaeda, the fundamentalist Islamic group being sheltered by the country's ultraconservative and religious faction, the Afghan Taliban. Simultaneous to media coverage on the inferiority of the Taliban's militia forces were news reports on their exclusionary social policies towards Afghan women—a portrayal echoing condemnations from American officials. Saba Mahmood likened the historic turning of events to being part of an age-old "us versus them" civilizational discourse:

“the burqa-clad bodies of Afghan women became the visible sign of an invisible enemy that threatened not only us, but our entire civilization.”[22] Rescuing Muslim women from their “terrorist,” misogynist male countrymen—and the Islamic headdress imposed upon them—became wrapped into *casus belli* arguments of right-wing American officials. First Lady Laura Bush’s reading of the weekly presidential radio address drove home this point, singling out the “deliberate human cruelty” and mistreatment of women and children in Afghanistan.[23] As part of an extensive political campaign to gain international support, these remarks exposed how women’s rights were being used as a pretext for American military intervention and the subsequent occupation of Afghanistan.[24]

The “War on Terror” also targeted regional power Iran, which the Bush administration had designated as a member of the triumvirate of “evil,” along with North Korea and Iraq.”[25] According to a State Department assessment, Iran was “a strategic challenge to the United States,” for it “is working to destabilize its region and to advance its ideological ambitions … the Iranian government oppresses its own people, denying them basic liberties and human rights.”[26] In February 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice requested $75 million from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to be spent on advancing freedom and human rights in Iran.[27] Rice pledged to use part of this funding to improve “radio broadcasting, begin satellite television broadcasts, increase the contacts between our peoples through expanded fellowships and scholarships for Iranian students, and to bolster our public diplomacy efforts.”[28]

Since the 2008 election of Barack Obama and the 2013 election of reformist Hassan Rouhani, both governments have cautiously entered diplomatic talks, which is promising. American resistance to resuming full relations has stemmed from assertions that Tehran supports a clandestine and illegal nuclear weapons program and funds terrorist organizations.[29] The Bush doctrine of promoting democracy and freedom in the region was replaced by a dual-track policy in the Obama administration—meaning, international negotiations simultaneous with a “global coalition to create the toughest, most comprehensive sanctions to date on the Iranian regime.”[30] Obama officials have continued providing financial and technical assistance, especially in advanced programming and Internet access, to Iranian journalists, bloggers, NGOs, and academics.[31] Yet the administration has stopped short of funding Iranian political parties or factions.[32]

Since the 1979 Revolution, Iranian officials have responded to American policy initiatives in the region with trepidation and wariness. It is expressly forbidden and illegal to establish links between Iranian human rights and women’s rights activists and the American government’s “democracy agenda.” When conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected president in 2005, the campaign against activists intensified. Minister of Intelligence Gholam Hossein Ejei, serving under Ahmadinejad (2005–2013), warned that any interaction with foreign countries and “[their] domestic agents, infiltrators and the enemy’s fifth column” would fall under government scrutiny. He explained, “with the information they gather, these domestic agents send the wrong signals to the enemy and unfortunately move according to the desires of the United States and Israel.”[33] Farideh Farhi has described this predicament as a “win-win situation” for hardliners in both Iran and the United States. She remarked, “the situation is lose-lose for those who see contact as a means to avoid war and confrontation, and a tragedy for the people taken hostage, whether in Tehran or Erbil, to be pawns in the hardliners' game of chess."[34] In other words, in this strategic game of geopolitics, Iran's effort to stifle and/or silence its own critics, including women activists, is justifiably done in the name of preserving its independence and national security.

Since Ahmadinejad's election and the consolidation of power by *osoulgara-ha* ("principalists")—conservatives who proclaim adherence to the principles and values of Islam and the Islamic regime—officials have launched a political offensive against both feminism and women's rights advocates. Moreover, feminism as a discourse is referred to as a "western plot that is aiming to destroy Islamic principles of Iranian society and the Islamic regime."[35] In the next section, we elaborate three examples of this multifaceted campaign.

Condemning Feminism and Feminist Consciousness in the Islamic Republic

Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the elite military branch in charge of protecting the Islamic system's core principles, are authorized by the government to arrest and punish activists, intellectuals, and political dissidents who are believed to be working against the regime. According to IRGC's own categorization, "feminists, secular students and intellectuals, and reformists [are] the main threats of national security."[36] In several domains, they have enforced security policies that promote an anti-feminist, anti-secular, anti-liberal platform. During the election aftermath and throughout Ahmadinejad's presidency, IRGC has worked in collaboration with officials to clamp down on secular feminist activists, reflecting a climate of hostility and trepidation towards feminist ideas.

This anti-feminist campaign is also promoted on state television. A cogent example is taken from October 2009, after the disputed re-election of Ahmadinejad. State-owned Channel 2[37] aired a 74-minute program entitled "Feminism and the War against the Family."[38] Aiming to highlight the dangerous penetration of "feminist ideology" in society, it accused feminism of damaging traditional family values and corrupting male and female relations. Using scenes from the British-American animated film *Chicken Run*, the program criticized the notion of gender equality, arguing that feminism had introduced "liberal" tendencies and promoted the "dissatisfaction of being woman." Accompanying these statements were edited video clips of meetings held by women's rights activists. The footage had been obtained during security raids of activists' offices and homes. By airing this program, officials sought to warn the public about feminist activists; evidently they were western agents involved in "an imperialist plot to undermine Islamic values within society."[39]

In recent years, the government has also increased state publications disparaging feminism.[40] According to an article originally published in the official leaflet of the Supreme Leader's Representative Office in Universities, the author traces the genealogy of feminism to its liberal and secular roots in order to demonstrate that it is incompatible with Islamic teachings.[41] Fatemeh Sadeghi contends that the state has also funded organizations to "fight feminism."[42] The Women's Studies Center, in particular, a government-established religious institution affiliated with the Qom Seminary, has trained "clergywomen in how to argue against feminism."[43] Sadeghi maintains that such organizations are "tasked with fighting feminism and encouraging a state-mandated form of modesty," and provide ideological justification for the regime's "counter-assault on women's rights."[44]

In the domain of television programming, Iran's National Television Islamic Research Center has published a series of articles online, indicating government efforts to downplay feminist ideas. In one particular article, Center officials criticized state television directors for airing certain American and European programs for showcasing "objectionable" female protagonists. The Center alleged that such women demonstrated "their disdain for family and marriage," and thus exhibited "independent characteristics." Should the audience be exposed to this type of behavior, then they would be encouraged to support women's rights causes.[45] Moreover, feminism—as a tool of American imperialism—attacks Muslims and the Islamic *ummat*, in general, and the Islamic Republic, in particular:

> [Among these tools is] feminism, which is deviant and focused on women; it is aided by foreign powers and seeks to invade our country. Feminism of the West is structured on denying both divine values and the theosophical features of men and women's creation; it believes in their absolute equality. Through these acts, it attempts to drag Muslim women into the same morass in which many Western women and families are trapped. [As a result of feminism], women themselves have stated that [their] spirituality and feminine identity have been destroyed.[46]

These examples testify to a systematic discrediting of feminist ideas and feminist-oriented activists, intended to justify preserving the religious, political, cultural, and traditional "foundations" of Iran. Because feminism is identified as a western-imperialist plot designed to destabilize the Islamic government, it is viewed as a dangerous political movement that jeopardizes Islamic principles. Hence in order to confront "feminist ideology," the state conducts its own research and invests in both academic and public projects authorized to reinforce the suppression of the women's movement.

Feminist Consciousness and Mobilization in Iran's Women's Movement after 1979

The government crackdown on both feminist activities and civil society is a response to a 30-year mobilization for more equitable rights by Iranian women activists from across the political and religious spectrum. Although women's rights were not among the chief demands of Iranian revolutionaries of 1979, the subject gained importance once women witnessed the impending curtailment of their rights under Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini's theocratic government. Less than a month after a broad coalition of Iranians helped end the Pahlavi dynasty, women quickly assembled in Tehran to stage their first mass protest against what they perceived to be a gender-discriminatory agenda. In March 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini decreed that mandatory *hejab* be first implemented in government offices and also banned women from many high positions within the judiciary.[47] To protest these measures, Iranian women—primarily secular and from both left and liberal factions—arranged a few days of rallies. Again women protested—many of whom wore *hejab* but disputed its enforcement. Leftist revolutionary women in particular were criticized by their male comrades, who believed that they should present a united front with Khomeini's supporters and stand together against imperialist forces seeking to attack and humiliate Iran. Almost a decade would pass before Iranian women would gradually resume their political activities, following mounting reports of summary arrests, imprisonment, torture, and mass executions of secular revolutionaries by factions within the Islamic Republic.

The end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988—one year before the death of Ayatollah Khomeini—was followed by a period of renaissance and transition for Iran. During Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency, centrist policies paved the way for a governance of prudence, domestic economic stability, and international diplomacy.[48] In this same period, Shahla Sherkat launched the first Iranian feminist magazine, *Zanan* (Women), in February 1992. Sherkat had previously worked as the editor of *Zan-e Rouz* (Today's Woman), though after 10 years at its helm she was dismissed for allegedly promoting the "intensification of [a] modernist, feminist dogmas, and westernized attitude" in *Zan-e Rouz*.[49] As Sherkat had intended, *Zanan* would uniquely cover religious, political, and social issues that would appeal to women audiences. Interestingly, almost two decades later, several academics among the Iranian diaspora do not cite this history; rather, they have pigeonholed *Zanan* as an example of Islamic feminism.

In the second decade of the Islamic Republic, a revival of secular feminist activity took place in response to President Mohammad Khatami's call for a more open political atmosphere. Exploring women's issues beyond the framework of religion and religious practice, secular feminists began to mobilize primarily international discourses, such as human rights legal mechanisms and conventions, to speak about and, at times, to define domestic women's rights issues. In this period, many women's secular-oriented, non-governmental organizations were established.[50] However, at the start of Ahmadinejad's presidency in 2005, this phase of the women's movement came to a dramatic end. Unlike Khatami, Ahmadinejad applied a harsh and perhaps hostile approach towards feminist activities, in general, and women's NGOs, in particular. By the end of his first term, almost all of the independent women's non-governmental organizations were shut down. Many women's activists were sentenced to long-term imprisonment and banned from practicing law, continuing their activism, and/or publishing their work. Since Ahmadinejad's controversial re-election in 2009, many were even forced into exile.

The Phenomenon of Islamic Feminism: A Theoretical Overview since the 1990s

In the early 1990s, women activists from "Malaysia to Egypt, from South Africa to Iran, began to use the term 'Islamic feminism' in their writings on women's issues and created a movement within the larger Muslim *ummah* (community)," observes Manal Omar.[51] Leila Ahmed's exploration of egalitarian and hierarchical readings of gender relations within Qur'anic discourse spurred further debate about a Muslim woman's right to interpret and apply *ijtihad* (independent reasoning in Islamic law) with a gender-egalitarian lens. Through this questioning of Islamic sources and the hegemonic, patriarchal interpretations that govern many Islamic legal structures, the phenomenon of "Islamic feminism" was born. Though there is no standard definition of the term itself the general understanding is that a "gender- friendly"[52] understanding of sources of Islamic jurisprudence, such as the Qur'an, *hadith*, and *sunnah*, should assist in dealing with contemporary social issues. According to Nayereh Tohidi, Islamic feminists "have maintained their religious beliefs while trying to promote egalitarian ethics of Islam by using the female-supportive verses of the Qur'an in their fight for women's rights …."[53] Margot Badran adds that Islamic feminism is "a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm. Islamic feminism, which derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence."[54] Badran specified that "Islamic feminism, as a discourse grounded in the Quran and other religious texts, is not 'Western,' nor it is 'Eastern.' It is a universal discourse."[55]

Feminist and legal anthropologist Ziba Mir-Hosseini has mainly applied the term "Islamic feminism" to describe the project and identity of Iranian women's activists. She has claimed that it refers to those who are merely finding inspiration and even legitimacy in Islamic history and textual sources.[56] In 2011, she explained that her initial usage of the term was meant "to refer to a number of Islamist Iranian women who after the 1979 revolution had played a crucial role in silencing other women's voices," like those of Sherkat, Azam Taleghani, and Zahra Rahnavard.[57] She elaborated, "By the early 1990s, Islamic feminists became disillusioned with the Islamic Republic's official discourse on women … and had joined the 'New Religious Thinkers,' who later formed the core of the reform movement."[58]

Islamic Feminism and Its Objectors

While Mir-Hosseini has unreservedly applied the concept of Islamic feminism to categorize these aforementioned individuals, other scholars and activists who have worked on the local level consider it "unrealistic" and a "mere academic product."[59] In a recent interview published in the magazine *Mehrnameh*, Fatemeh Sadeghi, a Tehran-based political scientist, argues that the construct of Islamic feminism is not applicable to the Iranian context. She reasons, "… because those who support feminist perspectives do not work with Islamic epistemology and vice-versa … Even still, many inaccurately think that Islamic feminism is paradoxical. I prefer to call those, who are seeking freedom and gender equality within the Shari'a framework, 'religious egalitarians.'"[60]

Like Sadeghi, scholars Shahrzad Mojab and Haideh Moghissi question the relevance of Islamic feminism to the Iranian context. Mojab faults feminist scholarship for deeming Islamic feminism authentic and an indigenous alternative to secular feminist strategies.[61] In her analysis, it is *ipso facto* a contradiction, for it justifies unequal gender relations in lieu of promoting equality. Moreover, it has not yet proven how it can viably challenge patriarchy, especially in terms of improving women's status in Iran.[62] For Moghissi, "cultural relativist academics and commentators" advocate Islamic feminism as a sound theoretical construct and practice. She challenges their claims that it is "the only homegrown, locally produced, and hence culturally suitable project for changing the lot of women in Iran and indeed in Muslim-majority countries."[63] Moghissi argues two important points: First, Islamic feminism has ignored the voices of many urban men and women and "wittingly or unwittingly lobbied on behalf of Islamists' projects."[64] Second, Islamic feminism generates and subsequently emphasizes a "romanticized notion of Islam and an Islamic frame as an alternative way of being and acting for change, to the detriment of all secular projects. It has an intimidating and silencing effect and discourages serious dialogue about the possibilities and limitations of feminist projects of different sorts for Muslim societies."[65] Moghissi maintains that Islamic feminists impose a religious identity on women based on the sole reason that they reside in a Muslim-majority society. The effect is that a singular identity based on religion is being endorsed, censoring the voices of secular women activists—many of whom were "raised against the authority of Islamic Shari'a and its legal practices in defining people's social and moral action."[66]

