



TURKISH DELIGHT IN VIENNA: ART, ISLAM, AND EUROPEAN PUBLIC CULTURE

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ABSTRACT This article focuses on the ways in which the European aesthetic realm becomes a battleground of intercultural and intercivilizational conflicts as well as a domain of borrowings and mixings between “native” and “Islamic” values, thereby creating a transnational public sphere. Through a two-way interpretation of a controversial statue depicting a naked woman with headscarf, entitled *Turkish Delight* and exhibited in a public garden in front of the Kunsthalle Museum in Vienna in 2007 before it was wrenched from its pedestal and left lying on the ground, the author examines how the artistic scene as an interactive space between art and politics, between cultures and publics, participates in the elaboration of a bond between

Muslims and Europeans, a bond not without elements of confrontation and violence. It is argued that while the statue violates the intimacy and piety of a Muslim woman by exposing her nakedness to the public gaze, it also seeks ways to relate to the familiar other, Turkish migrants in Europe, albeit in a provocative manner. The purpose of this analysis is to demonstrate how the public space is not fixed once and for all but is always being recreated anew and inhabited through performativity, conflict and confrontation.

KEYWORDS: public sphere, art, Islam, Europe, migration, post-colonialism, post-orientalism



A new European public culture is emerging as a result of the encounter with issues concerning Islam. This is an ongoing process through which Islam, from being an external reference, is becoming an internal one in shaping European self-awareness and politics. The categories of Europe and Islam are inadequate to describe this process; they refer to large, macro-scale realities, both too obvious and too vague, a universal religion (Islam) and a historical entity (Europe). It is difficult to relate them; they convey a sense of separation and fixity, whereas the frontiers between the two have become porous at the level of everyday practice and politics. What is at stake is the “indigenization” of Islam, its re-territorialization in Europe, which calls for a two-way awareness and confrontation; Muslims relate religious beliefs with their secular life-experiences in Europe and in turn Europeans engage with Muslim assertions of religious and cultural difference. The European public culture is potentially being conveyed in these encounters, mirroring practices and cross-reflexivity. The realm of art emerges in this process as a privileged interface in relating as well as confronting different publics and cultures.

The incompatibility of these cultural and religious codes and the fact that they cross paths in European public life engenders new forms of confrontation; the domain of visual arts becomes one of the battlegrounds of intercultural (and intercivizational) conflict as well as one of borrowings and mixings. By European public culture therefore I refer to new forms (including aesthetic forms) of intercultural interaction, to a process of mutual interpenetration, in which sexuality, religion, and violence are intertwined in particular ways and play a central role.

To depict the ways in which a European public culture is emerging in its encounter with Islamic difference, I shall first adopt a broad perspective and then narrow it down to a controversy over a statue that was exhibited in the park of a public museum in Vienna in 2007. The statue, entitled *Turkish Delight* by its German sculptor Olaf Metzger, represents a naked woman wearing only a headscarf. I shall use this example to try to highlight the ways in which the realm

of art reveals and fashions the public controversies in relation to Muslim migrants in present-day Europe. Women are central to these controversies as markers of the distinction between private and public, between religious morals versus secular liberties, but also between different notions of self and civilization.

1. THINKING ACROSS CIVILIZATIONS

Let me start by adopting a broad perspective in time and in space to open up our ways of thinking about the relations between different civilizations, before focusing on present-day Europe. *What Time Is It There? The Americas and Islam at the dawn of Modernity* is the title of a book by Serge Gruzinski, in which he reminds us that the Ottomans did not wait until the twenty-first century to be interested in the “West,” in what was then called the “New World,” the Americas. A book well known to historians had already been published in 1580 in Istanbul under the title *The History of Western India* (in Turkish: *Tarih-i Hindi-i Garbi*) that illustrated well the interest that Ottomans had in understanding the New World, the Americas, that was referred to as Western India (Gruzinski 2008: 36). Likewise, as the author argues, peoples in the New World were interested in the Ottomans. A book published in Mexico in 1606 devoted two chapters to Ottoman history. By juxtaposing two quasi-contemporary texts, namely a chronicle of the New World written in Istanbul and a Directory of Time published in Mexico that focuses extensively on the Empire of the Turks, the author brings out the interconnections between two visions, between different civilizations separated in time and in space, that of Islam and of America, irreducibly different, yet already, before modern times, aware of each other (Gruzinski 2008: 57–9).

Comparing the incomparable, here Istanbul and Mexico, enables us to open up a new perspective in our readings across civilizations and move away from the Euro-centered representations of modernity, which subordinate and obliterate experiences in other parts in the world. Gruzinski’s way of thinking “across civilizations” in the pre-modern era resonates, in a reverse manner, with that of Huntington’s thesis of the “clash of civilizations” in the modern world. What might capture one’s attention is that Turkey and Mexico appear central in both accounts, albeit to tell a very different story. In the view of Huntington the two countries do not invalidate his thesis because Turkey and Mexico are seeking to affiliate with a civilization that is different from their own, and therefore are “torn-between” countries, living the clash within (Huntington 1996: 138–51).

