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UNTANGLING THE MEANINGS OF HAIR IN TURKISH SOCIETY

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The debate about the covering of Muslim women's hair has been too narrowly conceived as an issue about women and the exercise of individual rights. The question, "why women's heads?" has rarely been asked. This article attempts to recast the debate by widening the frame of reference to include the meanings not just of women's hair but also of men's hair, of body hair as well as head hair, and treatment of hair over the life cycle. This exploration shows how deeply the sexual, religious, and political meanings of hair are intertwined in Turkish society and how the focus on women's covering has concealed as well as reinforced traditional gender definitions. [hair, gender, veiling, Turkey, Islam]

Introduction

Hair is an object of intense elaboration and preoccupation in many societies; seemingly the most superficial part of the human body, its meanings are nevertheless deeply rooted in culture. Hairstyles, in addition to the practices of obtaining one, convey messages about people's beliefs and commitments. How quickly we make inferences and judgments about a person's morality, sexual orientation, political persuasion, and religious sentiments when we see a particular hairstyle.¹

Sometimes the meanings of hair are transcultural but more often they are culturally specific and even then depend on the range of variations that are permitted and expressed in that culture. Abstract or general theories about hair are therefore not sufficient to interpret particular hairstyles or practices relating to hair; one must know quite a lot about the culture in order to do so.

Issues about Hair in the Turkish Context

To the Western eye, the covering of women's heads in Turkey and other Muslim countries is surely one of the most noticeable and provocative practices related to hair. Although this practice is often referred to as "veiling," which implies covering the face as well as the hair, what is usually meant is the covering of women's hair with scarves of various kinds.² Westerners have ambivalent responses to this practice—considering it both exotic and erotic or, in a more negative vein, as evidence for the backwardness of Islam and the oppression of women. Indigenous reformers, who wished to be considered modern and for whom "modern" meant "Western," often accepted these evaluations and

spent a lot of energy trying to get women to uncover. That was surely the rationale and the goal of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first President of the Republic of Turkey.

The issue of head covering goes back to the beginning of the Republic and is intimately intertwined with its history. Atatürk felt that in order for the defunct Ottoman Empire to be transformed into a modern, Western type nation-state, people had not only to think differently, but also to dress differently. The head was a prime target. He banned the male headgear called the "fez" and instituted the use of the brimmed hat. He encouraged women to uncover; he felt it was both a means to, as well as a symbol of, becoming modern and Western. He went around the country giving lectures on the topic, accompanied by his uncovered wife and female assistants. Headscarves were banned for civil service employees including nurses and teachers as well as for students in any public schools and universities.

Today, however, among certain Turks there is a controversy raging both in Turkey and in Europe with regard to women's *right* to wear a headscarf—to school or university or when performing civil service jobs, that is, the very places from which it had traditionally been banned. For many, the headscarf is a symbol of allegiance to Islam. In Turkey that allegiance conflicts with nationalist ideals and thus the wearing of the headscarf can be interpreted as a threat to the secular national government. In Europe, in contrast, the headscarf can serve as a marker of *both* national and religious identity, at least among Sunni Turks.³

The headscarf debate has been cast in terms of civil rights, especially about the freedom of religion. The issue has divided women (and men) in

Turkey and Europe; it has also divided feminists among themselves both inside and outside of Turkey. In my view, however, the debate is miscast; the emphasis on the political and religious dimensions of the headscarf has left the meanings of the body, sex, and gender in place. The contemporary debate, as well as Western analyses of it, ignores such elementary questions as 1) why covering? 2) why is it women's heads that are covered? 3) Why is covering a symbol of Muslim and/or Turkish identity? and 4) why are women's heads the site of political and religious conflict? It cannot be reduced to an either/or type of issue—either women have the right to wear headscarves or they don't—because the meanings of hair in Turkish society are very complex.

In Turkish society hair is an emotionally charged symbol with different meanings that depend on gender, age, class, political commitments, and religious sentiments. All of these factors can become entangled in any given context. I do not intend to approach the headscarf debate headon because I believe that the covering of women's heads cannot be understood in isolation from a whole range of meanings and practices related to hair in Turkish society. In order to understand the meaning of women's hair and its covering, it is necessary to analyze women's hair in relation to men's hair, head hair in relation to body hair, and the different practices related to hair over the life cycle. An ethnographic perspective becomes indispensable. Drawing upon my fieldwork in Turkey,⁴ I attempt to untangle some of the sexual, political, and religious meanings of hair in Turkish society as I also weave in and out of theoretical discussions of the topic. With that background, I shall return at the end to the debate about headscarves.

Ethnographic Evidence

My own hair became a subject of immediate concern as I sought permission to live in a particular village in central Anatolia in order to conduct my anthropological research. I was told that it would be difficult for villagers to accept me if I did not cover my hair. I didn't want my presence to be a continual irritant so I adopted the headscarf. I also wore the baggy, comfortable trousers called *şalvar* and the rubbers used for footwear, which are easy to slip off and on as one enters and exits a house. When I put on their clothes, I also put on a new social body and became, in their words, *tam köylü*,

a complete villager.

The significance of hair was further impressed upon me during my first few days in the village. Before it was decided that I could live in a house by myself, I was a guest of a family preparing for the wedding of their daughter, whom I shall call Ayşe. I was not the only guest: relatives who lived outside the village had returned for the wedding festivities. Since the whole village is included in a wedding—an event which spans several days—it is a major undertaking. I became an extra pair of hands instead of an extra burden; thus my introduction to village life was much more as a participant than as an observer. At Ayşe's request I became her *sağdıç*—her helper and confidante and was intimately involved in the details of the process transforming her into a bride. Hair was very much a part of this process.

One of my first tasks was to help her pluck out her underarm hair. This was part of the customary practice of removing all body hair, a custom that applied to men and women and not only at the time of the wedding. Men and women are expected to keep body hair removed throughout their adult lives although women are expected to comply more strictly. While the practice of removing body hair has a long history in Turkish society, many men of the urban Westernized elite do not comply and some may even be unaware of the history or the practice. A visit to a *hamam* (public bathhouse) would acquaint them with it.