Along similar lines of critique, Iranian women's activists regard Islamic feminism as a foreign import, a concept constructed by scholars of the Iranian diaspora. In general, it is viewed as a misleading terminology that does not convey the diversity of methods and sources employed within the Iranian women's movement. Notably, Sadr claims that "'Islamic feminism' has become a sexy concept."[67] She also believes that those who are labeled by academics as Islamic [feminists] do not see themselves as feminists: "They don't define themselves by this academic term. They say 'I'm a Muslim woman,' or/and 'I'm not a feminist.' They [academicians] find a thread of Islamic feminism also in secular campaigns …."[68] Likewise, Abbasgholizadeh expressed a similar sentiment during our interview:

> When I was [working] at *Farzaneh* [journal] and tried to address women's rights within the framework of *Shari'a*, we did not define ourselves as Islamic feminists. This concept comes from abroad. I don't believe in it. How do you support a concept that is constructed in the university? I'm an activist who works with reality. Such a thing does not exist in reality [or] in action.[69]

In another case, Sherkat, whom Mir-Hosseini had categorized in 2002 as a Muslim intellectual and a figure of "New Religious Thinking,"[70] did not mention "Islamic feminism" as the reason for launching the feminist journal *Zanan*. In the first editorial issue of *Zanan*, Sherkat explained that the journal's aim was to "open discussions about what is feminism and different forms of feminism and to let women decide for themselves whether they may agree with liberal, radical, social or any other kind of feminism."[71] Tahmasebi, as aforementioned, chimes in, "When we talk about the success of persons such as Shahla Sherkat, we should not forget that what she did was not possible without the help of secular feminists such as Mehrangiz Kar, who authored a legal column in *Zanan*. Highlighting the activities of 'Islamic feminists' does injustice to many women's activists and silences others."[72] She adds,

> Although secular feminism has always been scrutinized, along with independent women's activists, it initiated most of the civil society movements and not the Islamic feminists. One of the reasons that they are not heard is because they did not have a major tribune [to publish]. The religious ones were usually working at the governmental level … I don't find many scholars who speak about the women's movement and their arguments.

Sadr and Mir-Hosseini Debate Islamic Feminism

For the BBCPersian program *Pargar*, Sadr and Mir-Hosseini were guests for a roundtable discussion on Islamic feminism. According to Mir-Hosseini, given the tense political climate in Iran, women's activists in Muslim countries should inevitably rely on the Islamic feminist paradigm to challenge gender hierarchy. "Each woman or each woman's activist," she said, "who wants to change the situation [in Iran] has no alternative but to use the language of religion [here, Islam]. It is a necessity; otherwise, a woman's activist will have no audience." Islamic feminism, for her, is "an unintended child of Islamism or political Islam, but a legitimate one."[73] Sadr disputed both claims, pointing out that Shi'a doctrine and clerical hierarchy, which in the case of Iran is embodied in the Guardian Council,[74] have never granted women such legitimacy to interpret Qur'anic sources. Moreover, she noted that Muslim women's rights activists who consulted Shari'a to revise gender-discriminatory laws and policies had not yet realized any success. She suggested using other strategies, such as appealing to social realities, to tackle legal and social cases. During the anti-stoning campaign, for example, she and her colleagues, instead of appealing to Islamic doctrine, chose to highlight the harsh economic and social conditions of convicted women in order to overturn their verdicts and eventually make changes in the law.[75] Sadr argued that even in a strict, Islamic legal system, such as that of Iran, these methods were in fact the most effective.

By introducing Islamic feminism as the only strategy and by denoting religion as the most important element of Iranian culture, Mir-Hosseini denies any other alternative theoretical and empirical framework which women's rights activists can employ. She groups together the various manifestations of political Islam and international and secular feminism and has made provocative claims about secular feminists without providing any evidence of their failures—chiefly, that "[they] have lost credibility and legitimacy."[76] In her 2011 article "Beyond 'Islam' vs. 'Feminism,'" she does not discuss the role of secular feminists in building Iran's women's movement since the Revolution; instead, she only mentions a brief encounter with Abbasgholizadeh and comments on her changing ideological position from a former "Islamist" to a secular feminist. Moreover, Mir-Hosseini does not present empirical cases to illustrate how the Islamic feminist approach has yielded any significant achievements in advancing women's rights, or improving women's lives, for that matter. The only evidence she mentions is that some of Iran's reformists, who participated in the 2009 Green Movement and were once staunch supporters of the regime, still "insist that the Shari'a is an ideal embodying [of] the justice of Islam."[77]

Yet according to Tahmasebi, secular feminists have made significant headway in improving women's status in Iran. Though the struggle for gender equality has thus far been a long and unwieldy course filled with both wins and losses, it is women's activists like Sadr, Abbasgholizadeh, and Tahmasebi who have garnered domestic and international attention for their efforts at transforming the public and official discourses on specifically contentious issues, such as prison torture and stoning. The sentencing of stoning, in particular, which had existed in Iran's penal code and is enshrined in Shari'a as a criminal punishment for adultery, has been disproportionately handed down to women of lesser economic means.[78] Stoning became part of the Iranian penal code in 1979 when the Islamic government established a new judiciary system based on Shari'a. According to Justice for Iran, a London-based human rights organization, the first cases of stoning were reported in 1980, when two women were found guilty of adultery and sentenced to death by stoning in Kerman. Azam Taleghani—an Islamic political activist—was among the first women to publicly criticize this practice.[79] However, stoning has remained part of the Iranian Penal Code since the Revolution. As reported by Amnesty International, in Iran's Penal Code the sentence of stoning is issued as the penalty for married persons who commit adultery.[80] In 2006, a few Iranian lawyers and activists formed a committee to investigate and identify stoning cases. In the same year, an Iranian man and woman were stoned to death in Mashhad when they were found guilty of adultery. In response to these events, a network of volunteer lawyers, led by Sadr, started the "Stop Stoning Forever Campaign" in order "to prevent further cases of stoning and, ultimately, to get stoning removed from the Iranian Penal Code."[81] In 2007, this campaign launched the global "Campaign to Stop Stoning" with an international coalition that included members from Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), an NGO based in London.[82]

Eventually Sadr lobbied the government to review its sentencing procedures after having conducted workshops with Iran's judiciary, and, over time, this campaign gained international prominence. According to a 2012 court report, a judiciary spokesperson announced its intentions to remove stoning from the newly ratified penal code."[83] As of this writing, the campaign still continues, for prisoners remain on death row, awaiting the execution of their stoning sentences. Nevertheless, Sadr's efforts demonstrate that in order to reform gender discriminatory laws and policies in Iran, activists can work diligently and successfully within the judicial system; they do not necessarily have to work from an "Islamic feminist" platform. After having decades-long experience interacting with Iranian officials and other governmental bodies, Sadr has explicitly rejected the notion of Islamic feminism as being the most appropriate strategy to address women's issues. As she indicated during the BBC *Pargar* interview, in conversations she had with government officials, she realized that reformist members among them did not employ Islamic feminism as a theoretical concept. Rather, they focused more on immediate concerns germane to women's conditions in the family and society and less on religious discourse.

More recently, Mir-Hosseini has reconsidered her interpretation of Islamic feminism once she "understood [it] in an unfolding reality."[84] In "Beyond 'Islam' vs. 'Feminism,'" she repeats her earlier analysis[85] that "'Islamic feminists' did not speak with one voice. The positions they took were local, diverse, multiple, and evolving. They all sought gender justice and equality for women, but they did not always agree on what constitutes 'justice' or 'equality' or the best ways of attaining them. I saw it as futile and even counter-productive to try to put these diverse voices into neat categories and generate definitions."[86] In the end, though, Mir-Hosseini admitted that in the last two decades, "… 'Islamic feminism' has become so loaded with disputed meanings and implications, so enmeshed in local and global political struggles, that it is no longer useful in any kind of descriptive or analytical sense."[87]

Conclusion

When activists like Sadr and Abbasgholizadeh, among many others, are denounced as "inauthentic," where should the line be drawn distinguishing their efforts from those of alleged "native informants," regime apologists, and imperial agents? Does the theoretical concept of

“Islamic feminism” do any violence to secular women’s activists? Two rhetorical questions, in part, they nonetheless bespeak the tensions emerging within academic feminist debates about one’s legitimate representation and authenticity. Who has the authority to speak about the status of women under the Islamic regime in Iran? Moreover, which educational credentials, geographic location, personal experience, and theoretical language are best suited to convey this knowledge without an individual being labeled as inauthentic and westernized, on one side, and an apologist for an authoritarian regime, on the other?

In the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler cautions feminism “to not idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion.”[88] Butler’s suggestion is based on her observation of feminist theory—that it helps perpetuate exclusionary norms restricting the possibilities for the meaning of gender, culminating in the construction of new regimes of truth and power. When dominant post-colonial feminist theory likewise restricts the subject of “women’s activist” in the Middle East to that of an “Islamic feminist,” an analogous regime of power develops and, in this case, becomes hegemonic in Middle Eastern women’s studies. Similarly, when scholars present Islamic feminism in a privileged position—as the only “culturally acceptable and legitimate” approach to improving women’s legal and social status in Muslim societies—there is a limited space for alternative feminist approaches and actors to push the boundaries of the hegemonic theories within this scholarship.

Marnia Lazreg anticipated this dilemma back in 1988, when she observed how Middle Eastern feminist projects were appropriated using “external frames of reference and according to equally external standards.”[89] In her seminal article “Feminism and Difference,” Lazreg wrote, “Under these circumstances the consciousness of one’s womanhood coincides with the realization that it has already been appropriated in one form or another by outsiders, women as well as men, experts in things Middle Eastern.”[90] In this case, Lazreg’s critique speaks to a comparable power dynamic surfacing through the academic production of knowledge about women’s activism in Iran and the dominant conceptual frameworks within which this activism manifests and operates.

Among women’s activists living in the Islamic Republic and elsewhere in the region, there is a strong pushback against current, hegemonic feminist paradigms produced in post-colonial academic scholarship that seek to categorize women’s resistance to patriarchy, economic, and social injustice, and gender discriminatory laws, among many others. In her article “The Echo-Chamber of Freedom,” Sadia Abbas asks, “Are secular or reformist Muslim feminists allowed to talk about patriarchal structures that draw upon Islam, or are they always to be subjected to disciplining by the metropolitan gaze … In other words, are Muslims always to remain caught between the distortions, misrepresentations, and bigotries of the media-empire-neocon and the high-minded apologias of this configuration’s left-liberal critics?”[91] This question illustrates a recurrent problem for many secular, Muslim feminist activists from across the region, Iran especially. Where is there space for a robust *and* pluralistic discussion on the patriarchal power structures endemic to religio-nationalism within political Islam and in consideration of the post-9/11 political environs?

In “Beyond ‘Islam’ vs. ‘Feminism,’” Mir-Hosseini concluded by offering the following advice: “We are all heading in the same direction, but we also need to recognise and value the diversity in our approaches and create spaces where different feminisms and voices can work together towards the same goal."[92] Indeed, her recommendation identifies a valiant purpose and end, yet the question still remains: will the voices of secular Iranian feminists be acknowledged?

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2 Equal contribution by both authors.

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Chapter 19
Queering the "Iranian" and the "Diaspora" of the Iranian Diaspora

Farhang Rouhani

Introduction

Ranging in scope from widely popular women's memoirs to academic research in the social sciences and humanities, conceptualizations of an "Iranian diaspora" have flourished in the past couple of decades, particularly in the United States. In this chapter, I argue for the critical value of a queer diasporic analytical lens that disengages the idea of an "Iranian Diaspora" from concerns over authenticity and belonging and instead, through an analysis of diasporic Iranian women's memoirs, situates it within future possibilities for the creative expression of kinship and intimacy. I begin by justifying the vitality of a queer intervention on Iranian diaspora studies that questions the divisive concerns over authenticity as well as looks for opportunities to construct new relationships outside of an exclusive connection to a rooted idea of belonging. I will then apply such a lens to critically consider a recent popular memoir within this genre, Jasmin Darznik's *The Good Daughter* (2011). When viewed through the de-normalizing and de-stabilizing framework of a queer diaspora lens, the text provides an opportunity to challenge conventionally held understandings of gender, nation, narration, and home, and suggests new opportunities for building community through the intimate sharing of experiences. I contrast such a frame with examples of more conventional, Orientalist readings of the book, gleaned through reader responses of the book on the Amazon and Goodreads online review pages. As such, I argue that the strength in a queer diaspora methodology of re-reading texts lies in its questioning of the assumed coherence of authenticity, gender, nation, and home, and its construction of a relationship with the past that suggests possibilities for the future. By offering a new reading of popular texts, this approach presents a critical, anti-Orientalist methodology that simultaneously opens up new ways of building relationships within diasporic experiences.