Whether the two countries represent “torn between” or “in-between” cultures depends on our ways of reading and interpreting social reality, but also on the ways history will unfold. As we can observe in present-day politics, the history of Westernization in Turkey (synonymous with Europeanization for the nineteenth-century reformists) in no way convinced Turkish society to give up its Islamic

cultural customs and heritage. Nor did it convince Europeans to embrace Turkey into the European Union. On the contrary, Turkish membership seems less legitimate today in the eyes of many European citizens than in the past, in spite of Turkey's political determination to implement the institutional and judicial reforms that are required by the European Union. The Turkish presence in Europe has created resentment in cultural terms; it is feared that the acceptance of Turkey will undermine European identity and blur European frontiers. Likewise, the Mexican immigrants, who are, according to Huntington, reluctant to participate in the American language, civic rites, and virtues common to all, create a potential threat to the cultural and political integrity of the United States (Huntington 2004).

Drawing on the examples of Mexico and Turkey, we can argue that both countries, in different ways, have today become markers of frontiers, both geographical and cultural, in relation to the "two Wests": America and Europe. It becomes a question of identity for the West. They ask "Who are we?" in the mirror reflection of the Hispanic and Muslim presence and attempt to distinguish the cultural features specific to American and European culture. One should recall that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the notion of "Western civilization" was synonymous with the idea of "Universal" claim to embrace different cultures, nations, and religions of the world. This assertion had a particular impact on non-Western histories. Colonization was carried out in the name of universal modernity as well as voluntary modernization. Turkey and Mexico in this respect are two examples where French positivism and *laïcité*, or secularism, have had an important impact on the minds of national reformists in the respective countries; for them the path of modernization would lead to membership of the "Civilized Nations." The notion of "Civilization" was equated with the prefix "Western" and modernity was thought to be religion free. In present-day politics the use of the notion of "civilization" is undergoing a semantic shift; after having been discarded during a period characterized by critiques of Western colonialism, to be followed by that of postmodern cultural relativism, it is coming back again into the public discourse of European countries (Arjomand 2004: 344–5). But this time instead of assuming Universalist garb, the notion of civilization tries to capture the cultural distinctiveness of the European experience, thereafter called European cultural values, in contrast to those of Islam. One cannot refrain from drawing a parallel between the end of a postmodern mindset, cultural relativism, and the advent of debates over Islamic issues in the European public sphere; these debates called for ordering differences, establishing a hierarchy of values, and possibly even searching for Western hegemony over definitions of modern cultural values.

2. EUROPE: PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE WITH ISLAM

Let me narrow our angle further and pursue the notion of civilizational difference and how it made its way into the public debates of present-day Europe.

The idea of Europe as a distinct civilization from Islam came to be expressed during the debates that started in 2002 over the membership of Turkey in the EU. Turkey played a seminal role in prompting a public debate on European identity and cultural values. Until then European issues were mainly restricted to economic and political issues and were discussed within the political realm and negotiated with European bureaucrats. Likewise, Turkish membership was considered to be a question of international politics, belonging to the domain of foreign affairs. However, in the space of a few years, issues over Turkish membership have mobilized public opinion, bringing the question of European identity and values to the foreground. In parallel to this shift, not only did the Turkish application for membership become part of “domestic” politics in European countries, but it also provoked a wider debate over the cultural and religious definition of Europe, its frontiers, and its identity.

The very legitimacy of the membership of Turkey in the European Union was to be first questioned in France (and not in Germany where most Turkish migrants live). It was Giscard d’Estaing, a former president of France and the then head of the European Union’s Constitutional Convention (in 2002) who was the first to argue against Turkish membership overtly. In his opinion the acceptance of Turkey would mean the “end of Europe,” as Turkey belonged to a “different culture, different approach, and different way of living.” His words were to express what many European politicians thought privately as did also many private citizens.¹ This statement broke a taboo especially in France where Republican Universalism is esteemed to be a way of overcoming and if necessary silencing, religious and cultural differences. The French Republican secular heritage, referred to as French singularity (or “French exceptionalism”) is defended in many ways in opposition to the multiculturalism of the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Ironically, the arguments against Turkish membership brought the notion of civilization into public discourse, but with a semantic shift away from French Universalism; it was a concept which resonated with that of Huntington’s use, or the German notion of *kultur*.

The debate on Turkish membership turned into one about European frontiers and European identity. Whether Turkey belonged to Europe or not was discussed in different European contexts, in reference to differences in the geographical borders, historical heritage, and cultural values. The “othering” of Turkey from Europe was also meant to draw the boundaries of Europe, and determine whether they were defined in geographical, historical, or religious, namely civilizational, terms.