Saturday morning of the wedding weekend began with a ritually prescribed bath that took place in the laundry house among Ayşe's female friends. No one takes a bath alone—I would help her and she would help me. Ayşe advised me to take my bath first so the other women would not see me *keçi gibi*—like a goat. It was a reference to pubic hair, but the association was redolent of animality and the wanton sexuality that goats symbolize. Was the removal of pubic hair an attempt to remove those associations?

It is expected that men control the sexuality of "their" women (wives, sisters, daughters) as well as that of their animals. One of the sites of control is hair. It is a male prerogative to initiate sex, and they decide when animals will be bred and oversee the process. Men also shear the hair of goats and the wool of sheep and give it to women who then transform it into social uses. Wool is used to stuff mattresses and quilts, and goat hair is spun and knitted into socks and sweaters. The word for knit-

ting (*örmek*) is also used for the braiding of women's hair.

Ayşe washed my head hair and I hers. We used soap rather than shampoo even though I offered the latter.⁵ Her hair was long and luxuriant for it had not been cut since puberty. Long hair is both the glory and symbol of womanhood and yet the saying, *saci uzun, aklı kisa* (long hair, short intelligence or wisdom), implies that women lack something men have. Simultaneously, what women are thought to have, a loose and rampant sexuality, must now be tamed and brought under further control. This is symbolized by braiding the hair for the wedding.⁶ After the bath and hair washing we went to the house of a relative where her female friends had gathered for dancing and the ritual of hair braiding.

Braids were considered an essential part of the bride's costume and the braiding party an essential part of the wedding ceremonies. These braids are not simply two plaits but consist of twenty to thirty narrow braids, each of which is woven with silver tinsel. It is necessary for the braids to reach her feet, but since a girl's hair is rarely that long, black yarn is woven in to make up for the difference. At the end of one of the braids a blue bead is attached. This implies that the braids are an object of desire and the blue bead is there to ward off the evil eye of those who would covet them.

The hair braiding was accompanied with stories, jokes and remembrances—each woman weaving her story and memories into a braid. The process was clearly an ordeal for Ayşe and she cried intermittently. The hair combing was rough and no doubt it sometimes hurt. More painful perhaps was the awareness that their multi-stranded playful relationships would be woven into an orderly pattern through marriage. Their relationships would be irreparably changed as she too was being irreparably changed into a bride, wife, daughter-in-law, and would soon be a mother, and eventually a mother-in-law, herself.

Saturday evening is the traditional time for festivity and celebration, although women and men celebrate separately. *Kına gecesi*, henna night, as it is called, ends with the application of henna to the bride's hands and feet; a small amount is taken to the groom's house and smeared in a complementary way on his palms. But the night begins with the bride, replete with braids, wedding dress, and veil, being introduced to all the guests and dancing a number of rounds with her friends. The erotic

and gendered meanings of hair were dramatized at one wedding. In the dim light one could yet feel something stirring the huge crowd of women: a "man" was present. It was even more surprising to me since "he" looked exactly like a fellow student at the University of Chicago! It turned out to be a woman dressed like a man; she had attached a mustache and had pulled her hair back so that it seemed short. The contrast with the other women was striking.

Sunday morning the bride, again in her wedding dress and heavily veiled, was taken to the groom's house where she would sit "in state" all day to be viewed by his relatives and friends. However, the right to lift the veil was his alone and would be done in the privacy of their room.

Theoretically, her braids would be kept for forty days after the wedding, at which time they would be cut; in practice they would be cut sooner indicating that "forty" should be take symbolically not literally.⁷ Forty days symbolizes a transitional period that is both auspicious and dangerous and is employed on a number of occasions: for example, the forty days gestation before the soul opens, the forty days after birth when life is held in the balance, and forty days after death when the fate of the soul is being decided, at which time a commemorative service called a Mevlud is held. Forty days after a wedding the bride is expected to be initiated into her new role and duties (cf. Hirschon 1978).

My own intense initiation into some practices related to hair sensitized me and made me curious. Over the next twenty months I was able to observe and ask questions about the treatment and meaning of hair in a variety of contexts. Why all this attention to hair and what did it mean? I have since learned I am not the only one to notice. One Muslim scholar has noted that "[t]here is an undeniable fetishism of hair in Islam, the significance of which is both sexual and religious" (Bouhdiba 1985: 35). In Islam the relation between sexuality and religion is very strong; hair is but one symbol of this relation.

Anthropological Theorizing

The connection between sex, religion, and hair has wide distribution cross-culturally and has been noted in the anthropological literature since the nineteenth century. But despite the widespread connection, is there any legitimacy in assuming

that the motivation and meaning of various hair practices are everywhere the same? This is the question that occupied Edmund Leach in his pivotal article, "Magical Hair" (1958), pivotal because it draws on earlier attempts to theorize this material, especially psychoanalytic theories, and sets the direction of argument on this topic for years to come. Although the relation has usually not been fully articulated, interpretations have focused on three distinct but interrelated issues: 1) the relation between public expression and private motivation, 2) the use of sexuality for religious/ritual ends, and 3) the phallic character of hair.

Leach's paper deals with all three, though it is expressly concerned with the relation between public, social ritual and private, personal meaning, and his paper directly engages the psychoanalytic argument expressed by Charles Berg in his 1951 book, *The unconscious significance of hair*. Berg's argument is that hair cutting and other practices related to hair represent an intrapsychic struggle between "instinct drives (genital and pre-genital) and the castrating efforts of the repressive forces. . . . The whole conflict has been displaced upwards to the socially visible hair of the head and face" (Berg 1951: 94, 149). In other words, there is a cause and effect relation proceeding from the personal, intrapsychic motivation to its public expression. Leach argues against this view and against the corollary psychoanalytic move to conflate psychoneurotic behavior with public ritual, a conflation that is often cast as a distinction between the civilized and primitives. That is, the private rituals of neurotic but civilized people are seen as equivalent to, and say the same things as, the public rituals of primitives. In addition, as we shall see, Leach is especially critical of the concept of repression with regard to explanations of hair dressing behavior.