Resisting Authenticity, Embracing Possibility

In recent years, Iranian scholars and artists abroad have articulated compelling representations of home, Iranian-ness, and the formation of transnational communities in a variety of forms, including the visual and dramatic arts, cinema, literature, and an academic realm of study that has come to be known as "Iranian Studies." In their introduction to a special journal issue on the “Iranian diaspora,” Elahi and Karim question the possibility of referring to this group as a whole, given the different waves of Iranian emigration, political connections and tensions with Iran, and varying experiences of treatment in host countries (Elahi and Karim 2011, 81). While early on the terms “refugee,” “exile,” and “immigrant” were most commonly used, the contributors to this special issue discuss the “Iranian diaspora” in terms of a set of issues that cohere around the complexities of nostalgia for the home country, civic engagement in the host country, liminal and syncretic hybrid identity construction, the maintenance of strong political connections with Iran, and the creation of globally dispersed communities. Shakhsari, however, cautions against the “chic of diaspora,” given how diaspora studies have become fashionable in a way that assumes ease of mobility and oversimplifies hybrid identity formation (Shakhsari 2012, 25). In her analysis of representations of Iranian queer subjects in cyberspace, she concludes that “diaspora” acts not all that differently than “exile,” in that it similarly “conjures up an idealized image of homeland as fixed and imagines a homogenous heteronormative Iranian community” (Shakhsari 2012, 32). Any deployment of the term “diaspora” must address the power relations through which immigrants construct, maintain, and resist community formations, in a contextualized and de-essentializing way that does not assume internal cohesion around “Iranian-ness” as an identity category. This argument echoes Rogers Brubaker’s suggestion that instead of thinking of a diaspora as an already formed coherent entity, “it may be more fruitful, and certainly more precise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on,” which creates opportunities for empirically based understanding (Brubaker 2005, 13).

One of the most high-profile recent academic enactments of an “Iranian diaspora” concerned a debate over the role of memoirs written by Iranian immigrant women. These memoirs, most popularly represented by Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* series, Azadeh Moaveni’s *Lipstick Jihad*, and Firoozeh Dumas’s *Funny* in Farsi, among others, have become a lucrative industry within book publishing in North America and Europe since the late 1990s. Whitlock identifies the main elements of the memoir genre as examining experiences of expatriation and exile, providing intimate glimpses of the lives of affluent urban Iranian domestic life abroad, and constructing more complex representations of Iran through the narrative device of the return to the home country (Whitlock 2008). In the process, authors establish central themes of nostalgia and mourning for what they have lost in Iran, how they became American (or European, as in the case of Satrapi) women, and the “homing devices” they use to develop cosmopolitan, hybridized identities and communities. Malek argues that these memoirs have achieved particular popularity with Euro-American and second-generation Iranian-American audiences because of the extent to which they create a strong sense of truth through the use of first-person direct experience narration, make familiar to audiences what initially appears as foreign and exotic, create a vivid sense of the in-betweenness of place, and enchant their readership with art, humor, and wit (Malek 2006).

Given the extent to which they have come to represent an “Iranian diaspora” experience, these memoirs have come under attack by some of the most prominent Iranian scholars within the diaspora, especially for the roles they play within global imperial-capitalist power relations (see particularly Mottahedeh 2004; Dabashi 2006; Keshavarz 2007). The most widely cited of these critiques is Hamid Dabashi's essay in *Al-Ahram Weekly* that addresses the memoirs in general and *Reading Lolita in Tehran* in particular. He perceives Nafisi as having taken up the subject position of the "Native Informer," someone who foregrounds the interests of a predatory U.S. empire that is seeking a rationale for invasion and control, while opportunistically benefiting from the entrepreneurial role that the empire allows her. The fact that the memoir is about a group of women finding salvation through reading Western classics in Tehran, he argues, further serves as a part of a "civilizing" mission, denies Iran's rich literary heritage, and counteracts immigrant community and academic pride within the Iranian diaspora (Dabashi 2006). As a result, a very limited group of privileged transnational women become the mouthpiece for "Iranian women" as a whole in a new global marketplace that has developed a niche for the production, marketing, and consumption of such narratives (Mottahedeh 2004; Akhavan et al. 2007). While Dabashi makes compelling arguments about the appropriation of the memoirs, his criticism is also problematic. One concern is the "vituperative" nature of much of the criticism, which potentially has the effect of heightening tensions among transnational Iranian academics (Motlagh 2011, Darznik 2008). Motlagh also finds it puzzling that in critiquing how the memoirists' narratives have supplanted the researched, scholarly narratives of the experts, the scholars often use first-person narration in their own criticisms. "It is as if the memoir can only be answered in kind: personal experience of the 'wrong' kind can only be corrected by presenting personal experience of the 'right' kind" (Motlagh 2011, 411). What ensues is a struggle over authenticity and authority, of whose voices and politics get to represent Iran and Iranians. Thus, in their efforts to presumably correct the record and send the right message, the critics argue that there is a coherent message to be disseminated, which ultimately leads them to assert a sense of coherence on their own terms around the category of "Iranian-ness." Moreover, while effectively focused on how the memoirs fit within imperial power relations and a capitalist world economy, the critics have very little to say about the actual content of the memoirs or how audiences interpret them. Surely, there are alternative ways in which the memoirs could be critically read in constructive ways, rather than rendering them invalid. Whitlock suggests one such way in her reading of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. She states that while initially she found the text to be deeply problematic, singular, and overly focused on aesthetics, when she re-read it in a more intersectional, transnational way as a part of larger body of women's memoir-writing, she came to a different conclusion: "The fix of memoirs spawned by the Iranian revolution signals intractable issues in thinking about women, feminism, and life writing across cultures, as well as possibilities for mobilizing alternative ways of framing the subject" (Whitlock 2008). This analysis is only possible through a de-essentializing of the "Iranian" part of the genre and for building a sense of understanding across and beyond national cultures. For an in-depth examination of how such critical reading practices are possible, I now turn to the recent work in queer diaspora studies.

The fluorescence of queer diaspora studies over the past two decades has revitalized both queer and diaspora studies. As Gayatri Gopinath argues, "The concept of a queer diaspora enables a simultaneous critique of heterosexuality and the nation form while exploding the binary oppositions between nation and diaspora, heterosexuality and homosexuality, original and copy" (Gopinath 2005, 11). Queer studies, like diaspora studies, concern disorientation, dislocation, and unsettling (Ahmed 2006). A focus on queerness helps to denaturalize and complicate diaspora studies in its relationship to the family, nation, and nostalgia for the homeland, while a focus on diaspora helps to bring questions of race, colonization, and globalization to the center of queer studies. This combined perspective, furthermore, serves as an interpretive framework that works to make connections.

What I find particularly missing in the memoir critiques is an emphasis on reading practices, which scholars of queer diaspora studies address prominently. A queer perspective works "as a methodology, an oppositional mode of reading, interpretive strategy, or critical lens through which to question dominant ideologies of gender, sex, and nation" (Parker 2011, 640). This methodology argues for a way of critically reading content in a way that argues against dominant and normative understandings, wherever they appear. While much of the queer diaspora literature concerns queer subjects, a queer methodology can be applied to destabilize other practices of normativity (see for example Wesling 2011). In relation to the category of the Iranian diaspora, such a perspective can aid in denaturalizing and disorienting the category of "Iranian-ness" that so many scholars take for granted, particularly in relation to questions of home, family, and nostalgia. This interpretative framework helps to "foreground the resistant potential of what may initially appear as capitulations to, and collusions with, the dominant" (Gopinath 2011, 636). As such, a queer diaspora lens serves as a bridge over the impasse between the Iranian memoirists and their critics, by looking for clues to possible sources of relationality through difference within the unsettled, uneasy spaces of migration.

Of particular concern to queer diaspora studies and to my project is the experience of home. Queer diaspora scholars approach the home outside a linear narrative of "homecoming" and instead use one that engages with the multiple negotiations with the past and future that queer migrants face (Fortier 2001; Mai and King 2009). This approach requires seeing the diasporic home as an unsettled, sometimes violent space outside the conventional perspective of home as a privatized, often invisible site (Wesling 2011, 649). These scholars build upon work by critical feminist human geographers who, starting in the 1970s, criticized the long-held masculinist representation of the home as a space of comfort and refuge and instead began to show the complexities of the experience of home spaces for women. Blunt and Dowling summarize three significant feminist insights about the home as a concept: its simultaneous materiality and symbolism; the connections between home, power relations, and identity; and its connection to the multiple scales of family, community, nation, and empire (Blunt and Dowling 2006). The diasporic home can be understood simultaneously as a materially grounding space, a space with complex meanings and attachments, and as a space where multiple forms and scales of power relations intersect. It is a dynamic, destabilized space in motion, with complex links to the past, present, and future. Moreover, as Iris Marion Young posits, the home needs to be approached as a productive, creative space. While she agrees with the feminist critique, particularly through her examination of Heidegger's privileging of the male-dominated enterprises of building and constructing home spaces over the female-centered domains of cultivating and dwelling, she argues for the recognition of the positive value of individual and collective identity-building that comes with practices of home-making. "Recognizing this value," she writes, "entails also recognizing the creative value to the often unnoticed work that many women do" (Young 1997, 164). Applied to experiences of diaspora, this recognition has particular salience in suggesting the complex, gendered processes of home-making and identity-building within transnational immigrant homes.

In my quest to queer Iranian diaspora studies, I am particularly drawn to the work of scholars who unsettle and disturb ideas of attachment, the so-called homing instincts or desires. Johanna Garvey, for example, uses the concept of “queer (un)belonging” to refer to spaces of habitation that “undo belonging while not leading to the destructive behavior of not-belonging” (Garvey 2011, 757). There is tremendous creative potential in such a stance, which begins with the impossibility of a queer diaspora, given that there is no such thing as a queer homeland, and instead works toward building a new kind of community that does not exist within the destructive belonging/not-belonging binary. In her analysis, Garvey identifies some of the major elements of queer (un)belonging as an embrace of the reality of daily migrant life that does not conform to diasporic nostalgia, the shaping of a different relationship to time and space, and new methods of reading and identifying people that incorporate difference into community. What a queer diaspora approach does above all else is to show the constructive potential of residing within the uncomfortable spaces that disorient normative domestic arrangements. Such an approach invites us to draw power and inspiration from “the ways in which those who occupy impossible spaces transform them into vibrant, livable spaces of possibility” (Gopinath 2005, 194). The set of reading practices discussed by queer diaspora scholars provides a crucial opening for a new discussion of the memoirs. I will primarily employ this approach for examining *The Good Daughter,* but I will argue its importance for the memoir genre as a whole as well.

Learning to Relate Differently

Jasmin Darznik’s *The Good Daughter* tells the stories of three generations of Iranian women. It begins with Jasmin, who at the age of three had emigrated from Iran to the U.S. with her Iranian mother and German father, finding a photograph of her mother in a wedding dress at the age of 13. Her mother, Lili, eventually sends Jasmin a series of 10 audiocassettes on which she tells of the difficult life of her mother, Kobra, with an abusive husband, Lili’s sadistic first husband and the first-born daughter that she was forced to leave behind, her education in Germany as a midwife in the 1960s and subsequent second marriage to a German man, and their departure from Iran and settlement in California during the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The final chapters concern Jasmin’s experiences growing up in an immigrant family in the U.S.

The Good Daughter is in many ways an unconventional book within the Iranian women’s memoir genre. The author acts as the narrator minimally, in the prologue and the last two chapters. The majority of the story is Darznik’s retelling of her mother’s story, including her retelling of her mother’s retelling of her grandmother’s early life. While each chapter begins with a quotation from the audiotapes to reinforce their centrality, it is unclear how much of the story is a narration of the tapes and how much is Darznik’s re-imagining of her Iranian family’s lives. As such, it reads more as a creative work of literary non-fiction than strictly a memoir, but it does contain several of the thematic characteristics of the memoir genre, especially in its narrative of overcoming adversities in the immigration process, its use of the exotic aromatics of scents and flavors to re-imagine the Iran of the past, and its detailing of the complexities of immigrant life and exile in the U.S. What I find to be its most distinguishing feature is the absence of a “return” narrative. Most of the prominent Iranian women’s memoirs feature a return to post-revolutionary Iran at their central, dramatic moment, through which the narrator deals with loss and nostalgia. Here neither Jasmin nor Lili ever make that return, which becomes one of the ways in which Darznik disorients the diasporic memoir genre, as discussed below.

In the following analysis, I employ a queer diasporic lens to examine *The Good Daughter* for how it unsettles the Iranian immigrant woman’s memoir genre and for how such an unsettling can lead to new opportunities for kinship and intimacy. In arguing the case for a queering of reading practices, I contrast their possibilities with a set of conventional comments about the text posted by readers on the book’s Amazon and Goodreads review pages, especially as related to the themes of gender, nation, narration, and home. I analyzed a total of 68 reviews from Amazon and 120 reviews from Goodreads, posted between 2011 and 2013. I particularly focused on the reviews that sought to make generalizing claims, that were troubled by the book’s narration, and that made comparisons across the memoir genre. I pursued this line of evaluation to make a case for queering conventional reading practices and for asserting the significance of audience reception to understanding the impact of the memoir genre, something that the critics of the memoirists often do not address. I follow the practice that does not perceive queering to be limited to queer content, but an approach that can destabilize and question any significant kind of normativity. I conclude my analysis by assessing the prospects for kinship that a queer diasporic reading offers.

Several reviews equate the domestic abuse faced by Lili and Kobra with generalizations about Iran as a backward cultural nation. One reviewer, for example, states that the book “is a heart wrenching and mind opening look at a different culture’s treatment of its women” (4/28/13, Amazon), and another argues that “Lili’s story could belong to any woman raised in Iran during the same time period” (2/9/11, Amazon). For some, the book comes to represent the “backwards ways of the non-western world and the suppression of females that is still rampant today” (2/7/13, Amazon). A closer, more critical assessment of the text, though, reveals a much more complex depiction of Iran. Woven through the personal story of the memoir is a retelling of twentieth-century Iranian politics that echoes the nuanced perspectives of post-revolutionary Iranian studies. For example, the author does not glorify the “Peacock throne” of the Pahlavis, and chronicles the rapid speculation, hyper-urbanization, and corruption that foreshadowed the revolution of 1979. In a particularly complex section, she imagines what the women in her family, had they been allowed greater access to education and news during the 1950s, might have known about oil, power, and imperialism in Iran during the Mossadegh and subsequent coup period. This passage is nuanced both in its telling of history and its argument for how information was disseminated in a highly gendered way. By no means is this the nostalgic diasporic retelling of Iran’s past.