Turkey as the only Muslim-majority candidate for membership of the European Union and a Muslim-migrant country crystallized in different ways the presence of Muslims both from within and outside Europe. Turkish membership was feared to be a “Trojan horse” which would carry Islam into Christian lands; it was perceived as a “forced marriage,” one imposed by political elites but resented by European people; it would mean renouncing the victory of Europe over the Ottoman Empire in 1683 at the gates of Vienna. In sum, for Europeans accepting Turkey would mean blurring European identity and extending its frontiers towards the dangerous East.

A second move towards redefining European identity can be located in regard to the debates over its Christian roots. A tacit equation between Europe and Christianity has been expressed more and more overtly in recent public debates. Pope Benedict in his widely quoted speech at Regensburg in 2006 argued that Christianity, contrary to Islam, is a religion of reason and invited European intellectuals not to dismiss Christian spiritual sources in defining European identity. Whether or not there should be a reference to Christian values in the European Constitution was the subject of intense debate among the member countries of Europe before it was refuted by the leadership of France.

These examples enable us to depict the changing self-presentation of Europeans in their encounters with the different aspects of Islam. European self-presentation is based on a discourse of civilization, but the notion of civilization changes from claiming to be universal to being particular, to European distinctiveness. The question of difference, whether it is religious, cultural, or ethnic, is framed in a discourse about civilization and in an attempt to draw boundaries with Islam. By Islam, I am not referring here to a historical, theological macro-entity, but to the controversial ways Islam enters European society: Turkish membership, the French headscarf debate, honor killings in Germany, the Danish cartoon controversy, the assassination of the film director, Theo Van Gogh, in the Netherlands, and al-Qaeda attacks in Madrid, London, and Istanbul. These are different acts and deeds in different national settings, but each refers to a controversy involving Islam in Europe. These controversies have engendered a series of conceptual debates ranging from veiling to martyrdom; from gender equality to violence; from freedom of expression to blasphemy. In different ways they all contribute to the ways Islam is being anchored in the European public sphere, memory, and legislation, leading to a more general debate on the cultural values of Europe.

Islam – which was once thought to be a ghostly presence from the past, a relic expected to fade away with the process of modernization and secularization – today comes onto the stage of contemporary Europe. As a result of immigration and globalization, the issues over Islam are not confined to one geographic space, such as the Middle East, or to a Muslim-majority nation-state, like Turkey or Iran, but have become part of European reality. The presumed time lag

in modern discourse between those who are advanced and those who lag behind disappears. The geographical separation between those who are considered to be civilized and the rest ceases to reassure. The initial question “What time is it there?” evoked at the beginning of this essay, pointed to the differences in time zone and to the geographical distance, which now disappear. Europeans and Muslims have now become close to one another in the same time zone and share – not always willingly and with the same desires – the same public spheres, schools, politics, and daily life. The notion of civilization enters present-day European politics where time lag and geographical separation between people and civilizations no longer apply.

Theories of Orientalism and post-colonialism have helped us to frame the question of difference between the West and the Oriental world in terms of domination, between the power of the colonizer and the colonized subordinate, between the majority and minority groups.² The critiques of Orientalism dealt with the ways in which the “distant” or “exotic” other was constructed by the dominant Western discourse and imaginations. Post-colonial theories brought to our attention (as the prefix “post-” encapsulates) the histories of the past that had been discarded, and suppressed by colonial narratives. Multiculturalism posed a challenge to the monocultural foundations of the nation-state, bringing race and gender issues, and majority and minority rights into the political realm. However neither multicultural politics, nor post-colonial approaches, or Orientalist critiques fully capture the present-day European Muslim migrant history. Multiculturalism refers to the question of difference as an identity issue, but dismisses issues of agency, social interaction, and ambivalence. Post-colonialism describes the power relations stemming from a particular historical experience, that of colonialism. Even though post-colonial history underpins the different national modes of encounter in present-day Europe, such as between France and Algerians, or Britain and Indians, the history of migration in Europe is not exclusively that of post-colonialism. In this respect, the relationship between Germany and the migrant Turks, which is not linked to a colonial past, is significant in drawing on the novel features of the encounter. In present-day discourse the representation of the “other” has shifted from the distant unknown “Orient” to that of Muslims living in proximity with Europeans, and perceived as threatening intruders. The political revival of Islam has transformed European perceptions of Muslims, and has also transferred the study of Islam from classical Orientalism to political science. The notion of Orientalism in no way suffices to describe the public depictions and meanings of contemporary Islam. While the presence of Muslims in Europe is not a recent phenomenon, and Europeans have had a long relationship with the Islamic world, the way Europeans and Muslims have become aware of each other’s presence, confronting their differences, and debating the aesthetic and ethical dimensions

of modernity is a contemporary challenge. We need to elaborate a new analytical framework to bring out the dynamics of cultural confrontation in spatial proximity; a process that provokes, in spite of the asymmetrical relations of power and desire, a two-way exchange between Muslims and “indigenous” Europeans.