Although Leach acknowledges the convergence between ethnographic material and psychoanalytic theory, he disputes the relevance of the latter and takes a Durkheimian position that "public ritual symbols are given potency by society and not by individuals" (Leach 1958: 159). In other words, Leach would dispute the personal and prior motivation. Even if one admits that there may have been a connection once upon a time, that does not mean that each enactment of the practice is intrapsychically motivated; rather it is socially expected behavior and generally marks the transition from one social state to another.

Obeyesekere (1981) attempts to bridge the

two positions and argues for a reevaluation by anthropologists of the unconscious motivation of public symbols. He, like Leach, is concerned primarily with hair practices that have specifically religious significance, and also, like Leach, he discusses the meanings of hair of Hindu ascetics and Buddhist monks—those who either let their hair go so that it becomes matted (supposedly indicating their letting go of sexuality), or who cut or shave their hair (to indicate cutting off of sexual life for religious ends). He wants to show not only that these represent different kinds of asceticism and therefore different psychological motivations, but also, quite rightly, that it is not just anyone who takes up an ascetic mode of life. Nevertheless, his argument proceeds from the acceptance of psychoanalytic concepts such as "unconscious," "id, ego, super-ego," "repression," "castration anxiety" and the notion of the sublimation of sexuality for religious ends.

Obeyesekere's argument seems to cut off the discussion prematurely, leaving unanswered, even unaddressed, the question about the relation between the religious and the secular uses and meanings of hair.⁸ That is, how are meanings of hair engaged and construed by ordinary people in their ordinary life contexts, whether these be secular contexts, ritual contexts, or specifically religious contexts. The relation between the sacred and secular needs to be studied empirically to see if they are separate and mutually exclusive domains or intimately entwined. In Turkey, at least, I suggest that the meanings of hair are simultaneously religious and sexual, and that these meanings have political implications.

That hair has sexual significance seems not to be in dispute; what is open to dispute is the characterization of sexuality as phallic. Leach fully agrees with Berg that "when head hair becomes the focus of ritual attention this is very commonly because the head is being used as a symbol for the phallus and head hair as a symbol for semen" (Leach 1958: 157). Are they implying that the head is always a symbol for the phallus, even for women, or that only men's heads are the object of ritual attention? Hallpike (1969) and Hershman (1974) objected to this focus and so, seemingly, did Obeyesekere when he chose to concentrate on the ways six female Hindu ascetics treated their hair. But despite centering his study on women, Obeyesekere interpreted the sexual significance of their hair in phallic terms. For example, the matted

locks that emerge from a woman's head are thought to represent the sublated penis of the god (Obeyesekere 1981: 33); in this way he says she is able to retain, not let go of, the phallus. The shaven heads of Buddhist monks, on the other hand, symbolize castration, the renunciation of sexuality for religious ends.

All three theorists appear to accept the psychoanalytic theory that sexuality is itself phallic by definition.⁹ For Leach the bone of contention is not so much whether sexuality is phallic, but whether the phallic origin of the symbolism is repressed (1958: 155). Sexual symbols, he argues, may be taboo, but that does not mean that they are unconscious: "the reason for the taboo is well known; these phallic symbols are 'sacred' because of their sexual significance" and that "when we meet with the use of phallic symbolism in religious rituals and in drama the meaning is usually consciously understood by the performers and consciously conveyed to the audience" (p. 155).¹⁰

But how does such a framework help us to understand the covering and binding of women's hair? And what would it make of a Turkish married woman whose hair cutting signified just the opposite of sexual renunciation—signified her initiation *into* sexual life? I cannot go so far as Hallpike who asserted that "there is no frequent association of head hair and male genitals" but I do go a long way in following his suggestion that the "symbolism is 'about' the world, rather than 'about' the subconscious . . . for it makes it possible to evaluate different explanations of a particular piece of symbolism in terms of how well they fit the facts" (1968: 263). The "world" of Turks includes a strong connection between sex and hair symbolism, but the meaning is specific to each gender. To understand the gendered meaning of hair, we need to understand something about the meanings of gender.

Meanings of Gender

In Turkish society, as in many others including our own, the meanings of male and female are felt to derive from their role in procreation. Yet understandings of this process vary cross-culturally as well as historically; the meanings are not naturally given but are culturally informed,¹¹ and within Turkish culture can vary somewhat between educated city people and villagers. Nevertheless, there are significant commonalities. I have discussed the

Turkish material at length elsewhere¹²; here I can give only an intimation.

The man begets, the woman gives birth. The male is thought to provide the generative, creative spark of life that bestows specific identity to persons and, if it is renewed in each generation of males, is theoretically eternal. The production of semen, therefore, signifies more than a sexual or physiological process; it is endowed with creativity and agency and is symbolically associated with divine activity.¹³ I do not mean that God procreates, rather that human men in procreating emulate God's creative ability. Semen carries the soul and the essential identity of a child which is why children are thought to belong to the man in a way they do not belong to the woman. The ancient notion that semen originates in the brain¹⁴ was alive and well in rural Turkey. The pride that is attributed to the male organ of generation is also conferred on men's heads or, more accurately, the two are seen as intimately connected.

The definition of maleness is not confined to bodilyness; it overflows its physical meaning and becomes generalized. For example, seminal production is also associated with intellectual production—expressed quite explicitly in the notion of "seminal idea"—a generative, creative idea. Men can produce brain children as well as physical ones; they can inseminate minds as well as bodies, establish intellectual lineages as well as biological ones.¹⁵ In contrast, women are imagined primarily as bodies and as providing the material that nourishes and sustains life. Thus, they become defined by and even more restricted to their physical roles. Male genitals are associated with the creative divine element and become a source of pride, whereas female genitals are thought to lack that element and are, therefore, felt to be a source of shame (cf. Delaney 1987; Hoffman-Ladd 1987). Unlike the penis, which receives a great deal of attention especially throughout childhood, female genitals are strictly taboo and are rarely mentioned. A woman's honor consists in keeping them under wraps so to speak, keeping them for the use of only one man. These specific meanings, I suggest, are displaced to the female head, where they become integrally related to the symbolism of hair.