Similarly, her retelling of the revolution itself is a careful, removed delivery of the *sholooqi* (busyness) of the period, without any judgment of what happened and what followed, other than that it led to her family’s exile. Given that the Iranian memoir genre depends so much on a return narrative that disparages post-revolutionary Iran, this omission is in itself a highly destabilizing move. The fact that Darznik's post-revolutionary account occurs entirely in the U.S. and has little to say about conditions in Iran does not deter reviewers from making their own judgments. Many reviewers identify the treatment of women in Iran now as "not so different from what it was in the 1950s" (7/15/12, Goodreads), address "the appallingly different lifestyle women lead in Iran" (2/9/11, Amazon) in the present tense, even though the Iran context of the book occurs before the revolution, and argue that "unfortunately for women in Iran not much has changed" (11/10/12, Amazon). Given the absence of discussion of the post-revolutionary period in the book, these interpretations are more a product of long-standing American perceptions than they are a reflection of Darznik's aims. One reader even goes so far as to make a connection to *Reading Lolita in Tehran*: "… it's extremely interesting to see how women's lives were beginning to improve in *The Good Daughter* up to the time of *Lolita* and then how both books follow the downward spiral to where Iran is today" (9/12/12, Amazon). Instead of critically embracing the destabilizing ambivalence that the author constructs for post-revolutionary Iran, the reviewer uses a limited interpretation of *Reading Lolita in Tehran* to stand in for what she leaves out. This is an interpretation inspired much more by contemporary Euro-American Islamophobia than by the content of the text itself, as exemplified by the following comment of another reviewer: "I fear the growth of radical Islam largely because of the treatment of women" (7/17/11, Goodreads).

A more critical lens embraces the text's omission of a post-revolutionary narrative as a learning moment that counteracts the limitations of Orientalist perceptions. Orientalism, as critiqued first and foremost by Edward Said, concerns the limited, derogatory colonial and post-colonial representations of "the East" by scholars and artists from a vantage point in "the West." Such representations serve to reinforce understandings of "the East," particularly the Middle East, as static, corrupt, and violent, thereby bolstering the self-image of "the West," and to justify political and economic imperialism (Said 1978 and 1985). Elements of Orientalism are evident in other aspects of reviews, from generalizing the book to represent "Middle Eastern women" and "Muslim countries" to expressing gratitude for being located in the West. Many reviewers state that the book "helps to understand life in Muslim Countries" (3/25/12) through how "these Middle Eastern women go through hell and back" (5/15/11, Goodreads), and that ultimately, "This book will make you glad you were born in this century and this country" (2/10/11, Goodreads). But these reviews overlook the tensions between cultural generalizations and experiential specificity in the book. There are interspersed essentialisms in her text, in generalizing statements like "Paradise, for Iranians, has always been a garden" (Darznik 2011, 158). But these mingle with a narrative that emphasizes the uniqueness, rather than the generalizability, of experience. Certainly nowhere does the story stand in for the category of "Middle East woman" or "Muslim." There are many instances through the text in which Darznik inserts criticisms of Orientalist interpretations, from Lili's closed-minded German in-laws crudely referring to her as an "atheist" and to Iran as a "barbaric country," to the prejudice and ethnocentrism the family faces in California as immigrants. She even includes a scene earlier in the 1960s, while Lili is receiving her training as a midwife in Germany, in which she experiences herself as a character from *The Thousand and One Nights* as the doctors exotify Iran through their admiration for classical Persian arts and their desire for dark-haired and -eyed *Orientalisch* women like Lili (Darznik 2011, 185, 220–21). These insertions suggest the author's awareness and criticism of the Orientalist gaze, but they require a critical approach that de-normalizes the standard interpretation of the oppressive Muslim society to bring their significance into view.

The reviewers' conventional understanding of gender extends to both women and men, most prominently represented through the long-suffering Muslim woman and the violent, abusive Muslim man, leaving some reviewers to wonder, "Are there/were there any kind or normal men in the Arab [sic] world?" (3/18/11, Goodreads). I find it particularly interesting that in none of the reviews does Darznik's representation of her largely absent, alcoholic Johann stand in for a representation of a German or European man. As scholars of Middle East representations in the global media have pointed out, rape and domestic abuse happen everywhere, but only certain societies become represented as rapist and violent in their gendered characterizations, another aspect of Orientalism that filters how readers interpret a text like this (Alsultany 2012). Understanding the gap between the way some people come to stand in for a whole category and others do not is an essential part of de-Orientalizing understandings of the memoir.

According to many of the more positive reviews, the author achieves a sense of authenticity through her Persian heritage, attention to cultural details, especially food, and empathic narrative. It is interesting that readers give her this authority, even though she migrated to the U.S. at the age of three and has never returned to Iran. While Darznik's attention to detail is engaging, I would like to offer a different interpretation, that rather than the lens of authenticity, this narrative needs to be read as the re-imagining of home and Iranian-ness from the vantage point of the diaspora. How do you create an attachment and an identity with a place that you have not physically seen and felt since you were three years old? It has little to do with authenticity and much to do with a creative diasporic need to imagine sensory and emotional connections. To read Darznik's text in such a way makes it less a story about Iran and more a story about reckoning with alienation. Food is one of the central ways in which she makes connections between growing up in the U.S. and how she imagines Iran. It is fascinating, for example, that even when she is reconstructing what Lili and Kobra ate in times of poverty, it sounds luscious and inviting: "a soup of marble-sized meatballs bobbing alongside a single potato, a pot of plain rice seasoned with a pinch of cumin seed … or skinny eggplants that Kobra fried in water, turmeric, and few slivers of onion" (Darznik 2011, 154). She states near the end that her Iran had always been a place in California, filled with the sadness of women and their stories. In this sense, her book can be read as an attempt to recapture a different Iran through her mother's stories. It is a complex representation that seeks to be romantic and gritty at once, from the description of the sensual aromatics to the explicitly violent retellings of domestic abuse in her family. In this tension, Darznik reveals the complexities of attempting to recapture a homeland within the diaspora, something that seems desirable and undesirable, possible and impossible at the same time.

What particularly unsettles some readers, and receives the bulk of negative comments about the book, is its ending. Several reviewers identify the ending as abrupt, incomplete, and unsatisfying, given that Jasmin decides not to return to Iran to visit her newly discovered sister and her dying grandmother. Here, the memoir genre is particularly influential on how readers comprehend the text, with the expectations of a "return" narrative. Readers become uneasy that

Jasmin and Lili do not want to return, instead believing that the “story can really only be fully understood in the context of Iran, the land of Jasmin’s own birth” (11/19/11, Goodreads). But if we perceive the story to be about an understanding of Iran through its diaspora, we have to let go of the idea that a physical return to Iran could provide any kind of resolution or complete a sense of belonging. Reviewers are so passionate about their dissatisfaction with the unresolved nature of the ending that one even suggests that Darznik’s editors should pay for her to go to Iran and add that story as a set of new chapters, while another speculates that she might be holding back on the return narrative for a sequel! But by embracing the unsettled ending, we gain insight into the sense of loss in diasporic living, along with the liberation it may provide. Toward the end, she states, “The truth was that my mother Lili didn’t believe the past could be recovered, no matter how much time had passed by” (Darznik 2011, 320). A great sadness pervades these last few pages, but also a sense of possibility and completion through the decision that the past cannot and will not be recovered.

A final area of uneasiness that permeates the reviews concerns the often painstaking details Darznik provides of the constant moving from home to home and the cycles of wealth and poverty of her family. One reviewer writes, “The flurry of activity, the homes bought, sold or foreclosed, the fortunes made and lost gets hard to follow” (3/18/11, Goodreads). But this is precisely one of Darznik’s greatest contributions to understanding diasporic experiences through her delineation of the multiplicity of homes, leavetakings, and changing fortunes. In contrast to the majority of the Iranian diasporic memoirs that take the moment of the revolution and immigration as their point of departure, in this story there are multiple changes and shuttling between residences, beginning far before the revolution and continuing into the U.S., that signal a complex relationship with home and where it may lie, far preceding the moment of revolution. By showing how Lili and Kobra both experienced multiple forms of exile before the revolution and continued to do so afterward, Darznik also undoes the narrative connection to the 1979 Iranian Revolution as a single turning point in Iranian immigrants’ lives. Also, in her depiction, home in itself is never a safe place, given the context of abuse of her grandfather, the sadism of Lili’s first husband, and the alcoholism of Jasmin’s father in the U.S. Home only serves as a refuge in moments. In these ways, Darznik disrupts any notions of dependable safety, comfort, or refuge to be derived from “home” and ‘homeland,” and does so in a way that disengages an exclusive relationship between exile from home and migration, suggesting multiple spaces of exile.

In a recent newspaper piece called “Home is Where They Let You Live,” Darznik tells another story that has made her uneasy about the concept of “home.” At the age of 13, she and her mother traveled to Germany to visit relatives, and when they attempted to return, the officer at the U.S. consulate asked her where her home was. When she replied “the U.S.,” he did not renew their visas based on the indication that the family intended to stay in the U.S. permanently, rather than temporarily by way of a business visa. After two years of waiting in Germany, they were finally allowed to return, but the experience left her with a complicated relationship with “home” and the U.S. in ways that disrupted any dependable sense of belonging. She realizes that for her, as for countless other diasporic children, home is not just what is safe and desirable, but also what is legally permitted or denied. She concludes, “‘Home.’ At 13, I had that notion knocked out of me in ways that were useful, or mostly so. But the word still makes me uneasy, and even now, whenever I am given a choice, I leave the answer blank" (Darznik 2012). While exile is usually represented in Iranian diasporic writing primarily as a moment of sadness and mourning, for her it is also useful in giving a sense of liberation through detachment from the idea of "home." Furthermore, as Nasrabadi argues in her analysis of the Iranian women's memoirs, there is strength and value in a collective sense of melancholia, when an author makes a crucial shift "from viewing her difficulties in belonging to either society as a personal failure to understanding her struggle as a part of the vicissitudes of melancholic diasporic existence" (Nasrabadi 2011, 497).

This sense of liberation ultimately leads to the possibility of the re-creation of "home," but in an uncertain way. What exists for Jasmin and Lili in the concluding chapters is very much along the lines of Garvey's notion of "(Un)Belonging," a new kind of intimacy that resides outside of the belonging/not-belonging immigration binary. There are two passages, occurring at the ends of the last two chapters, that both suggest such a possibility of learning to relate differently, outside the conventional diasporic logic of nostalgia and exile. The first occurs through Jasmin's recollection of the stories her mother told her when she was growing up, while feeding her pomegranates in the bathtub:

> I'd forgotten home, I'd forgotten Iran, but just as some memories linger in spite of our longing to forget them, there are some loves that will take in just about any soil. When my mother Lili lined my bathtub with pomegranates, she was giving me an appetite for an unearthly fruit and the stories and secrets encased in its many-chambered heart, and this, she knew, was a pleasure from which not even a small girl could be exiled. (Darznik 2011, 293)

There is a powerful sense of intimacy and pleasure here linked to the sharing of stories and food. The fact that this connection is an unearthly fruit that will take in just about any soil suggests simultaneous materiality and ethereality. It remains tied to the past through the lingering of memories, but is not dependent on the past alone to grow and thrive. The shared stories lead to a frank new intimacy between Lili and Jasmin, which allows Jasmin to feel "safe in the small, crowded, makeshift house" of her mother (Darznik 2011, 321). In a manner similar to the way Gopinath argues that "queer desire reorients the traditionally backward-looking glance of diaspora," here the newfound intimacy between mother and daughter looks forward rather than back (Gopinath 2006, 3) In the final sentences of the book, after Jasmin has explained the death and burial of her grandmother in Iran without her or her mother's presence, she writes:

> Where there is too much distance, and too many leave-takings, there are no returns, or none in which we can fully believe. Still, one love always entangles itself in another, grows unrecognizable, and survives. (Darznik 2011, 324)

Here Darznik disrupts the notion of return to a home or homeland and suggests the possibilities for a different kind of home rooted in the unpredictable, undetermined nature of relationships. They have experienced so much distance, movement, and dislocation that have worked together to obliterate the possibility of a return in any kind of meaningful symbolic or material way. Instead, what they have remaining is a shared love, tangled and rooted in the past, but growing in unpredictable ways into the future. There is sadness and grief in the realization of distance and the impossibility of return, but also tremendous potential and dynamism in the unrecognizability of how relationships rooted in the past take shape and thrive into the future.

The newly rekindled relationship between the two women, in this way, serves as inspiration for the meaningful constructing of relationships and identities within a diasporic experience.

Queering the Past and Re-Imagining the Future

In his book *Cruising Utopia*, Jose Esteban Munoz presents queer utopian memory as a critical recollection of the past in a way that allows us to see beyond the present to imagine worlds of political possibility (Munoz 2009). This motioning toward an engagement with the past that creates new possibilities for the future is exactly what queer diaspora scholarship offers. On the level of an "Iranian diaspora," this lens serves to challenge concerns for authenticity in representations of Iran and Iranian-ness, and instead looks to the past in a critical way that unearths meaningful opportunities for building relationships into the future. It requires a critical reevaluation of the meanings and significance of nation and home, and it moves us toward moments of uneasiness and destabilization as critical opportunities for liberation and intimacy. While *The Good Daughter* is in many ways a unique book within the genre, a queer diaspora approach de-normalizes the genre as a whole and can be applied, sometimes oppositionally, in future-looking ways to other diasporic representations as well. This means that as readers, we must examine how authors queer diasporic experiences, at the same time queering the normativities that exist within the text and within the world of possible interpretations of the text.

A queer diaspora lens, as such, supports a vital set of reading practices to counter the conventional Orientalism through which people read books such as these memoirs. This approach requires critical reading and thinking in a way that questions dominant and normative assumptions about home, family, gender, and nation. While the memoirs' critics effectively point out the imperial power relations within which the memoirs are located, their critiques do not extend to audience reception. Given that learning how to read in opposition to imperialism is central to dismantling it, a queer diaspora lens provides a radical frame for learning how to read and relate to others differently. That the readers' reviews show Orientalist thinking to be alive and well argues for the urgency of queer reading practices in multiple spaces. While such queer methodological frameworks are often limited to academic settings, the posts suggest the need for them to be expanded to engage with social networking venues such as the review sites. The narrow interpretations of some readers extend the need for queer pedagogical reading approaches far beyond the classroom setting to more popular public sites of discussion and exchange.