A process of cultural intermingling takes place; however, instead of leading to peaceful co-existence this has given rise to a series of antagonistic debates and events, through which both sides are transformed. I have tried to capture this process in terms of “mutual interpenetration” between Islam and Europe and highlight

Figure 1
Olaf Metzel, *Turkish Delight*, 2006.
© Kunsthalle Wien public space. Photograph: Wolfgang Woessner.



its embodied, gendered, and violent dimensions (Göle 2005). The German word used to translate it is *Anverwandlungen* (Göle 2008): an old word, seldom used, which conveys well the sense of change of the self and the other, the metamorphoses that ensue from proximity. I am arguing in this paper that the synchronic proximity between Muslims and Europeans engenders an antagonistic bond between the two that leads, albeit unintentionally, to the transformation of public culture. Muslims enter public space bringing issues that are considered to be anachronistic in European modernity, such as religion, Islamic covering of women, martyrdom, blasphemy, and violence. In turn, Europeans engage in relating to these issues in different ways, in diverse voices and from different perspectives. There is a two-way transgression, mutual crossings of the symbolic and spatial boundaries that provoke anxiety, change and violence. I shall try to illustrate the social choreography in question by means of a controversy over the statue of a woman.

3. PUBLIC BODIES AND SPATIAL TRANSGRESSIONS

This is about a public sculpture, a life-size bronze female figure entitled *Turkish Delight*, which is naked apart from a headscarf covering her hair. It is the work of a well-known German artist, Olaf Metzger, and it was exhibited in front of the Kunsthalle Museum in Karlsplatz in Vienna in November 2007. Not surprisingly, the artwork failed to delight many members of the Turkish migrant community living in the city; for some it was offensive to Turkish women, for some an affront to national pride, and for others an insult to their religious values. Whether to defend gender, national, or religious identity, or all three at once, the Turkish community raised their voices and requested its removal. A few months later, the statue was wrenched from its pedestal and left lying on the ground in the public garden. Two men who damaged the statue were caught on security video; although they were not officially identified, they were presumed to be members of the Turkish migrant community. After all, the statue's title, *Turkish Delight*, made it clear that it was addressed to the Turkish community and not to Muslim migrants in general. Later a young member of one of the most influential business families in Turkey discreetly bought the statue for his private art collection and museum in Istanbul. His gesture can be read as a desire to remedy the act of intolerance of his fellow Turks, but also as a "performative" act (possessing the undesired object). Not only did he endorse the defense of the freedom of artistic expression but also silently and "non-discursively" took part in the public debate that followed the removal of the sculpture.

After the forcible removal of the statue, a new exhibition took place in the Kunsthalle Museum (January 24 – March 16, 2008). It was called "Footnotes on Veiling: *Mahrem*." The exhibition came to Vienna from Istanbul (from the Santralistanbul artspace in Bilgi University as part of my own project and with Emre Baykal as the

Figure 2
 Olaf Metzger, *Turkish Delight*, 2006.
 © Kunsthalle Wien public space. Photograph: Wolfgang Woessner.



curator). The new exhibition was a continuation of the headscarf issue but with a broader perspective on public–private distinctions and included works by artists from different national backgrounds – Iranian, Turkish, Algerian, Syrian, Portuguese, Muslim, and secular – mainly women artists but also men, living in different cities in the Middle East and Europe. It was meant to initiate an intercultural way of looking at things and to pursue the public debate in a new manner, in an introspective manner. In the words of a Muslim member of the Viennese community, the “*Mahrem*” (the title of my book in Turkish and meaning interior, sacred, gendered space) exhibition provided a veil for, and covered the nudity of, the *Turkish Delight* statue. This was not intended. Yet it meant that the exhibition brought to mind the sense of interiority from a gendered perspective and entered into communication with the previous exhibition, namely the naked statue, while adding a new layer to the public debate. It illustrates the role of transnational dynamics and cultural mobility in shaping the European public sphere. The latter is emerging in debating ways of inhabiting space, ways of separating interior and exterior spaces, and differentiating the values of the sacred from the profane. The effect of cultural mobility and transnational circuits is to link different cultures and past memories together in many different and competing ways. European public culture emerges as a result of these multilayered juxtapositions and competing constellations.