Girls and boys, in rural Turkey at least, are relatively neuter as children; as infants, both are fully swaddled with their heads covered and as toddlers they are dressed in the same kind of pants and tops. And both are given the freedom to run in

and out of people's houses. Nevertheless, gender differences become focused on hair. Around the age of two a baby boy's hair is cut short and will be regularly trimmed. After that even playing with the headscarf can call upon his head a string of shaming comments. For example, an older sister teased her baby brother who had put on the headscarf, "Now you've become a girl." Their mother got angry and shouted at him, "You are male, you are male, take that off." Although both boys and girls are indulged and spoiled, girls seem to be more spoiled and less tame. Their hair, too, is free and often tangled. Hallpike's notion that unruly hair can symbolize a state of being outside society is useful here; while girls are not exactly outside of society, they will not enter it to the same extent that boys will, thus Hallpike's view that hair cutting indicates entrance into society requires a gendered analysis. In Turkey his notion applies only to boys. Boys are expected to show by their demeanor their recognition, and thus internalization, of their more exalted status. They are being groomed to enter into the public society of men, whereas girls will soon be confined to the private world of the home. More convincing perhaps is Firth's suggestion that rather than indicating a relation between inside/outside society, hair cutting may symbolize a transition from one type of social control to another (Firth 1973). Boys begin to learn that they must control themselves, whereas girls will be controlled externally.

Upon entering school boys have their heads almost shaved as they do when they enter the army or, for that matter, prison; and so it does seem to signify entrance into a disciplined regime. Girls may or may not have their hair cut at this time; it is believed that girls cannot become quite so disciplined.¹⁶ Nevertheless, even though children do have their hair cut occasionally they do not really become social beings until puberty and not fully adult until marriage. Since women must always be under the mantle of some man, it could be argued that they never really achieve full adult status.¹⁷

For boys there is a transitional stage before puberty. Sometime before the age of twelve, and generally after the age of five, boys are circumcised. They become socially gendered beings by the removal of a covering—the "veil of the penis" (Boddy 1988: 5), while girls become socially gendered when they are "veiled" by the headscarf. Girls cover the site of their shame; boys reveal the locus of their pride. The boy's penis is displayed

during the circumcision ceremonies, and it is the object of much attention (Orga 1950; Pierce 1964; Roper 1974) Thereafter the sight of the genitals is taboo and they are covered by clothes.¹⁸ The genitals are the pre-eminent site of gender but since they must be hidden, their meanings are displaced to the head where they can be publicly displayed. While the head can symbolize the genitals, it is not just a symbol of the phallus. As different meanings are attributed to the genitals of each gender, so too are the heads of men and women differently treated.

Puberty is the time when gender meanings become inscribed in bodily practices, and in Turkey practices relating to hair are prominent. The abstract notion of puberty as merely sexual maturity gives no indication of the specific cultural meanings, nor of the differences in meaning for girls and boys, nor finally of any implications beyond the physiological. For a boy, puberty is demonstrated by the ability to ejaculate and is interpreted as a sign that he can produce living "seed." Puberty is also exhibited by the emergence of both pubic and facial hair, an event that further associates the genitals with the head. Pubic hair should be neither seen nor mentioned and in Turkey, as noted, it is often removed. Nevertheless, the mustache sprouting above a boy's mouth is the emblem he can display to proudly proclaim his virility.

Women remove their pubic hair and cover their head hair. The fact that the removal of pubic hair is rationalized in terms of cleanliness suggests that it carries meanings of dirt and dank sexuality that might entrap men with its cloying tendrils. Women's sexuality is not allowed to run rampant, or to be displayed; instead it is covered and put under strict control. Women's hair, it would seem, comes to symbolize the physical entanglements by which men are ensnared, and thus must be kept out of sight. Women's sexuality is meant for men's pleasure; and while men are meant to enjoy sex, they should not become enmeshed in it. They are supposed to keep their emotional distance and their minds free (cf. Sabbah 1984: 117). The headscarf and other coverings are meant to facilitate that repose.

The sight of women's head hair, especially of unrelated women, is felt to trigger uncontrollable sexual desire in men, perhaps because of the connection between head hair and female genitals. As several men told me, "A woman's hair is the ruination of families." They meant not only that a wo-

man with uncovered hair would arouse a married man and cause him to commit adultery at least in his mind, but also that even within the house too much loose hair creates disturbance.

Hair may also evoke the image of Sirat, the bridge over which souls of the dead must walk. It is said to be the thickness of only one strand of hair; it slices the wicked like a razor and they fall into hell, but for the righteous it widens out into a path leading to heaven. The more pious men avowed that for every strand¹⁹ of hair that a woman shows, she is said to burn one day in hell. This is reiterated in Muslim scholarly texts, which may be why images of Muslim hell are full of women (Smith and Haddah 1975). Women's hair is a highly charged symbol of the power of female sexuality; men's attempts to control the latter may be symbolized by their attempts to control the former.