A queer diaspora approach, ultimately, has critical and creative implications for both diaspora and Iranian studies. To make difference visible and question normative urges when they appear makes diasporic authenticity and singularity impossible. It becomes unworkable to question one set of experiences as more valid than another, or to speak of "the Iranian diaspora" as a coherent entity. Instead, a queer diaspora approach presents us with the challenge of building connections and relations between experiences, but in a way that also critically questions normativities when they appear. The concluding reconciliation of Jasmin and Lili, after a lifetime of sharply different experiences and perspectives, provides inspiration for such a building on a larger social scale, a new way of relating that admits the past, but points toward the future.

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Index

All index entries shown here correspond to the page numbers within the printed edition only. Within this digital format these page numbers allow for cross referencing only.

Abbas, Sadia, 351
Abbasgholizadeh, Mahboubeh, 336, 346, 347, 348, 350
Abd el Salam, Seham Saneya, 169
Abdel Moneim, Intisar, 324–6
Abdo, Diya, 291
ableism, 32
ablutions, 257. *See also* cleanliness; purification
abortions, 29
Abrahamic religions, 218n1. *See also* Christians; Islam; Jews; Muslims
Abu-Lughod, Lila, 1, 177
accommodation, 45, 220
activism
    anti-war, 22
    feminist, 15
    in Iran, 336, 344
    LGBT, 246
    Muslim women's, 323, 347, 351
    secular women's, 15, 332–4
    transnational feminist, 166
    Western, 171
    women's rights, 323, 340, 344
aesthetic labor, 80n10
Afghan Taliban, 337
Afghanistan, US military offensive against, 337
agency
    economic, 4
    embodied, 142
    female, 141–3, 165
    of gaze, 238
    gender and, 332
    "middle ranges of," 129, 134

  - pietous, 332
  - of the shampooers, 131
  - of youth, 203
- Ahmadinejad, Mahmoud, 338–9, 342–3
- Ahmed III (sultan), 121
- Ahmed, Leila, 280, 282, 343
- Ahraralso, Latifa, 13, 277
- AKP (Islamist Justice and Development Party) government, 20, 29–30, 31, 105, 245
- Âlâ magazine, 11–12, 235, 240–41, 247, 249
  - controversial nature of, 243n10, 244–5
  - models wearing headscarves in, 237, 243, 244
  - uncanny aspect of, 241–5
- Al-Ali, Nadje, 333
- Albanians, in the Ottoman state, 121–3
- Al Deiri, Makarem, 323
- Aleppo, Ottoman bathhouses in, 12, 256, 257, 259, 265–6, 268
- Algeria, 326
- Al-Ghazali, Zeinab, 322
- Al Ghuzami, Abdallah, 278
- al-Hajj, Ibn, 261
- al-Hakim, Fatimid Caliph, 261
- Al Halafawi, Jehan, 323
- Al-Huda International School, 232
- Al-Imtiaz, 63
- Al Mahdy, Aliaa, 13, 277
- al-Nabulusi, ‘Abd al-Ghani, 258
- al-Qaeda, 337
- Al-Sharuni, Y., 280
- alterity
  - and clothing, 231–2
  - and identity, 217
- al-Usra, Mudawwanat, 183
- Amnesty International, 348
- anthropology
  - on family life, 186
  - of religion, 254, 266
  - research methods, 140
- Anzaldua, Gloria, 281
- Arab Spring, 276
- Arab Women’s Movement, 13, 278

Arman, Ayşe, 20, 28–9, 31
Aslan, Hülya, 243
Assad Bashar al-, 195, 198–9, 297n4
assimilation, 220
assisted reproduction, 19–20, 28, 30, 32. See also *in vitro* fertilization
authenticity, 16, 147
    cultural, 197–8
    in Egypt, 14, 318, 319
    and the female body, 327
    Muslim, 105, 212
    in the Muslim Brotherhood, 326
authority, 16, 168, 194, 241, 276, 293, 350, 357, 363
    of divorce arbiters, 185, 193, 194
    of Islamic Shari'a, 345
    male, 59, 84, 100, 103, 286, 307, 322
    of the male gaze, 242
    military, 21
    moral, 4, 46
    patriarchal, 58
    of the police, 47
    of the state, 322
autonomy, 170, 211
awra modesty, 223, 258, 259, 266, 276. *See also* modesty
Ba'ath party, 198
Badran, Margot, 343–4
Bâlî, Yemenici, 125–9, 131–4
Banna, Hassan Al, 322
Bardakçı, Murat, 124
bathhouses. See *hammams*
bathing
    and cleanliness requirements, 255–6
    group, 255–6, 260
    and ritual purification, 256–7, 261
beardless shampooers/youths, 7, 115, 118–21, 123–4, 130–34, 259
    as "third gender," 124, 132–3
Beauvoir, Simone de, 301, 313n43
bedfellows, 133
Bedouins, 42
behavior(s)
    adaptations of, 45

  - in bathhouses, 263
  - of Christian women, 263–4
  - courtship, 212
  - feminine, 6, 140, 146, 153
  - gender, 186, 188, 190, 191, 193–95
  - as indicator of identity, 222
  - irresponsible, 49–50
  - masculine, 38, 46, 47, 50, 51, 58, 148
  - negative/antagonistic, 6, 40, 86, 104, 188, 359
  - public, 7, 326
  - related to sexuality, 237
  - sexualized, 43
  - of women, 48, 247
  - *See also* sexual behavior
- Bey, Sipahi Mustafa, 130, 133
- *bilâdi* food, 144, 147, 158–9
- Bīṭār, Hayfā, 14, 297, 300, 305–8, 310–11
- blood selling, 40
- bodily secretions, 256
- body/bodies
  - criminalization of, 15
  - display and embodiment of, 80
  - of disabled veterans, 3, 26
  - as means of protest, 276–7
  - as site of power struggle, 13, 14, 318
  - *See also* female body/bodies; male body/bodies
- body memory, 170
- body modification, 8, 141, 150–53
  - depilation, 7, 150–55, 256
  - female circumcision/FGC, 150, 156, 165
  - *See also* female genital cutting (FGC)
- body protests, 13, 284, 294
- bone cracking, 256
- Braidotti, Rosi, 298
- Bray, Alan, 133
- Brubaker, Rogers, 356
- Burayk, Mikha’il, 263–4
- *burqa*, 10–11, 222, 223
  - color of, 228–9, 231–2
  - components of, 224–5

connotations of, 230
    and group identity, 225–7
    as identity, 231–2
    as *purdah* dress, 219
    and religious identity, 231–2
    simplicity of, 227–8
    style of, 230–31
    variation in types of, 228–9
    See also *hijab*; *niqâb*
Bush, George W., 337
Bush, Laura, 337
Butler, Judith, 130, 350
“Campaign to Stop Stoning,” 348–9
capital flows, 32
capital investment, technoscientific, 32
carry *dabba*, 59
catamites, 116, 127, 129, 134
CEDAW (Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), 177
Çelebi, Evliya, 262
censorship, 279, 285, 299, 345
chadar, 222. See also *burqa*
Chicken Run (film), 340
childcare, 106, 106n6
children
    abduction of, 59
    as global citizens, 108
    men’s relationship with, 9, 49–51
    protection of, 170
    value of, 100, 100n4
    See also girls
Christians
    disapproval of bathhouses by, 263–4
    in the Ottoman empire, 262
circumcision. *See* female circumcision, male circumcision
citizenship
    in the Muslim world, 1
    in Turkey, 3, 4, 20–21
Cixous, Hélène, 298
cleanliness, 7, 147, 152
    and the Muslim self, 150

  religious aspects of, 153–4, 254
  of women, 152, 164
Clinical Processing Therapy (CPT), 174
Clinton, Hillary, 334
clothing
  and alterity, 231–2
  gendered, 231
  and identity, 218, 231
  modern dress, 226, 325
  See also *purdah*
coat numa, 228
cold-blooded, foreign women as, 48–9
colonialism, 198, 362
  counter-colonialism, 322
colonization, 358
commensality, 145–6
commodification, 75
communication
  between genders, 312
  lack of, 301
  in the Muslim Brotherhood, 321
  non-verbal, 237n3
  as unmanly, 80
  visual, 218
conception, assisted. *See* assisted reproduction; *in vitro* fertilization
concubines, 278
connectivity
  breakdown in, 192–4
  conjugal, 9, 188, 192
  marital, 189, 191–2
  patriarchal, 187
Connell, Raewyn, 78, 91, 128
conscientious objection, 22
continuity, 11, 220
contraceptives
  condoms, 48
  restrictions on, 29
cooking
  as essential skill, 7, 140, 144–7
  as feminine education, 149, 158

counter-colonialism, 322. *See also* colonialism
couples therapy, 107
courtship
  discursive framework of, 197
  and engagement, 201–2, 204
  finding a spouse, 202–5
  muḥāfiẓ discourse, 9, 205–10
  munfatiḥ discourse, 9, 210–12
  of traditional youth, 207–10
  Western practices of, 197
couscous, as metaphor for the feminine ideal, 139–40, 147–8
co-wives, 187, 190
crisis tendencies, 38, 79, 90
Cruising Utopia (Munoz), 367
culture
  Arab, 285, 308
  consumer, 77
  in Dahab, 41–3
  Egyptian, 43, 171
  and FGC, 165, 168, 171, 174, 179
  hegemonic, 40
  heterosexual, 11, 235–6, 264
  Islamic, 319
  local, 5, 174, 206
  of *mahremiyet*, 11–12, 236–8
  masculine work, 105
  material, 218
  Muslim, 1, 16, 197, 198, 205, 206–8
  oral, 282
  popular, 78, 199, 240
  in the retail workplace, 80, 91
  Syrian, 200
  therapeutic, 107
  visual, 240
  Western, 198, 205, 206, 208, 221, 282, 285
  written, 282
  See also subculture
cunt, 147–8
Dabashi, Hamid, 357
Dahab

  culture in, 41–3
  dynamics of relationships in, 47–50
  sexual relationships in, 41–3
  sexualized behavior in, 43
  tourist industry in, 37–8, 41–2
  ᶜ*urfi* marriages and policing sexuality in, 43–7
Damascus, 263–4
Darznik, Jasmin, 16, 355, 360
Davud, Peremeci Benli Kara, 132
Dawit, Seble, 165–6
de-industrialization, 6, 77, 85
Dellaknâme-i Dilküşâ (“The Book of the Shampooers that Opens the Soul”), 124, 133
de Moor, Ed, 284
depilation, 7, 150–51, 256
  religious aspects of, 153–4, 155
dhimmi (non-Muslim women), 13, 260, 265–8
  transitional gender of, 266, 268
diaspora. *See* Iranian diaspora community
Dictionary of Islam, 223
difference, 298–9, 307–8, 311–13
disability
  politics of, 30
  stigma associated with, 3, 23
  and subordinate masculinities, 32
  in Turkey, 24, 30–31
  of Turkish veterans, 3–4, 19–20, 22
Disability Survey (Turkey), 24
discourse
  conservative (*muḥāfiẓ*), 199–204, 205–10
  of cultural authenticity, 197
  liberal (*munfatiḥ*), 200–201, 210–12
  Western colonial, 198
disease, commodification of, 40, 40n3
distinctiveness, 220
division of labor, gendered, 2, 144–5
divorce
  according to Islam, 206
  and gender roles, 9
  judicial arbitration of, 184–6
  narratives of, 185–6

  under Syrian personal status law, 182–4
  three kinds of, 183–4
djellaba, 224
Doctors Against FGM, 8, 171, 175
domestic abuse, 194
domestic violence, 9, 40, 82, 104, 192–4, 193nn16–17, 301
Douglas, Fedwa, 279
Douglas, Mary, 255, 267, 319
dower/dowry payment (*mahr*), 183, 190, 191, 192, 194, 204
downward mobility, 59
draft evasion, 21, 22
dream interpretation, 258
dress
  uniform, 222–3
  Western style, 230
  See also clothing; *purdah*
dress codes, 276. See also *purdah*
drugs, to prolong intercourse, 49
Dumas, Firoozeh, 356
dupatta, 222, 230
education
  at Al-Huda International School, 232
  as draft avoidance strategy, 22
  as governmentality, 25
  at the Madrassah Jamia Hafsa (MJH), 11, 218–19
  in Pakistan, 59–60, 63
  religious and moral emphasis in, 6, 105–6
  in Turkey, 105
  of women and girls, 77, 198
Egypt
  challenged masculinities in, 37–51
  constructions of femininity in, 129–59
  divorce laws in, 183–4
  economic reform in, 39
  family discourse in, 206
  feminism and feminists in, 13, 165, 176–7
  FGC in, 164, 166, 171, 172–3
  heterosexual relationships in, 186
  neoliberal economic policies in, 4
  polarization of society in, 284

- political upheaval in, 38–9
- post-revolutionary, 14, 318
- struggle for independence in, 326
- and the “Virgin Trials,” 317–37

Egyptian Uprising (2011), 321
Egyptian women
- as “hot,” 148
- as “hot-blooded,” 48

Ejeli, Gholam Hossein, 338
el Sadaawi, Nawal, 169
emasculation
- of Egyptian men, 4, 37, 48–51
- of Pakistani migrant husbands, 5, 66
- of retail workers, 87
- *See also* masculinity

embodiment
- and FGC, 8, 170
- of Islam, 155–6
- male, 19
- relationship with gender, 32
- relationship with the economy, 32

Emirzade, Haci, 266
employment
- in Dahab, 37–8, 41
- military service as prerequisite for, 21
- in shopping malls, 73–91
- in the UK, 57, 66
- *See also* unemployment

equality
- concept of, 312, 313n43, 323
- gender, 110, 340, 341, 344, 345, 348, 349
- social and legal, 170, 177, 198
- *See also* inequality

Erdoğan, Tayyip, 29
Ergin, Nina, 122–3
Erotic Awareness, 284
Essén, Birgitta, 169
essentialist theories, 1, 2, 56, 363
evaluation, 220, 221n3
exfoliation, 263