The artworks themselves followed a transnational circuit and brought different peoples and nations into contact; the *Turkish Delight* statue was first created and exhibited in Germany, and then in Vienna, and now remains in Istanbul (if it is ultimately exhibited in Turkey, one wonders what meanings it will take on in a non-migrant

context). The “*Mahrem*” exhibition opened in Istanbul, then moved to Vienna and later to Berlin, to two cities which are particularly important in Ottoman-Turkish history. The exhibition reversed the direction of the flow of art, shifting the center from European cities to Istanbul. Not only did the artworks and exhibitions circulate among different publics, and gain different meanings, but also different national publics were brought into contact with each other by means of these controversies. The headscarf issue, in crossing the geographical frontiers and private–public boundaries, ceased to be a Muslim–Muslim concern, and became a concern for “all,” namely a public issue for Europeans. Furthermore, controversies over gender, body, and space bring materiality of culture and visual difference to the public eye. The domain of art and in particular of visual art is becoming the preferred domain in which to reveal and shape these controversies in so far as it captures the pictorial, corporeal, and spatial dimensions of these conflicts.

The public sphere, which is meant to provide through art, the sciences, and politics, a shared space, a sense of commonality among citizens, becomes a realm of conflict and confrontation. Many not only fear that Muslim migrants are failing to share the same values as European citizens, such as freedom of expression, pluralism, autonomy of art, and gender equality but moreover that, in the name of religion, they are intimidating, by use of force, those who want to exercise and live in conformity with these values. This leads to a totalizing discourse on Islam that associates religion with issues of migration, gender, and terrorism. As a result,

Anti-immigrant xenophobic nativism, secularist antireligious prejudices, liberal-feminist critiques of Muslim patriarchal fundamentalism, and the fear of Islamist terrorist networks are being fused indiscriminately throughout Europe into a uniform anti-Muslim discourse. (Casanova 2007: 65)

Jose Casanova argues that a discourse of this type on Islam recalls the nineteenth-century discourse on Catholicism, depicted as essentially anti-modern, fundamentalist, illiberal, and an undemocratic culture.

The incommensurability of the two cultural worlds is so great that it is feared it will undermine the pillars of European public life. On the other hand, Muslims resent the way they are (over)represented by their religion; all migrants are not religious, and, as many would vouch for, they adhere to secular values of freedom and equality. Furthermore, many regret that since September 11 (a date which occurs frequently in the discourse of European Muslims) no difference is made between pious Muslims and radical Islamists, and Islam is too easily coupled with violence and terrorism, offending the feelings of many and leading to “cultural racism” (Modood 2007) against Muslim migrants, and furthermore to “Islamophobia,” a newly coined

notion that captures the emotional, irrational substratum of the totalizing discourse on Islam.³

Normative arguments, linear readings, preference for one group rather than the other, being provocative or being offended, choosing between freedom of expression over dignity, will not help to capture the dynamics of cross-interpretations of the new cultural politics. Let's fix our gaze on the statue and engage in a two-way reading to tease out the several possible and conflicting interpretations from the two different – Turkish and Austrian/German – cultural perspectives.

The statue depicts a Turkish woman, a Muslim (the headscarf symbol) alone in the midst of a public garden in the center of Vienna. It conveys a sense of vulnerability. By exposing a Muslim woman's uncovered body to public view, possibly an all-male view, the statue contradicts Islamic prescriptions. Women who cover their heads do so to convey a sense of piousness and sexual modesty. They communicate to male members of the community a regime of social interaction that is meant to avoid physical contact, including eye contact, considered sinful (*göz zinası*) in Islam. The exposure of the statue of the woman to male eyes, including those of non-Muslims, is a transgression of religious prescriptions and provokes a displacement of the meaning of the veil.

Nudity has different cultural and religious connotations. A woman naked in the midst of a natural landscape can be read as a return to the state of nature and thus as a sign of innocence from the point of view of the German heritage of naturalism. But from the point of view of Islam, covering parts of one's body (a prescription for both men and women) is a sign of the ability to control one's instincts, discipline one's self and desires (*nefs*), and marks a difference in status from others, such as naked slave women. The nudity of the statue is provocative because it works against the purpose of the "headscarf," which is a reminder of Islamic distinction, religious piety, and feminine morality. By using both nudity and covering, the artist plays one against the other, and introduces contradictions with Islam and with Muslim women's assertions of sexual modesty and social distinction.

However, the nudity of the female statue does not seem to invite seduction or sexual provocation. The non-expressive face, the motionless body, and the dark skin (the bronze) remind us of the photographs of North African women taken by European artists, the colonial representations of women, their naked breasts conveying a state of nature, primitiveness in comparison with the Western civilized woman. One can interpret it as Western male eyes trying to subordinate and demystify Islam by undressing a woman's body, appropriating and assimilating it to the colonized subordinate (MacMaster and Lewis 1998) (noting though that being portrayed as subordinate is foreign to Turkish imagery as they were themselves colonizers).