Women's hair and heads are covered in a number of ways (see Figures 1, 2, and 3), and there are a number of terms used to refer to these coverings. In other words, there is not one canonical form of head covering nor one cover term. The most common term was *çarsaf* (literally, bed linens), which could function almost as a generic term, but also refers to a large outer scarf that covers the upper body. *Yemeni* refers to the small, square, pastel-colored, and printed gauze scarves that women trim with beads and tatting. These can be tied in back or draped under the chin and tucked into the sides so that the face is surrounded. These were worn at all times regardless of what other coverings might be added. In our village these were worn even in the house, though they might be more loosely tied; allegedly these scarves were even worn to bed! In other villages I have heard that some women may remove the scarves at home among family. When a woman goes out to the street or visiting, she will add a larger, printed cotton scarf called a *yasmak* over the *yemeni*. Often the patterns of these scarves are specific to particular regions (for the pattern in our region, see Figure 2), and although there are a number of ways to drape them, they should cover not only the hair but also the shoulders and breasts. Villagers also used the term *dülbent* for a plain white scarf with or without trimming, and *basörtü* for West-

ern-type printed "silk" square that is tied like a kerchief under the chin. Normally this would be used for trips to the city. An *atki* is a large woolen square that is used in the winter. Neither in village, town, or city did I hear the word "turban," nor is it in my 1979 edition of the *Redhouse Turkish Dictionary*. "Turban" refers to the headcovering favored by the urban Islamic groups, but its recent use underscores the fact that the so-called Islamic headcovering is not a traditional type of covering but is, instead, a relatively recent phenomenon.

Small girls in the village played at covering themselves but the headscarf became obligatory at puberty. Puberty for a girl is signaled by menstruation—an indication that she is sexually open, that she is fertile. Her fertility, like that of the soil, must be enclosed in order that a man may know that the seed sowed there belongs to him. When a woman puts on the headscarf, she is referred to as *kapalı*—covered, closed. A woman who goes about bareheaded is referred to as *açık*; she is open and this implies that she is available and open to the advances of men. The headscarf is a sign that everyone can read and it says, "I am a proper woman, I am under the protective mantle of my father." He is guarantor of her sexuality until he transfers it to her husband upon marriage. By means of the headcovering she indicates that her fertile field is not free for the planting; it has boundaries and belongs to some man. These boundaries, like those of a field, cannot be transgressed without dire consequences.

Regardless of the actual physiological onset of puberty, for girls its social recognition (cf. Van Gennep 1909) is at the end of primary school when they are about twelve years old; at this time they must cover. Schools are state supported and secular, and during the time I was in Turkey neither female teachers nor students were permitted to wear headscarves.²⁰ The wearing of headscarves is not just a violation of the dress code but could be considered almost as treason. Such behavior could easily be interpreted as expressing a commitment to Islam that is over and above the allegiance expected toward the secular state that Atatürk worked so hard to establish.



Figure 1. A Bride with Braids.



Figure 2. Woman Wearing Scarf.



Figure 3. Girls Having a Tea Party.
(See outer scarves in tree.)

Currently, school attendance is obligatory only until the end of primary school or fifth grade. While the emphasis on the education of girls may vary between regions and between Sunni and Alevi villages, nevertheless, the majority of village girls did not (and probably still do not) attend school beyond the primary level. Therefore, the law banning headscarves in school was acceptable to most villagers and the conflict between religious custom and sentiment, on the one hand, and nationalist ideology and allegiance, on the other, was accommodated. Some of the meanings of sexuality and hair covering emerge in the case of girls who might like to continue school beyond fifth grade. Since a father's permission is necessary for a girl to continue in school, a girl who wished to do so would first have to convince her father to support her in this struggle; in going to school she would have to flaunt custom.

The few fathers I knew who did give permission for their daughters to attend middle school were called "communists." This had nothing to do with their political sentiments nor with what was being taught in school but had everything to do with "covering." Because these girls would be mingling freely with boys without the curtain of protection between them, it was as if their bodily boundaries were being compromised; metaphorically, it was as if they were common land.

Formerly, uncovered female heads were associated with the loose immorality of the West; during the time I was in Turkey, people invoked the association either to the West or to the Communist world, depending on context. In either case, however, it was interpreted as a capitulation to the material world rather than submission to the religious order of Islam. At the same time, it must be noted that women of the urban elite classes have long been oriented towards the West and many have been educated in the West. Women from these classes do go uncovered and have done so for some time. Atatürk considered Westernization a necessary aspect of modernization, and a major sign of modernity was, for him, uncovered women. In today's climate of antagonism to the West, some of these women have begun to adopt the *türban*. Before returning to that issue, there is yet one kind of hair to be addressed.

Although we have briefly touched upon the meaning of the mustache, we have not yet broached the topic of the beard. Since children, women, and eunuchs are beardless, the beard can

be utilized as a significant symbol of masculinity (Firth 1973: 285), but such an observation does not take us very far. While the beard can distinguish between age groups, and between men and women, it can also distinguish between different groups of men.²¹ So we need to ask what sort of masculinity does it symbolize? In traditional Islam the beard is "a mark of authority and piety" (Gaffney 1982: 56). Traditionally in Turkey, it is only older men, especially those who have made the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca, who are permitted to let their beards grow. A man who has made the *hajj* has completed the five conditions of faith, and having fulfilled his pious duties can legitimately wear a beard.

In Mecca, as men and women enter the sacred precinct, they are required to abstain from sexual activity for the period of the *hajj*. But since women's sexuality is at the command of men, the injunction is really directed to men. The symbolic association between sexuality, religion, and hair is further strengthened by the fact that during the *hajj* men let their hair and beards grow like the ascetics so much discussed in the anthropological literature about hair. Hair grooming would imply that their minds were still focused on worldly things when they should be focused on God. After the *hajj* rituals and the sacrifice that commemorates Abraham's ordeal have been completed, the *hajj* proper comes to an end and pilgrims re-enter the mundane world. Men cut their hair and shave their facial hair, women cut off a lock of hair. In this context hair cutting does not symbolize a cutting off of sexuality or a commitment to celibacy, in fact, just the reverse. It does mean, however, a renewal of commitment to a socially prescribed control and use of it. The theoretical implications of this hair behavior make it clear that while hair cutting may be used cross-culturally to symbolize some relation to sexuality, the actual meaning of that relation cannot be deduced from universal "facts," but must be empirically investigated in specific cultural contexts.