Ezzat, Ola, 319
Ezzat family, 319

face, covering of, 224, 225–7, 241. See also *purdah*; veils
face transplants, 31, 33
Facebook, 240, 244, 245. *See also* social media
Faisal, Hala, 13, 277
Fallahi, 282
family and families
  kin networks, 186
  obligations to, 69
  and patriarchal connectivity, 187
  relatives of spouses, 9
  role of, 186–7
  as source of marital friction, 190, 192
  support for marriage by, 202
  See also fatherhood, “new fatherhood”; grandmothers; mothers; mothers-in-law; Pakistani husbands; sons-in-law
family courts, 181, 182n2
Faqir, Fadia, 299
Farhi, Farideh, 338
fatherhood
  and masculinization, 29
  medicalized, 3–4, 20
  among middle-class professionals, 96–8
  redefining, 6
  traditional, 103
  transformation of, 98
  See also “new fatherhood”
female body/bodies
  aging, 79
  in Arab women’s writing, 275
  changing ideals of, 149, 248
  covering/hiding of, 225–7, 242, 276–7
  erotic, 14
  fat as ideal, 140, 149, 159
  justice and, 327
  as metaphor, 312
  moral and feminine ideals of, 140, 146–7
  nude, 277–8

  - oppression of, 275–6
  - representing difference, 298–9, 307–8, 311–13
  - in Rifaat's writing, 278, 280–93
  - as site of struggle for power, 14, 318
  - and subject production, 319, 326
  - use of by hegemonic patriarchy, 327
  - *See also* lesbian relationships; masturbation
- female circumcision, 7, 8, 140, 142, 150–51, 153, 168, 280, 287–8, 292
  - as Islamic practice, 153–4, 156–8
  - as plastic surgery, 156–8
  - *See also* female genital cutting (FGC)
- female genital cutting (FGC)
  - as body modification procedure, 165
  - conflicting positions on, 8, 163–6
  - as cosmetic surgery, 169
  - in Egypt, 164, 166, 171, 172–3
  - in Iraq, 164, 166, 169, 171, 172, 177
  - as Islamic custom, 169
  - issues in naming, 164–5, 167–8, 172–5
  - in Kurdistan, 164, 166, 169, 171, 172, 177
  - laws forbidding, 168
  - pedagogical perspective on 163–6
  - performed by medical professionals, 168
  - politics of, 169
  - significant details, 164–5
  - understanding, 140
  - UN facts and figures for, 164
  - as violence against women, 165
  - *See also* female circumcision
- femininity/femininities
  - constructions of, 7, 139–40
  - devaluation of, 78
  - in Egypt, 14, 318
  - emphasized/exaggerated, 5, 81–4, 91
  - and FGC, 164
  - and gender norms, 130, 132
  - ideals of, 7, 153, 159
  - Islamic, 142
  - and the Muslim Brotherhood, 326
  - as performative, 82

  relationship with home-cooked food, 139–40, 143–4
  in retail industry, 79
  and the senses, 142
  shaping and perfection of, 141, 158–9
  tropes associated with, 143–4
  virginal, 327
  See also womanhood
feminism and feminists
  Arab, 281
  in Egypt, 175–7
  in Iran, 339–41, 349
  Islamic, 14, 15, 281, 283, 284, 293, 333–4, 342–9
  post-colonial, 165, 331–2, 350–51
  secular, 15, 333–4, 347
  transnational, 165–6
  in Turkey, 238
  Western, 171
  See also feminist consciousness; feminist scholarship and theory
feminist consciousness
  condemnation of in Iran, 339–41
  in Iran (after 1979), 341–3
  See also feminism and feminists; feminist scholarship and theory
feminist scholarship and theory
  “diasporic,” 332
  and Islamic feminism, 345
  post-colonial, 15, 350
  on power, 8, 350
  on structural inequality, 78, 350
  Western, 15
  See also feminism and feminists; feminist consciousness
FGC. *See* female genital cutting (FGC)
folklore, 282
food
  bilâdi, 144, 147, 158–9
  in Darznik’s memoir, 364, 366
  “hot,” 144
  intimate sharing of, 145–6
  moral idiom of, 148–9
  sexual connotations of, 144–5
food preparation, as representative of values, 140, 143–4, 158–9

foreign women (tourists)
  as “cold-blooded,” 48–9
  men’s relationships with, 48–51
foreplay, 4, 48
Foucault, Michel, 4, 25, 48, 115, 117, 120–21, 129, 134, 178, 179, 238
Foursquare, 240
Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), 321, 323, 324
frigidity, 9, 193
fundamentalist movement, 276–7
Funny in Farsi (Dumas), 356
gallabiya, 224
Garvey, Johanna, 16, 359–60, 366
gaze
  disempowerment of, 247
  Foucaultian, 238
  Lacanian, 238
  See also gazing
Gazi Adaptation House, 25, 26
gazing, 11–12, 235–7
  as penetration, 238–40, 246–7
  See also gaze
gender
  asymmetries of, 91
  conservatism, 76
  construction of, 141
  crisis, 73, 85
  designations in the bathhouse, 13
  discourses on, 141n1
  hierarchy of, 6, 347
  ideals of, 159, 186
  ideology, 327
  issues, 198, 332
  norms, 9, 73, 74, 79, 130, 158–9, 188, 191–4, 231, 253
  oppression of, 324
  segregation based on, 37
  social construction of, 130
  See also identity/identities, gender
gender regime
  feminized, 79n9, 79–80
  in shopping malls, 80–84, 90

gender relations
  egalitarian, 101
  and *mahremiyet*, 237
  in the Qur’anic discourse, 343
gender roles
  in Egypt, 37
  gender segregation, 9, 10, 198, 201–2, 212, 301
  in marriage, 185
  muḥāfiẓ discourse, 205–10
  munfatiḥ discourse, 210–12
  See also femininity; masculinity; men; women
Gender Trouble (Butler), 350
generosity, 145, 146
genital modification. *See* female circumcision; female genital cutting (FGC)
Ghaathi, benefits from British migrants, 59–60, 64
ghar damad, 57, 58
Gilmore, David, 58–9
girls
  dressing for *purdah*, 224–32
  and FGC, 150, 152, 163, 168, 169
  identity acquisition by, 156, 220–22
  mature, 149
  unmarried, 152
  See also “virgin trials”; women
“Girls Ultras Azhari,” 327
global capital, 75
globalization, 6, 77, 197, 358
Göle, Nilüfer, 237, 242, 243
The Good Daughter (Darznik), 16, 355, 360–67
  reviews of, 361–3
Goodwin, Jan, 277
Gopinath, Gayatri, 358
governmentality, 25, 30, 32
Grand Bazaar, in Istanbul, 75
grandmothers, 107, 288, 292
Green Movement, 348
Grehan, James, 264
grooms, transnational. *See* Pakistani husbands
group bathing 255–6, 260
Guardians of the Air (Rosa Yāsīn Hasan), 14, 297, 303–5, 309–10

Guth, Stephen, 284

habitus, 43, 84, 141–2, 159
    and the acquisition of moral virtue, 7
    Aristotelian, 7, 141–2, 152, 159
    Bourdieu’s concept of, 159
    gendered, 81n11
hadith, 260, 343
hair
    body, 151–2
    head, 152–3
    See also depilation
Halfaoune (film), 253
Halil, Patrona, 121–2
Halperin, David, 117
hammams
    historical documents pertaining to, 117–18
    and homoerotic sex, 259
    of Istanbul, 115
    leisure practices in, 255–6
    as liminal space, 12, 253, 254, 268
    as morally and sexually transgressive space, 258–63
    poor reputation of, 261
    regulation of, 12, 253–4, 268
    as sexualized space, 253, 258
    shampooers employed in, 118–26
harassment
    police, 43–4
    sexual, 40, 129, 148, 238–9, 257, 276, 288
harem, 239, 240n6
haremlik space, 134
Ḥasan, Rosa Yāsīn, 14, 297, 300, 303–5, 309–10
Hasso, Frances, 186, 188
headscarf wearing
    bans on, 242
    contradictions in, 243
    by magazine models, 237, 243, 244
    and the problem of fashion, 242–3
    and purdah, 228–30
    signification of, 241–3

spiritual aspects of, 242n9
    See also veils
hejab, 341–2. See also *hijab*
henna, 227, 227n5, 256
heterosexual culture, 11, 235–6, 264
hiding
    of adornment, 226
    of the body, 225
    of the face, 224, 241
    as aspect of *mahremiyet*, 11, 12, 235, 241, 245, 246–7
hierarchy
    clerical, 347
    gender, 6, 128, 347, 350
    power, 74, 87, 91, 332
    social, 259
hijab, 55, 199. See also *burqa*; *hejab*; *niqâb*
hippie culture, 42
home
    immigrant perspective on, 365–6
    representations of, 359
home-cooked food, as metaphor, 147
homoerotic desire and relationships, 275, 289–92, 311
homophobia, 88n13
homosexuality
    female, 280–81, 283, 289–92, 293
    historical, 6–7
    male, 6, 88–90, 117, 121, 133–4
hospitality, 145
hot-blooded, Egyptian women as, 48
human rights, and FGC, 175–6
humiliation, 4, 47, 48, 276
hunger strikes, 276
Ḥurrās al-hawā (*Guardians of the Air*; Hasan), 14, 297, 303–5, 309–10
Hürriyet (newspaper), 20
husbands
    abusive, 56
    insensitivity of, 191
    legal expectations of, 190
    migrant, 58
    rights and responsibilities of, 187, 188

    wives’ criticism of, 192
    See also Pakistani husbands
Hussein, Saddam, 173

İbrahim, Hamlacı, 131, 133
identification, 7, 11, 13, 41, 128, 200, 217, 221, 229. *See also* self-identification
identity/identities
    communal, 2
    construction of, 140, 217–19
    created by wearing the *burqa*, 11, 225–7
    cultural, 2, 58
    gender, 3, 5, 80, 90, 222
    gendered, 153
    group, 220, 221, 222
    and the home, 359
    hypermasculine, 43, 47, 152
    individual, 220
    Iranian, 356, 358
    masculine, 40, 42, 47, 50, 52, 58
    militaristic, 2
    Muslim, 10, 179, 229
    nationalistic, 2
    and religion, 2, 217, 219
    sexual, 128
imagination, masculine, 63–5
imperialism
    American, 341
    cultural, 179
    Western, 1
impotence, 193
Imra’a min hāḏā al-‘aṣr (*Woman of Modern Times*; Bīṭār), 14, 297, 305–8, 310–11
in vitro fertilization (IVF), 3, 27–9, 30, 102. *See also* assisted reproduction
India, rape in, 238–9
individual, relationship with society, 14, 297–8
individual therapy, 107
individualism, 103, 187
individualization, 105
inequality
    class, 149
    gender, 31, 37, 78

  in the homosexual culture, 133
  social, 73, 74n3, 78, 91, 301, 302
  for women, 277
  See also equality
infertility clinics, 30. *See also* assisted reproduction
informal economy, 41
Inhorn, Martha, 187, 194
Instagram, 240
integration, cultural, 55
internalization, 104, 109, 158, 159, 218, 220, 221
International Monetary Fund, 39
“Interrupted Lives” (interview series), 20, 28–9, 31
intimacy
  public displays of, 11, 236, 245–6
  requirement of to be hidden, 245
  See also *mahrem*; *mahremiyet* culture
intimate relations. *See* sexual relations
Iran
  condemning feminism and feminist consciousness in, 339–41
  feminism in, 340–41
  feminist consciousness and mobilization (after 1979), 341–3
  human rights abuses in, 335
  secular women’s activism in, 331–51, 333–4
  struggle for independence in, 326
  US relations with, 336–9
  and the War on Terror, 337
  women’s movement in (after 1979), 341–3
  women’s rights in, 15
Iranian diaspora community, 15, 16, 335, 336
  and immigrant memoirs, 355–68
Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), 339
Iranian Studies, 356
Iran-Iraq War, 34
Iraq
  FGC in, 164, 166, 169, 171, 172, 177
  US relations with, 337
Irigaray, Luce, 298
isdal, 325. See also *burqa*
Islam
  as dominant social force, 197

  as embodied faith, 155–6
  and FGC, 169
  and gender segregation, 10
  global, 319
  role of women according to, 323
  See also Islamic law; Muslims; Muslim values
Islamic extremism, 284
Islamic feminism, 333–4, 342–3
  conclusions, 350–51
  debate on, 347–9
  objections to, 344–6
  since the 1990s, 343–4
Islamic law, 195, 199, 325, 333, 345. *See also* Shari'a
Islamic Republic of Iran. *See* Iran
Islamic revival, 197
Islamicate, 236
Islamism, militant, 15, 318
Islamist fundamentalism, 276–7
Islamist movement, 322, 323
Islamization, 10, 199, 326
İsmail, Derviş, 124, 125, 127, 131–4
Istanbul
  gated residential communities in, 75
  prostitution in (Ottoman), 115–16
  shopping malls in, 5, 75, 90
  See also *hammams*
Istanbul Encyclopedia (Koçu), 124

jallabiya, 224
janaba, 256. *See also* uncleanliness
Janissary Corps (Janissaries), 115, 121, 125–6, 127n45
jewelry, 227
Jews
  in the Ottoman bathhouses, 255
  in the Ottoman empire, 262
jilbab, 224–5, 227
Johnsdotter, Sara, 169
Johnson Davies, Denys, 281
Joint Programme, 171
Joseph, Suad, 9, 186, 188