One can also read an Orientalist gesture in the linking of “Turkish delight” with a woman. The popular age-old Turkish sweet *loukoum*, produced since the fifteenth century, captures the image of the Oriental bazaar and its sensual pleasures. The sweet taste of *loukoum* (made from starch and sugar), its soft, jelly-like, sticky consistency, its flavors such as rosewater or mint, and the pieces of hazelnuts, pistachios, or walnuts in the small cubes is a mouthful symbolic of Oriental opulence. Turks themselves use the label “*loukoum*” to describe beautiful, sweet, and attractive women. The statue of the woman does not capture the sensuous and charming sense of beauty that Turkish *loukoum* might evoke. Here again the statue introduces an anachronism both with the Turkish sense of beauty as well as the Orientalist representations of women. The statue is far from being a reproduction of the Orientalist images of women; living in the interior of a “harem,” lying on a sofa and assisted by a black eunuch and a woman playing the lute as depicted by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres in his famous painting of the *Odalisque with a Slave*. The Orientalist vision tried to penetrate and conquer the mysterious interiors of the Oriental Turkish harem, whereas the statue breaks away from the “exotic” interior and the “erotic” other, the pillars of Orientalism. The opulence and luxury of the Orient are replaced by the image of working-class peasant migrants; here we have the familiar other, nearby, in proximity, in the public square. All exotic mystery and erotic attraction are gone.

Likewise migrants find themselves outside their oriental home and its protections. The statue is not exhibited in the “interior” space of the Kunsthalle Museum but “outside,” in front of the museum in the public garden. It follows women in their mobility as it steps out from interior and sacred spaces (*mahrem*) into the exterior space of public life. Migrant Muslim women are covered, yet they are publicly visible (or more precisely, they become visible because they are covered). The statue captures the status of migrant women in European cities. Quite unlike what one might imagine with respect to migrant Muslim women’s real lives, the statue of the woman is alone; there are no children, no female or male family members who accompany her. Contrary to the common representations of Muslim women who are thought to be under the authority of the male members of the community, the statue draws on the isolation of the migrant woman. It represents the true condition of a migrant woman, vulnerable and uprooted, in a foreign environment without family support, and in the midst of a public garden, in the open air, in a European city. The public space where she is standing, motionless and lost, provides a sort of mental collage between her village peasant background and the natural surroundings of the public garden, suggesting that she has not yet found her way into European city life.

Muslim women themselves unsettle and transform the symbolic meanings of the Islamic covering in so far as they have transgressed the traditional boundaries of home and country and have entered into

secular life-spaces which were not initially intended for them. The spatial transgression of the veil challenges both traditional Muslim conceptions as well as secular feminist ones. By being personally covered and publicly pious, Muslim women expose a sense of agency that works against the “Orientalist” representations of woman of the interior as well as the “Westernist” representations of secular feminism. What is at stake therefore is the reconfiguration of the migrant Muslim women in the European landscape. The statue exemplifies the tensions of this reconfiguration caught between past and present, conflicting symbolic orders. It reflects the ways in which European publics and, in this case, the German sculptor are struggling and engaging with the Islamic headscarf of women in particular and with Islam in general. The aesthetic realm as an interactive space between art and politics, between cultures and publics participates in the elaboration of a bond (which also includes elements of provocation and violence) between Muslims and Europeans.

One needs to track how, at the present time, at ground level, by means of micro-practices, different cultural perspectives and social groups meet with each other, confront their differences and make them public. The notion of a European public sphere does not refer here to an entity already in existence, constituted by the extension or the addition of different national publics, but to the process of its making. The confrontational issues over Islam provoke debates on cultural values, mobilize collective passions, bring forth new voices and faces, follow transnational dynamics, and create overlapping public spaces.

4. FROM THE KUNSTHALLE PUBLIC GARDEN TO EUROPEAN PUBLIC CONSTELLATIONS

The public garden exemplifies at micro-level the public sphere at large. Whereas the public sphere tends to be conceptualized in abstract terms and in relation to a nation, with a language community and citizenship rights, the public garden displays the physical and spatial aspects of the public square, which comprises a plurality of perspectives. It enables us to situate the controversy in space, bring forth the visual and performative aspects, and extend our notion of public beyond those who are recognized as public citizens sharing the same language community. The statue is addressed not exclusively to Viennese residents, but to “all,” migrants, and Muslims, men and women living in the city, but also to Turks, living outside the city. The statue provoked a public divide, an intercultural (mis)communication, but also a bond between diverse players and diverse publics, not always sharing the same definition of national public. The statue itself exemplified the way the German artist saw and depicted covered migrant women and the way the two were coming to terms with each other. Paradoxically the statue made

issues and people public, assembled and interrelated by means of a confrontation following transnational and intercultural dynamics.