Upon return home from Mecca, the male pilgrims may again let their beards grow. Since they have fulfilled life's purposes, they are free to let their beard grow as they turn their minds to more lofty religious matters. At the same time, they must neither devote too much attention to the care of the beard nor ignore it to the extent that it becomes disheveled.²² A properly kept beard implies not just authority conferred by age as well as by

religion, but also connotes the wisdom to strike a balance in the use of that authority. For these reasons, the older men in the village I studied believed it was their prerogative to wear a beard, and they perceived young men with beards as both sacrilegious and rebellious. The older men would interpret such behavior as a direct threat to their authority. Not surprisingly, no youth in our village had a beard. And yet it is not so simple.

In other Muslim countries, for example, the beard has become a sign of affiliation with some of the new conservative, "fundamentalist" Muslim groups (Gaffney 1982). For some young men, therefore, the beard is a sign of *their* piety and the authority that goes with religious observance. However, this phenomenon was not so prevalent in Turkey during the late 1970s and early 1980s where a bearded youth was more often assumed to be a member of a leftist, Marxist group. In either case, it is clear that a young man wearing a beard was seen as a threat to authority. While the use of a trimmed beard by a Muslim man and the covering of hair by Muslim women can both be interpreted as resistance to the West, there is still a major difference. A woman's adoption of the headscarf indicates a return to traditional values which include submission not just to God but also to male authority.

The dress code that prohibited female university students from wearing a headscarf was modified in 1980 to prohibit male university students from wearing beards; both were interpreted as threats to the authority of the secular state. In the university context whether the beard was interpreted as a symbol of leftist or rightist tendencies, it was nevertheless interpreted as a symbol of those who sabotage the order of the state. In this instance the secular state seems ironically to have appropriated the mantle of the sacred (cf. Toprak 1981; Delaney 1991). A Turkish friend of mine confided that every time he returns to Turkey he shaves off his beard because he wants to avoid the social consequences of its meanings. Not just beards but "during the 1970s mustaches in Turkey became a symbolic badge of political identity" (Starr 1991: xviii-xix). Certain styles of mustaches were classified as "leftist"—especially those that were bushy and turned down on the side of the mouth. This style was known as *Stalin biyiği* (Stalin mustache). In contrast, those with the edges curved up recalled the styles of the Ottomans and were, at least in the 1960s, emblematic of the

"rightist" nationalists. Mustaches are occasionally tolerated in the Army, only for officers, but they are not approved. In any case, they must be thin and neither cover the upper lip nor extend beyond it. Beards of any style, however, are not permitted in the army.

Because the significance of hair in Turkey is at once sexual, religious, and political, it becomes entwined in different ways in different contexts for different people. Men, clearly, have their own issues and problems with hair that are different from those that affect women. But the meaning of women's head covering is not unrelated; it is neither an isolated phenomenon nor uniform in meaning. The meaning is different for rural women from what it is for urban women, and urban women are hardly unified over this issue. The meaning of the headscarf is also different depending on whether the context is Europe or Turkey and different for the Alevi minority as opposed to the Sunni majority. Class differences may be involved but class is not the decisive indicator. The issue is significant primarily for those women who wish to make a self-conscious statement about their religious sentiments and commitments. Whether urban women express their reasons for covering as emancipation from the male gaze, devotion to Islam, or more politically as resistance to the West, the sexual, religious, and political meanings are not separate.

The Headscarf Debate

The foregoing discussion should make it clear that the headscarf debate is far more complicated than it has hitherto been portrayed. Because the debate has been so narrowly focused on the political issues of individual rights and freedom of religion, there has been no examination of the cultural logic or rationale behind the differential meanings and values of male and female bodies, of sexuality, and of gender.

A number of women are protesting the law that prohibits them from wearing the headscarf to schools, especially to the universities. They argue that they have a right to do so and that the abrogation of this right is a restriction of the freedom of religion and an infringement of individual rights. Framed this way, the issue has ironically united some people on the left with those of the conservative right. But other female students ask, "If I support their right to wear Islamic scarves, will they

tolerate my mini-skirt?"²³ The ironies of the debate have been obscured by this rhetoric, for those who demand the right to wear the scarf are using what are essentially Western liberal arguments to protest *against* the West. Their portrait of the West highlights stereotypic images of women as loose, immoral, and scantily clad beings. Neither they nor their Western sympathizers have asked whose vision/version of Western women is being used? Why is there so little awareness that these images have been painted primarily by men both in Muslim countries and in the West? And correlatively, why has there been no counter-protest from Western women, many of whom are well aware that these images of womanhood are further fetishized and exploited by the advertising that is necessary to increase the demand for all kinds of commodities that support Western economies. What these Muslim women do not seem to realize is that the vision of women they reject is also one many Western women reject and struggle against. But for Western women to counter these stereotypic and damaging images by covering themselves and adopting something equivalent to "Islamic dress" would imply that at some level they accept the stereotypes.

Another factor overlooked in the debate is its urban character. It is carried on by young women who have considerable freedom to express and exercise their choices. Of course, if suggestions that some of these women are being paid by Islamic "fundamentalists" to wear turbans to the universities prove to be true, their credibility and freedom of expression will be undermined. In any case, these women do not speak for the greater numbers of women who are not as free to express their choices, caught as they are in networks of small town and village pressures from family and friends. Even among the urban elite, this pressure exists. It can be subtle and is more reflexive of background and peer group, and sometimes is overt. But in villages the sentiment and weight of the entire community comes to bear on women's heads. The women demanding the right to wear the headscarf and their Western supporters rarely consider how their actions may affect the thousands of women who are not privy to this debate.