Justice and Development Party (Turkey), 20, 29–30, 31, 105, 245
Justice for Iran, 348

kalion wala, 228
kannunname, 264
Kar, Mehrangiz, 346
karâma generosity, 145
Kazzem, Safinaz, 285
Khatami, Mohammad, 342
Khattab, ‘Umar ibn (Caliph), 262
khimar (*khumur*), 224–5, 325, 326
Khomeini, Ayatollah Rouhollah, 341, 342
kin networks, 186. *See also* family and families
kissing protest, 11, 12, 235, 237, 245–9
kitchen, as feminine space, 144
knowledge
    feminist production of, 15
    implicit, 158
    religious, 221
Koçu, Reşat Ekrem, 124, 125
kohl, 227, 227n5, 256
Kurdish conflict, 3, 19, 22, 22n2
Kurdish Opening, 31
Kurdistan, FGC in, 8, 164, 166, 169, 171, 172, 177
Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), 22, 22n2
Kuwait, 326

labor
    aesthetic, 80n10
    gendered division of, 2, 144–5
Lazreg, Marnia, 350
lesbian relationships, 13, 14
    in *Smell*, 300–303, 312
lesbians, 280–81, 289–93
    in retail work, 88n12
LGBT activism, 246
liberation, 14, 298
limb transplants, 31, 33
liminal spaces, 50
liminality, 46

  of the *hammam*, 253, 254, 268
Lipstick Jihad (Moaveni), 356
literary realism, 283–4
literature. *See* women writers; writing
love, in marriage, 10, 202–3, 209, 210, 212
Lutfi, Huda, 261
Madrassah Jamia Hafsa (MJH) 11, 218–19
Mahmood, Saba, 332, 337
Mahmud I (sultan), 121, 122
mahrem, 11, 12, 236, 239, 242–3, 246
mahremiyet culture, 11, 12, 13, 241–5, 247–8
  defined, 235–7
makeup, 227
male circumcision, 154, 168, 169
Maliyeden Müdevver classification, 117–18
manhood
  in Egypt, 37
  ideals of, 110
  redefining, 7
manliness, attributes of, 61–3
Marcus, Julie, 256
marriage(s)
  arranged, 10, 201, 203, 205, 286
  attempts at reconciliation, 189
  as bond between families, 57
  desire for child as reason for, 103
  to diasporic kin, 5, 55–7
  of disabled veterans, 26–7
  early, 10, 57, 203, 205
  in Egypt, 39–40
  fast, 203, 205
  forced, 55, 57, 206, 286, 292
  gender and sexual relations in, 8–9
  ideal expectations of, 187–8, 194
  and Islamic tradition, 206, 212
  legal, social and personal standards of, 188
  and love, 10, 202–3, 209, 210, 212
  military service as prerequisite for, 3, 21
  Muslim tradition of, 182, 205–6
  parental support for, 202

  - sources of difficulties in, 188, 190–92
  - under Syrian personal status law, 182–4
  - traditional, 201–3
  - transnational, 57–8
  - See also ᶜ*urfi* (temporary) marriages
- marriage contracts, 46
- marriage crisis, 40
- masculine dominance
  - in Egypt, 37, 38, 43
  - Muslim teachings on, 322
  - in Turkey, 78–9
- masculinity and masculinities
  - alternative, 59, 110
  - classless, 84
  - complexity of, 2, 70
  - complicit, 5, 70
  - of disabled veterans, 19, 20, 26–7
  - dominant constructions of, 37–8
  - dysfunctions in, 40
  - of Egyptian men, 4, 38
  - essentialist discussions of, 56
  - and fertility, 28
  - fluidity of, 70
  - and gender norms, 130, 132
  - hegemonic, 5, 6, 12, 20, 22, 23, 38, 58, 70, 84–7, 100–101, 110, 128
  - heteronormative, 29, 32
  - hypermasculinity, 43, 47, 132
  - ideals of, 109
  - and marriage, 39–40
  - and migration, 56
  - privileging of, 78
  - resistant, 70
  - in the shopping mall, 84–8
  - sociocultural construct of, 58
  - studies of, 32
  - subordinate, 5, 70
  - three features of, 58
  - transnational constructions of, 5
  - *See also* fatherhood; husbands; men; “new fatherhood”
- masculinity crisis, 32

massage, 256, 263
masturbation, female, 300, 308–11
medications, to prolong intercourse, 49
Mekuria, Salem, 165–6
memoirs, by Iranian immigrant women, 16, 355–8
men
  as breadwinners, 107, 108–9
  consensual associations and intimacies between, 128–34
  disempowerment of, 38, 39, 49, 50, 51
  emigration of, 41
  emotionally distant, 103
  empowerment of, 79
  gay men in retail work, 5–6, 88–90
  and the job market, 41
  migration of to Dahab, 42
  migration of to Europe, 41
  migration of to United Kingdom, 55–7
  mistreatment of by wives, 67
  powerlessness of, 66
  proper dress of, 223
  reaction of to crisis, 3
  as retail workers, 5–6, 80
  roles of, 3, 141
  socialization of, 20
  submitting to demands of women, 48–9
  victimhood of, 66
  See also emasculation; fatherhood; husbands; masculinity; “new fatherhood”; Pakistani husbands
MENA (Middle East and North Africa)
  divorce in, 183, 186–7
  family relationships in, 187
  support for marriage in, 189
Merry, Sally Engle, 175
metrosexuality, 85
migration
  advantages to home villages, 59–60, 64
  imagined benefits of, 63–5
  and masculinity, 2, 56
  of Pakistani men, 5, 55–8
  possible disadvantages of, 65–7

- preparation for, 65
- reasons for, 55, 55n3
- as route to upward mobility, 64–5

military service
- in Pakistan, 63–5
- in Turkey, 3, 20–21, 88n13

military-medical institutions, 19, 25–6

Mir-Hosseini, Ziba, 344, 346, 347, 349
- debate on Islamic feminism, 347–9

Moaveni, Azadeh, 356

mobilization devices, robotic, 31

Model of Family Change, 100

modernity, 1, 14, 147, 149, 222, 237, 289, 297, 306–8, 318

modesty, 142, 148, 152. See also *awra* modesty

Moghissi, Haideh, 345

Mohammed (Prophet), 153, 261, 262

Mojab, Shahrzad, 345

Moneim, Intisar Abdel, 322

moral cultivation, 142

moral virtue, acquisition of, 7

Morocco, divorce laws in, 183

Morsi, Mohamed, 318, 318n2, 320, 321, 325, 325n3, 326–7

mothers
- duty to care for, 62
- mode of address for, 61n12
- and the “new fatherhood,” 97, 107
- as participants in FGC, 142, 288, 292
- as religious tutors, 323
- teaching daughters, 149, 158
- violence toward, 104

mothers-in-law, 55, 65, 143, 144, 146

Mubarak, Hosni, 39, 324

Muhammad (Prophet), 153, 261, 262

Munoz, Jose Esteban, 367

Muslim Brotherhood, 13, 319
- gender and mobilization in, 321–2
- gender ideology in, 322–4
- and the “virgin trials,” 14, 317, 318n2, 320–21

Muslim identity
- and the *burqa*, 11, 222–3

- FGC and, 179
- vis-à-vis Western values, 10

Muslim Sisters, 322, 324–7

Muslims
- Alawite, 198, 201, 208
- Sunni, 198n3, 199, 200–201, 213

Mustafa, Keşmîr, 129

Mutilation, sexual, 173, 174

My Stories with the Muslim Brotherhood: The Memoirs of a Former Sister (Moneim), 322, 324–5

Nafisi, Azar, 356, 357

Nagi, Susan, 279

Nahda sit-in, 326

nakedness, 226. *See also* nudity protest

narratives
- of divorce, 185–6, 195
- of Egyptian men in Dahab, 4
- Egyptian women's, 279, 282
- of family building, 20, 23, 28
- of the female experience, 152
- of middle-class fathers, 6, 102, 106
- Ottoman historical, 7, 116, 124, 128, 129, 131, 132, 253
- of Pakistani migrants, 60–61, 64, 66, 68
- of public sexuality, 235, 246
- of retail workers, 76, 83, 89–91
- "return," 356, 359, 361, 362, 364
- by Rifaat, 14, 278–94
- women's memoir genre, 16, 355–7, 360–67
- of youths, 9

National Television Islamic Research Center, 340

nationalism
- Iranian, 16
- Islamic, 198
- Islamist, 332
- Pakistani, 64
- patriarchal, 333
- Turkish, 4, 20, 31

nazar, 238

Nazar-Ahari, Shiva, 335

neo-liberalism, 2, 4, 32, 50, 90, 91
neo-liberalization, 6, 75, 77
“new fatherhood”
  concept of, 98–101
  global dynamics of, 107–9, 110
  ideals of, 101–2
  individual dynamics of, 102–5, 110
  local dynamics of, 105–7, 110
  among middle class professionals, 96–8
“New Religious Thinkers,” 344, 346
NGOs (non-governmental organizations), 8, 157, 171, 172, 173, 175, 338
niqâb, 157, 225, 228, 229–30, 232. See also *burqa*; *hijab*
norms
  of the bathhouse, 265
  dominant, 2, 186, 189, 193, 194
  exclusionary, 350
  feminine, 8, 152
  gender, 9, 73, 74, 79, 130, 158–9, 188, 191–4, 231, 253
  of gender interaction, 199–200, 206, 210, 213
  in governmentality, 25
  Islamic, 7
  local, 197, 199, 200, 203, 204–5
  of *mahrem*, 12, 242, 243
  middle-class global, 6, 102, 107
  patriarchal, 299
  public, 246
  of *purdah*, 63
  religious, 186, 189
  sexual, 9, 188, 193–4, 275
  social, 102–3, 141, 141n1, 164–5, 167, 185, 186, 188, 189, 192, 193, 194, 223, 279, 281, 292, 298
  of virginity, 9, 249
North Korea, 337
nudity protest, 275, 276, 277

Obama, Barack, 338
odor, associated with uncircumcised women, 150–51
Omar, Manal, 343
One Thousand and One Nights, 278, 282, 363
“Operation Enduring Freedom,” 337

oral heritage, 282
oral sex, 4, 48
organs, illegal market in, 40
Orientalism, 16, 253, 362, 363, 367
ornaments, non-display of, 226–7
orthopedics clinic, 25
Other/otherness
  constituents of, 221–2
  corporeal, 31
  in courtship practices, 205
  identity in opposition to, 217, 218, 221, 231–2
  as inferior, 298–9, 313
  as non-*burqa*-wearers, 11, 217–18, 221–2, 231, 232
  queer, 117
  respect for, 312
  shame regarding, 82
Ottoman Bathhouses. See *hammams*
Ottoman Empire, 7, 22n2
  bathing practices in, 254–5
  issues of morality in, 118–20
Ozyegin, Gul, 249
pain
  cultural meanings of, 170–71
  and femininity, 142, 152–3, 157, 158
  and male/female circumcision, 169
Pakistan
  burqa and Madrassah education in, 217–32
  classic patriarchy in, 55n2
  economic issues in, 64
  emigrant marriages in, 55–70
  extended family groups, 57
  military service in, 63–5, 12
  secular women's activism in, 333
Pakistani husbands, 55–9
  coping strategies of, 68–9
  economic opportunities of, 58–9
  as martyrs, 68
  masculine identity of, 5
  objections of, 66–7
  personhood of, 61–3, 69

    positions of, 70
paraplegia, 20n1
parenting
    attachment, 108n7
    blogs on, 107
    guidebooks, 107
    See also fatherhood; mothers; “new fatherhood”
parents, duty toward, 61–2
Pargar (BBC Persian program), 347, 349
Parmar, Pratibha, 165
patriarchal connectivity, 9, 187
patriarchy, 1, 58, 78, 258, 322
    classic, 55n2
    in Egypt, 4
    rebellion against, 275–6
    in Turkey, 3
Patrona Halil Revolt, 121, 122n23
pedophilia, 280
Peirce, Leslie, 123
performativity, 141–3
perfumes, 256
Perfuming Humanity by Interpreting Dreams (al-Nabulusi), 236
Persepolis series (Satrapi), 356
physical capital, 38, 51
piety, 14, 318–20, 325–7, 332
    and the female body, 327
    in the Muslim Brotherhood, 326
    in Muslim societies, 332
    reflected in the face, 226
piety movement (Egypt), 332
police
    harassment by, 43–4
    interference from, 44
    submission to, 46–7
    surveillance by, 46, 47
    violence by, 46
police escorts, 43
politics
    disability, 30
    gendered and sexual, 1

  global, 172
  international, 175
  and political repression, 14, 297, 303
  religious, 219
  of reproduction 19, 20
Politics of Piety (Mahmood), 332
pollution, 13, 151, 256, 267
post-colonialism, 15, 198, 350–51, 362. *See also* feminism, post-colonial
poststructuralism, 141
post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), 22–3, 170
poverty, 19, 40–42, 81, 131, 165, 188, 321, 364
power
  from difference, 298
  dynamics of, 11, 179
  of the gaze, 238–40, 246–7
  and masculinity, 32
  patriarchal structures of, 8, 351
  reconceptualization of, 25
  repressive, 312
  and space, 240
  and the shaping of lives, 171
power relations, 58, 73
  in diaspora studies, 356
  and the home, 359
  intra-male, 126, 128
  reversal of, 247
privatization, 75
procreation, with foreign women, 49
pronatalist population stance, 3, 4, 29–30
prosthetics, 26, 31, 33
prostitution
  attitudes toward male vs. female, 116
  female, 120
  laws against, 44
  male, 115, 127, 129, 132, 134
public bathhouses. See *hammams*
public sphere, regulation of, 246
purdah, 10–11, 218–19, 222–3, 223n4, 224
purification
  religious aspects of, 153, 154–5

  ritual, 256–7, 261–2
  sand used for, 256
purity
  and the Muslim self, 147, 150, 151
  Muslim system of, 267
  reflected in the face, 226
  of the “virgin trials” women, 317–18
  of women, 7, 143, 151, 152, 158, 159, 164

Qom Seminary, 340
Quataert, Donald, 134
queer diaspora scholarship, 16, 355, 358–60
queer persons
  in Istanbul, 6
  in retail work, 80, 88–90
“queer un-belonging,” 16, 359, 366
Qur’an, 153, 155, 343–4
  quoted in support of marriage, 189

Rāʾiḥat al-qirfa (*Smell of Cinnamon*; Yazbik), 14, 297, 300–303, 308–9
Raangi
  benefits from British migrants, 59–60, 64
  education in, 63
  family example in, 61–3
Rab3a sit-in, 319, 326
race, questions of, 358
racism, 277
Rafsanjani, Ali Akbar Hashemi, 342
Rahnavard, Zahra, 344
rape
  homosexual, 127–8
  in India, 238–9
Reading Lolita in Tehran (Nafisi), 356, 357–8, 362
Red Mosque, 219
Reinhart, Kevin, 256, 267
relationships
  before marriage, 207–10
  changing concept of, 207n15, 207–8
  failure of in *Woman*, 305–8, 313
  heterosexual, 186