The spatial quality of the public sphere and the plurality of perspectives are stressed in the work of Hannah Arendt. As Christian Geulen argues, in Arendt's approach one finds a notion of the public explicitly avoiding the presupposition of symmetry: "a common world disappears when seen under one aspect; a common world only exists in the variety of perspectives" (Geulen 2006: 64). Hence public space is made up of, and constituted by and through, the articulation of different perspectives. Secondly, Arendt insists on the notion of a concrete public space (*öffentlicher Raum*) rather than an abstract public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*) and the special role of physical, corporeal difference in public: "in public space, where nothing counts but to be seen and to be listened to, visibility and audibility are of major importance" (Geulen 2006: 65). Hence Arendt elaborates the notion of public space as a communal space of visibility where citizens are able to meet with one another, confront each other so that they can examine an issue from a number of different perspectives, modify their views, and enlarge their position to incorporate that of others. First of all, public space is a plurality of perspectives. That is why she rarely refers to the concept of "public opinion," which presupposes a common mass point of view for all, except to criticize it. Secondly, the "*polis*" for Arendt is the space where individuals make their visibility explicit to each other. But its specificity is that it does not survive the fleeting instant. "Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever" (Arendt 1958: 178). This type of public space of visibility can always be recreated anew wherever individuals gather together politically. Since it is a creation of action, this space of visibility is highly fragile and exists only when materialized through the performance of deeds or the utterance of words (D'Entreves 2008). But by means of narratives (she says that was why the Greeks valued poetry and history so highly), the memory of deeds can be preserved and passed on to future generations as a repository of instruction. Hence the nature of the political community is also to be a community of remembrance.

To recapitulate, the public sphere is constituted by the plurality of perspectives; it is the space where individuals make their appearance explicit to one another by means of performance and action; it is the product of the fleeting instant, namely it is not fixed once and for all but inhabited by action, conflict, and confrontation; narratives inscribe the ephemeral nature of events in the memory of the political community. Drawing on these aspects, I wish to stress first the importance of space as a physical locality which enables individuals to meet each other face to face; secondly, the performative dimension of action alongside the discursive one; and thirdly, the cultural struggles over memory and visibility in the emerging European (and Islamic) public sphere. The latter can be

conceptualized as constituted of public constellations in which the plurality of cultural perspectives meet with each other, but also collide, where individuals make their differences and appearances explicit to each other, not only by discursive arguments, but also by performative practices, ranging from visual art forms (as in the case of the statue), architecture (construction of mosques), fashion (veiling), and the market (leisure and consumption patterns).

5. THE ROLE OF ISLAM AS AN AMPLIFIER

The question of cultural difference as it is conveyed by Islam in the European public sphere calls therefore for a conceptual adjustment of the hermeneutics of the “public sphere.” First, there is an element of exacerbation in making oneself explicit to the other. Cultural and religious differences are made to be audible, visible, and demonstrative. Islam acts as an amplifier for both Muslims and non-Muslims who use it as a reference. Thus, the use of the Islamic headscarf made the statue more visible and scandalous, thereby extending its public perception. But it was not the simple presence of the religious symbol that made the statue more public. The religious reference was exacerbated by means of a transgressive gesture (namely nudity), which provoked scandal and controversy.

The contemporary phenomenon of Islamic veiling is also an outcome of a form of exacerbation of religious difference. Young Muslim women embrace religion in ways that are different from the previous generation; they differentiate themselves as educated and self-aware Muslims in opposition to their mothers who, in the eyes of their daughters, reproduce the traditional ways of religious transmission and practices unquestioningly. Islam becomes a more explicit reference for pious self-fashioning and the new generation of urban and educated Muslims interprets the head-covering in more literal terms; they replace the loose headscarf of their mothers by adopting new modes of covering their hair entirely. The headscarf becomes a hyperbole in making religious difference explicit to others. The semantic shifts in the debates – from the label “headscarf” to “Islamic veiling” – illustrate this move from a traditional quasi-invisible sign to that of the affirmation of cultural-religious difference. But once again it is not the simple presence of the religious symbol but its spatial transgression that makes it visible and controversial. Muslim women literally cross the borders, moving by means of migration from small towns and villages to big cities, to European countries. The present-day head-covering becomes visible to the public eye to the extent that it penetrates deep into the nerve centers of secular modern life-spaces, such as schools, universities, and cities, but also becomes part of (street) fashion, consumption patterns and political discourse.

Contemporary head-covering is neither a continuity of traditional religious prescriptions nor assimilation to the secular modern. Traditional religious groups, but also secular modernist people,

expect a covered Muslim woman to be confined to a private space, to a given role and not be conspicuous to the public eye. Whereas the neo-veiling of women who thereby choose to be personally pious while advancing in public life (education, profession, politics) destabilizes both the traditional prescriptions of modesty and secular feminist norms of emancipation. Resorting to neo-veiling – a practice that was supposed to hide, silence, and segregate women – renders Muslim women more public, visible, and controversial. It provokes a general debate on the place of religion in public life, on issues such as religion and agency, freedom of choice and veiling, and equality of faith and gender. As it becomes part of the public debate in Europe, it ceases to be exclusively an issue among Muslims (traditional versus radical, Islamist men and covered girls); it challenges secular cultural values, and self-presentation of Europeans, men and especially women.