The argument for covering and "Islamic dress" known in the Arab world as *hijab* is that it removes women from being perceived as erotic and sexual objects (Sherif 1987) and no doubt it does provide that kind of shelter. At the same time, however, one could just as easily argue that cover-

ing advertises their entire body as an erotic object. Among certain Muslims that seems to be behind the notion of covering:

Key concepts relating to the Islamic ideology of female modesty are contained in the words '*awra*, *fitna*, and *zina*. That is, the entire body of a woman (except her face and hands) is to be treated as pudenda; it is a vulnerable, weak object that must be covered to avoid embarrassment and shame. Even the voice of a woman is '*awra* and should not be heard (Hoffman-Ladd 1987: 43).²⁵

Clearly, a closed mouth is symbolically analogous to a closed vagina, for women to speak openly is almost equivalent to exposing themselves.²⁶ Not only is the equation between the female head, in this case the mouth, and the genitals reinforced, the equation has specific gendered meaning. As men call things into being with their "seed," so too do they have the power to call things into being with the word. It is their prerogative to initiate conversation (as well as sex) and to define the situation, including what is Islam. This does not mean that women do not speak, but the cultural wisdom is that their words carry no weight. They are not generative or definitive. These ideas are not unique to Turkey; they are familiar to Christians in Paul's command: "Let a woman learn in all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent" (Tim. 2: 11). Curiously, this passage occurs immediately after a demand that women not adorn themselves with jewels and braided hair! Women, at least in some circles, are speaking out but they struggle against a cultural and religious tradition that has discouraged them; when they usurp the prerogative of men to speak out publicly, they threaten the social order legitimated by those traditions.

Conclusion

Notions of gender are deeply entangled with meanings of hair in Turkish society. The women calling for their right to wear the headscarf and their Western sympathizers seem not to realize that whether women wear the scarf or not, whether we are covered or uncovered, we are still being defined by our bodies in ways that men are not.

The polarization between covering or not covering not only divides women but in the process obscures the much larger issue—how to transform the meanings of the female body and sexuality. Finally, I suggest that urban Muslim women are do-

ing exactly what they accuse some of their Western sisters of doing—presuming to speak for those who

do not have a voice and who have never had a choice whether or not to cover their hair.

NOTES

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¹For example, anyone who was a teenager in the 1950s in the United States can recall the response of parents and "straights" to the male hair style called a DA. DA did not mean District Attorney; it was not a lawful hair style but rather a flippant tail (Duck's Ass) turned on authority. Firth (1973) has an excellent discussion about public reaction to long-haired youths in the 1960s, then compares it with the Tikopia and makes it clear that the meaning is culturally specific. More recently such response has been transferred to people with punk styles or skinheads. Blacks make statements by straightening their hair or wearing an Afro, weaving their hair into cornrows or letting it matt into dreadlocks. As Hebdige (1979) has shown for youth groups in Britain, hair styles can index an entire system of meaning.

²The number of books that include "veil" in the title, and whether written by Middle Easterners or Westerners, for example, *Veiled sentiments, Beyond the veil, Behind the veil in Arabia*, would seem to cater to and perpetuate the exoticization of the other. What is often forgotten by Westerners is the fact that until fairly recently women in the West wore hats when they went out publicly and always covered their heads upon entering church. This custom is attributed to Paul's statement: "A man ought not to cover his head since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man" (1 Cor. 2: 7).

³For an excellent discussion of this issue in Turkey, see Olson 1985 and for a similar discussion in Germany, see Mandel 1989.

⁴My research in Turkey was conducted between September 1979 and June 1982, twenty months of which were spent in a village in central Anatolia. A full account of that work can be found in Delaney 1991. I have also made observations during two return visits in the summers of 1986 and 1992.

⁵Berg (1951) suggests that massaging the head during hair washing may have sexual connotations and that the white froth of shampoo can be associated with semen. I do not know whether any such association was made by villagers but their feeling that using shampoo was somehow sinful may relate to this. The relation between head hair and sexuality was, however, involved in villagers' reactions against the practice of urban Turkish women to go to beauty salons to have their hair cut, and therefore touched, by men.

⁶Compare Firth (1973: 273) for discussion of the meaning of braids among certain American college girls in the 1950s.

⁷The number forty is very prevalent in Turkey and Islam as well as in a number of other traditions. One need only think of the 40 days and 40 nights that Noah's ark was tossed upon the flood, or the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness. See also

Brandeis 1987.

⁸That has been true of most other anthropological analyses; Hershman (1974) is a partial exception. He discusses everyday practices related to hair among Hindus and Sikhs. He faults Hallpike (1969) for his lack of a "theory to explain why hair in particular is chosen to symbolize social control" and feels "inclined towards the Freudian position that the subconscious symbolism of hair is sexual" (p. 291). But when it comes to specific ceremonies such as the Punjabi mourning rites, he says "It does not necessarily follow that the symbolism of hair will also be sexual" (p. 291).

⁹The phallocentric bias in psychoanalytic theory has been challenged by a number of feminist theorists. In addition, they have shown that it lacks an adequate theory of female sexuality. Does woman have a sex, is she a sex? See especially Luce Irigaray 1985.

¹⁰I might agree with Leach that phallic symbols are sacred, but only because of their meaning within a particular theory of sexuality in which the male contribution to procreation is considered to be the generative element. This is what allies him with divine creativity. While this theory of procreation is widespread, it is not universal.

¹¹Scientific theory is itself a product of particular social, historical, and cultural circumstances, has changed over the centuries, and is unevenly disseminated throughout the world. Especially is that true of contemporary genetic theory which has only become widely known in Western culture during the last seventy years or so. Genetic theory, in which both male and female contribute to the essential constitution of a new person, has failed to dislodge some of the older images and ideas. Many children are still told that "the daddy plants the seed." And as feminist D. Dinnerstein notes "pre-natal fathering . . . includes not only the initial planting of the *seed*, but a long period of protective, expectant, imaginative waiting" (1977: 149, emphasis added). She continues, "the fragility of his tie to the *seed* that he *buries* for so many months in the dark center of another" (p. 151, emphasis added). A song by Paul Anka contains the common phrase, "She's having my baby." Consider also the fact that although women may have "seminal" thoughts, the use of that word perpetuates the idea that creative, original thinking is masculine in character. Furthermore, a number of feminist scientists have noted the way these ideas are perpetuated in scientific theory itself (cf. Tuana 1989; The Biology and Gender Study Group 1989; Martin 1991).