- homoerotic, 289–92, 311
- homosexual, 280–81, 293
- lesbian, 13, 14, 300–303, 312
- of liberal youth, 210–12
- outside of marriage, 206–9
- of traditional youth, 205–10
- Western, 205–8, 210–12
- *See also* sexual relationships

religion
- anthropology of, 254, 266
- contradictions with, 45–6
- and identity, 217
- used as image, 45–6
- and the male identity, 41
- “new fathers” lack of involvement with, 105
- traditional, 105

religious conservatism, 101

religious extremism, 276–7

religious rhetoric, protest against, 276

reproduction technologies, 19, 27–9

research
- anthropological, 140, 164
- on divorce, 184, 188
- ethnographic, 2, 38
- on gender in Egypt, 37, 38, 42, 49
- on headscarf magazine models, 240n6, 241
- on the “new fatherhood,” 97, 97n3, 98, 99, 101
- FGC, 166, 171, 172, 175–9
- on marriage and migration, 56, 69
- on *mahremiyet*, 236
- multi-sited, 140
- on *purdah*, 218, 219, 221, 226
- on the retail industry, 74, 74n3, 79, 91
- by the state, 341
- on Turkish veterans, 3, 19, 24, 27, 31

retail workers, 74
- emphasized femininity of women, 80–81
- experience of, 76–7, 77n6
- gender and sexuality among, 74–91
- queer, 6, 80

  recalibrated masculinity of men, 80–81
  as social prototype, 76n5
  subjectivity of, 74, 77–8
Rice, Condoleezza, 337
Rifaat, Alifa, 13–14, 275, 278, 282
  confrontation of social and cultural values by, 279–86
  and the Egyptian literary tradition, 282
  perspective of, 283
  protest and controversy in writings of, 292–4
  religious influences on, 285–6
Risâle-i Garîbe, 116
risky behaviors, 38, 40, 50
ritual purification. See purification, ritual
rotten report, 22, 88n13
Rouhani, Hassan, 338

Saadawi, Nawal el, 276, 281
Sadat, Anwar, 39
Sadeghi, Fatemeh, 340, 344, 345
Sadr, Shadi, 332, 334–6, 348, 349, 350
  debate on Islamic feminism, 347–9
safe sex, 48
Safran, Janina, 262
Said, Edward, 362
salafi movement, 276
Sariyannis, Marinos, 115
Satrapi, Marjane, 356
Schick, Irvin C., 124
sectarianism, 277
Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East (Al-Ali), 333
Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, 129
selamlık space, 134
self
  caring for, 25, 255
  conception of, 220–22
  concern for, 107
  feminine, 140, 156, 179
  formation of, 142, 146, 187, 231, 238
  inner, 159
  masculine, 58, 79n8

  Muslim, 7, 140, 150–53, 159
  notions of, 187
self-actualization, 91
self-affirmation, 43
self-assertion, 14
self-discipline, 11
self-efficacy, 220
self-esteem, 51, 79n8, 220
self-expression, 88, 210, 278
self-fulfillment, 102–3
selfhood, and social norms, 141n1
self-identification, 102, 107, 231
self-image, 51, 88, 362
self-immolations, 276
self-improvement, 210
self-other dialectic, 217, 222, 231
self-presentation, 80
self-regulation, 25, 83
self-respect, 145
self-understanding, 3
Selim III (sultan), 119
sex workers, 27–8, 129–32. *See also* prostitution
sexual behavior, 182, 186, 188, 190, 193–5
  appropriate, 190
  inappropriate, 9
  risky, 38, 40, 43, 50
  “unnatural,” 9, 193
sexual harassment, 40, 129, 148, 238–9, 257, 276, 288
sexual health, 48
sexual mutilation, 174
sexual propriety, 185
sexual relations
  bathing before and after, 257
  premarital, 9–10, 197
sexual relationships
  in Arab women’s writing, 275
  lesbian, 13, 14, 300–303, 12
  between local (Egyptian) men and foreign women, 42–50
  before marriage, 210
  with multiple partners, 47

  non-marital, 186
  traditional restrictions on, 207
sexuality
  in Arab women's writing, 275
  of disabled veterans, 19, 27–8
  of Egyptian tourist industry workers, 4
  embodied, 237
  female, 275, 278, 280
  ideals about, 186
  issues of, 198
  masculine, 19
  and masculine identity, 40
  as means of self-affirmation, 43
  in the Ottoman state, 117
  policing of, 44
  public, 11, 236–7, 241
  regulation of, 237
  reproductive, 32
shalwar kameez, 222, 223, 230
Shari'a, 257, 259–60, 265, 280, 283, 333, 345. *See also* Islamic law
Sherkat, Shahla, 342, 344, 346
shiqaq, 9
shopping malls
  feminized gender regime in, 5, 78–81
  in Istanbul, 75–8
  as workplaces, 76
shyness, 142
Simon (of Lvov), 263
smell, 145, 149, 150–51, 153, 158
Smell of Cinnamon (Samar Yazbik), 14, 297, 300–303, 308–9
smoothness, 7, 150, 159
social bathing, 255–6, 260
social influence, 220n2, 220–21, 221n3
social media, 240
  and the "virgin trials," 320
  See also Facebook
social norms. *See* norms
socioeconomic pressures, 37–41, 50
softness, 153
  of women, 140, 143, 151, 159

sons-in-law, dependent (*ghar damad*), 57
Spivak, Gayatri, 331
sports, as masculine pursuits, 62
stigma
    of assisted reproduction, 29
    associated with sexual relationships, 38
    of male infertility, 29
stoning, 336, 347–8
“Stop Stoning Forever Campaign,” 336, 347, 348
subculture
    homosexual, 121, 133
    of ᶜ*urfi* (temporary) marriages, 4, 46, 50
subjectivities, 19, 91, 159, 199, 326
    of women, 141
suicide, 276
Süleyman, Kalyoncu (Suleiman the Sailor), 130–31
sunnah, 343
survival strategies, 40–41
süslümanlar, 248, 249
Suzuki Carry, 59, 63
sweetness, 147, 152, 153
    of women, 140, 143, 150, 152
Syria
    contemporary women writers in, 297–313
    Islamization of, 10
    marriage and divorce laws in, 181–95
    national unity in, 198
    premarital courtship attitudes in, 197–213
    sectarian polarization in, 212–13
    urban youth in, 200–213
Syrian society, 14, 297–8, 311

Tahmasebi, Sussan, 334, 346, 348
Taleghani, Azam, 344, 348
Taliban, 337
television programming, 340
testicular sperm aspiration/extraction (TESA/E), 27
therapy, individual and couples, 107
Tohidi, Nayereh, 343
toilet etiquette, 260n22

torture victims, 170
tradition(s)
    in courtship and marriage, 197, 205
    Islamic, 256
    reinvention of, 10
transfer of meanings, 176–7
transgender people, 88n12
translation, 176–7, 178
travel visas, 46
Turkey
    gender relations in, 78
    gender and sexuality in the retail industry, 91
    heterosexual culture in, 235–49
    Islamist government in, 6
    masculine dominance in, 78–9
    masculinity of disabled veterans in 19–33
    middle class in, 95–6
    military service in, 3
    "new fatherhood" in, 6, 95–110
    new sexuality culture in, 248
    religious and gender diversity in Ottoman bathhouses, 253–68
    same-sex relationships in Ottoman bathhouses, 115–34
    veterans in, 3–4, 19–20
Turkish Disability Act, 30
Turkish Nationality Law, 21
Tyler, Amina, 277

UAE, heterosexual relationships in, 186
uncleanliness, 256, 267
unemployment, 40, 41
uniformity
    in *burqa* dress, 11, 219, 228–9
    in the Muslim Brotherhood, 14, 318, 322, 325
United Kingdom, Pakistani migration to, 5, 55–8
United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), 172, 175, 177
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 172, 175, 177, 178
United States, relationship with Iran, 336–9
urban renewal, 75
urbanization, 197
^{c}*urfi* (temporary) marriages, 4–5, 37n1, 181

  with foreign tourists, 44–5
  rationale for, 46, 50
  by university students, 44–5

values
  civil, 277
  conservative religious, 11, 14, 96, 102, 105–6, 110, 156, 275, 279, 282, 286
  family, 340
  feminine, 79, 90, 140
  gender, 97
  globalized, 107, 110
  Islamic, 206, 231, 236, 240, 340
  Islamist, 322, 339
  masculine, 84, 104
  of middle class fathers, 95–9, 101–2, 107–9
  modern, 244
  Muslim, 11
  of purity and cleanliness, 7, 150
  social, 170, 218, 220n2, 221, 275–6, 278, 279, 282, 286–7, 292–3
  See also Western values
vehicles as status symbols, 59, 60n10
veils, 224–5
  on women, 79, 157, 198, 218n1, 277
  on beardless youths, 125
  See also headscarf wearing
veterans
  disabled, 3–4, 19–20, 22
  domestic difficulties of, 23
  masculinity of, 19–33
  rehabilitation of, 25
  state aid to, 25–6, 32
  Turkish, 19–20
  war injuries of, 23
Veyne, Paul, 115, 120
violence
  domestic, 9, 40, 82, 104, 192–4, 193n16, 193n17, 301
  in lesbian relationships, 303
  police, 46
  sexual, 126, 127–8, 132, 192–3
  of street masculinity, 23

- wartime, 23
- against women, 82, 104, 165, 276, 192–4, 301

virginity, 9, 79, 211, 249, 287
“virgin trials,” 14, 317
visas, 46

Walker, Alice, 165–6
“War on Terror,” 336, 337
warfare, 1, 2. *See also* Kurdish conflict
Warrior Marks (Walker & Parmar), 165
water
- in the bathhouse, 266
- and the need for hygiene, 254–5

water pipes, 256, 263
websites, on parenting, 107
Western values, 9–10, 96
- criticized, 205–8
- idealized, 210–12

Westernization, 205
Whistling Woods International, 238
Who Could the Man Be? (Alifa Rifaat), 13, 275–6, 285–93
- “Al haduta” (“The Story”), 289–90
- “Alamial Maghull” (“My World of the Unknown”), 280, 283, 290–92
- “Anaqeed al-Inab” (“Vine Grapes”), 288–9
- “Hazehi Laylati” (“This Is My Night”), 286
- “Sadiqati” (“My Girlfriend”), 289
- “Sharaf” (“The Honor”), 287
- “Who Could The Man Be?” 287–8

Williams, Christine, 91
wives
- co-wives, 187, 190
- husbands’ criticism of, 192
- legal expectations of, 190
- of paraplegic men, 28
- rights and responsibilities of, 187, 188

Woman of Modern Times (Hayfā’ Bīṭār), 14, 297, 305–8, 310–11
womanhood
- creation of, 148–9
- FGC and, 179

women

abuse of, 56
in the bathhouses, 12–13, 254, 246, 261, 263–5
bisexual, 88n12
as bitches, 211–12
British-Pakistani, 6, 57–9, 66
changing image of, 324
as clean, 152, 164
contemporary issues in Syrian literature, 311–13
controlling and regulating, 12, 318
as cunts, 147–8
education of, 77, 198
employment of, 81–4, 198
empowerment of, 83–4
expectations of marriage, 187
and the gaze, 235–6
intergenerational relationships of, 146, 158
Islamic role of, 323
marginalized, 284
mistreatment of husbands by, 67
modern dress of, 325
as modest, 152
and the Muslim Brotherhood, 321–5
non-Muslim. See *dhimmi*
oppression of, 198, 311
political mobilization of, 15
polytheist, 262
public behaviors of, 247
in public spaces, 258, 262
as pure, 7, 143, 151, 152, 158, 159, 164
rebellion of against restrictions, 275
reputations of, 204
response to ideals of gender and sexuality, 186
restrictions on movement of, 261–3
as retail workers, 79n8, 79–84
ritual purification of, 261–2, 266
roles of, 3, 41, 106–7, 141
Salafi, 332
security provided for by men, 63
and self-expression, 278
sexual desires of, 13

as sexually vulnerable, 231
  as sluts, 211
  as smooth, 7, 150, 159
  as soft, 7, 140, 143, 151, 159
  subjectivity of, 141
  subordination of, 37, 79, 81–2, 129
  as sweet, 7, 140, 143, 150, 152
  unfeminine, 151n9
  valuing of circumcision by, 142
  victimhood of, 55, 57, 68
  violence against, 82, 104, 165, 276, 192–4, 301. *See also* domestic violence
  Western, 4, 323
  See also Egyptian women; femininity; foreign women (tourists); girls; grandmothers; mothers; mothers-in-law; *purdah*; veils; wives; womanhood
"Women Against the Coup," 327
Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), 349
women writers
  Egyptian, 13–14, 275–94
  objectives of, 299
  Syrian, 14, 297–313
  See also writing
women's liberation, 285, 293
  in Egypt, 276–8
women's mosque movement, 141, 142
women's movement
  Arab, 13, 278
  in Iran, 341–3
  See also women's liberation; women's mosque movement
women's rights
  in Egypt, 323–4
  and FGC, 165
  in Iran, 15, 333–6, 338–42
  and Islamic feminism, 343, 346–8
  as pretext for invasion of Afghanistan, 337
  in Syria, 300
Women's Studies Center (Iran), 340
World Bank, 39
World Values Survey, 105
writing
  Arabic, 282, 283

  - as a body protest, 279–86
  - explicit, 275–8, 284
  - homoerotic, 281
  - women's memoir genre, 16, 355–7, 360–67
  - *See also* women writers

Yassine, Abu Ali, 279
Yazbik, Samar, 14, 297, 300–303, 308–9
Young, Iris Marion, 359

Zaghloul, Susan, 323
zahrat, 319–20
Zanan (*Women*), 342, 346
Zayd, Nasr Abu, 277
Zia, Afiya Shehrbano, 331–2