¹²For a fuller account of my theoretical approach to notions of procreation and their significance see Delaney 1986, 1987, and 1991.

¹³These notions are hardly unique to the village in Turkey where I did my fieldwork; they have a long history in the West as well. They are explicitly stated by Aristotle and are implicit in the Bible, and both have had a profound effect on Western notions of gender. The similarity in Turkey may relate to the fact that Islam has been heavily influenced by both Aristotle and biblical stories; however, this does not mean that villagers today are familiar with those texts.

¹⁴This notion can be traced to Aristotle, for example, in *Generation of animals*, but may not have originated with him. See also Onians 1951. My own feeling is that this belief also

relates to the story in which Zeus "gives birth" to Athene from his head. Little known is the fact that he first devoured her pregnant mother, Metis, wisest of all the gods.

¹⁸In a Christian context it is perhaps no coincidence that schools established to study the sacred text, the seminal word of God (*logos spermatikos*) were called seminaries.

¹⁹After reading a draft of this paper, a Turkish friend wrote to me about the following practice:

With the custom of taking young girls as *besleme* for household (which means that the girl will then begin to live in the new household), one of the first things usually done to the young girl is to have her change her name, and also to cut her hair really short. There is a hygienic explanation often given to the hair cutting (the girl comes into a middle or upper-class family from a rural or working-class environment, and it is assumed she may carry *bit* (lice), but I think the hair cutting must also have identity implications for the girl in question.

²⁰A divorced woman would usually return to her father's house but a widow would stay in the home of her dead husband and come under the protection and control of his father or brothers. Although several women in the village left their husbands for periods of time, the couples were eventually reunited. There were no divorced women in the village and no divorce occurred while I was there. (Cf. Starr 1985 for a very different situation in the area around Bodrum.) Urban, highly educated women told me how difficult it was to live alone after a divorce because they were presumed to be sexually promiscuous. While women in Turkey have many rights equal to men, a man was able to determine domicile and had to give permission for his daughter or wife to work, at least until the 1989 Constitution. Legal rights, in any case, do not guarantee social equity; this is as true in the United States as in Turkey.

²¹Nevertheless, some Turkish men, particularly in urban areas, continue to draw attention to the genitals by wearing tight pants and/or by touching the genital area as they strut down the street. I do not know whether this behavior is almost unconscious since it goes unnoticed by most Turks, or whether it is done specifically to provoke foreign women. It was an aspect of my own experience and a number of foreign women have commented about this to me. It was not, however, my experience in the village.

²²Firth (1973: 267-268) suggests that the power of even a single strand of female hair to move men is a theme not unique to Turkey or Islam but also contained in the literature of the West.

²³Since that time and because of the protests of some women and their male supporters about their right to wear the headscarf, a number of conflicting laws have been passed. Apparently the government permitted headcovering in universities by special bill in 1988; but then President Evren annulled the bill through the Anayasa Makemesi (Constitutional Court) in 1989. Meanwhile, Turkey's Higher Education Council, known as YOK lifted the headscarf ban in December 1989 and the then new President Turgut Özal approved. Now, universities are caught between the Constitutional Court and the Higher Education Council and each university seems to be making its own decision on the matter. See *The Turkish Times*, January 17, 1990.

²⁴For example, a beard can be used to distinguish between priests and other men and even between different kinds of priests, but the meaning cannot be known a priori. "In Eastern Christianity beards have traditionally been held appropriate for priests, but this has not been the view of the Western church, where there has been considerable divergence of opinion" as well as custom (Firth 1973: 285). Firth goes on to suggest that the wearing of beards by Eastern Orthodox Christian priests may have the connotation that they are more manly but are also of lower status since they are also permitted to have wives. Yet, it is not quite so simple, because even if Western priests go beardless and are unmarried and even if it is accepted that they are of higher and more sacred status, an uncomfortable contradiction looms. It would seem to imply that higher, more sacred status is closer to femininity than to masculinity and that seems to fly in the face of all the cultural evidence.

²⁵See the treatise by Al-Makki (d. 996) 1978: 101.

²⁶*The Turkish Times*, December 14, 1989. The argument from "individual rights" seems misplaced since it does not seem to work both ways. Nor does it take into account the fact that women in a number of Islamic countries have been killed for not wearing the veil. For example, two young women waiting at a bus station in Algeria were killed allegedly because they were unveiled. See *The New York Times*, March 31, 1994.

²⁷It also seems ironic, if not tragic, that as the sociopolitical boundaries and walls dividing peoples of the world are coming down, the sexual barriers between men and women as well as those creating divisions among women are going up. For forty-three years, between 1939 and 1979, the *chador* was officially outlawed in Iran. For a similar amount of time, though beginning and ending a few years later, a wall divided East and West. And just as peace in the Middle East seems possible to think about, uncovered Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza have been harassed by paint-slinging, name-calling male youths who police the streets. These youths are calling for women to adopt the head covering and even face veil in order "to keep our morals and traditions intact" (*The New York Times*, August 22, 1991). Not only are these young Muslim men asserting their dominance over women, they are also helping to keep the divisions between Muslims and Jews inviolate.

²⁸Hoffman-Ladd also defines the words: '*awra* as weak spot, pudenda; *fitna* as temptation, chaos, discord, and *zina* as adornment, beauty. The *zina* "that may be shown in public is the face and hands, whereas the hidden *zina* is the rest of the body" (1987: 29). She makes a very interesting and convincing argument that what is considered Islamic dress or *hijab* is actually contemporary and not at all traditional Islamic dress. She also goes on to discuss the way in which the women wearing *hijab* are in fact perceived as a threatening and therefore somewhat aggressive presence in modern Egyptian society, a perception at odds with the rationale for wearing it! Is adopting the master's symbols ever a way to freedom?

²⁹The surrealist painter Magritte seemed to give expression to these ideas in his painting "Le Viol." It is a female head with flowing hair, yet the face is a nude female torso—breasts for eyes, genital area for mouth. A woman's head is erotic, but she is mute: a woman should be seen and not heard.

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