Post-1968 secular feminism made public the personal–private domain, which stood in their eyes for women’s oppression (as the slogan “the personal is political” conveys). It worked against the power of religion over women and released women’s bodies from religious prescriptions (in fighting for abortion and contraceptive rights) and puritan morals and clothing (the removal of the corset as an emblem of bodily constraints). Secular feminism liberated women from a set of religious and conservative constraints, and introduced a new set of practices in conformity with the rhetoric of emancipation. A woman’s body became a salient, if not a decisive site where women anchored their identities and employed their strategies of liberation. Today, a modern woman makes her “emancipation” explicit (and apparent) in diverse exploits of body – embracing sexual autonomy, physical fitness, beauty and fashion, new-age health, and the like. If for the secular woman the possibilities for women’s liberation are thought to be opened up by means of “owning” one’s body, for pious women, there is an element of “abstraction” from the body. Seen through the lenses of modern life, veiling can be read as conveying a dual meaning and criticism – both religious and moral. First, as a reminder of God’s will and presence in profane life, ideally veiling is a form of resistance (although in practice many veiled women desire to follow the commercial patterns of beauty and leisure) to the spiral of secular aesthetic and materialistic exploits of the body. Secondly, veiling displays a grammar of Islamic feminine identity that is based upon covering and hiding parts of a woman’s body, and therefore is a reminder of the sacred, secret, gendered domain (which is both spatial and corporeal), i.e. protecting the *mahrem* while being in public (Göle 1996: 83–130). Here again this is an ideal situation because young covered women are faced with many contradictions and do think about the tensions which arise from their commitment to norms of modesty and their desire for participation in public life.⁴ Nevertheless, the secular and Islamic approach do exemplify two different and opposite modes of management

of sexuality and femininity in public life. Islamic women become public by covering their heads and controlling their desires, while the grammar of emancipation calls for women to be accessible. These two different approaches to self-presentation in public life appear to be incommensurable. Adopting a Western style in the public sphere enables an opening up for the possibilities of exchange (including being seen), multiple encounters, provides a space for anonymity and a space for “stranger sociability.” Michael Warner argues that one of the defining elements of modernity is normative “stranger-sociability.” He writes:

In modern society, a stranger is not as marvelously exotic as the wandering outsider would have been in an ancient, medieval, or early modern town . . . In the context of a public, however, strangers can be treated as already belonging to our world. More: they *must* be. We are routinely oriented to them in common life. They are a normal feature of the social. (Warner 2002: 75)

However, the Islamic sense of intimacy and modesty works against modern definitions of “stranger sociability”; the daily practices of gender segregation, the covering of women, the supervised communities (*mahalles*) and the inward looking architecture of houses are examples of this (Ammann 2006). An Islamic form of self-presentation requires the limitation of the public self by evoking the sacredness of the interior space and women’s *mahrem*, namely gendered spaces and covered bodies. In the meanwhile, paradoxically, both the secular and the Islamic bring matters of sex and public life to the center of political debate. They are mirror images of each other.

Secondly, through this process those who are not thought to belong to the same group (such as secular feminists and Islamic women, migrants and residents, Muslims and Europeans) are brought into close proximity with each other and create a new public constellation. Western notions of secularism, feminism, and art are revisited in their confrontation and encounter with Islam. Likewise Muslims find themselves confronting the differences between a life-style based on religious precepts with that of secular life-experiences and reinterpreting the frontiers between the licit and the illicit in a Muslim-minority context. Issues around gender and sexuality are central especially for the younger generation who are sharing a similar life experience as their European counterparts. They appropriate values of religious modesty and morality in a context where social mixing between men and women is inevitable and face and discuss taboo topics such as the limits of friendship and flirting, virginity and marriage, and falling in love with a person of another religion.

Space matters: different places are subjected to public attention when religious, performative agencies challenge, contest, and reveal

the unwritten laws of habitation and codes of interaction (also known as codes of “civility”). Hence communal spaces, such as schools, universities, hospitals, public gardens, public transport, working places, beaches, and swimming pools become a “public” question when an Islamic presence forcibly enters and disrupts the norms of the *modus vivendi*. Islam as a form of ethics and aesthetics disrupts European secular life-spaces and modes of sociability. Hence the public sphere is not all about discursive communities, rational arguments, truth, and assertions of validity among citizens of a national community. The material, visual, pictorial, and sensorial dimensions of public communication and social confrontation become salient and decisive thus provoking a politics of emotion.

There is a strong presence of an emotional stratum, which is heightened by the visual, pictorial dimensions of the controversies which ensue when technologies of communication ensure rapid circulation and reproduction among different publics. A transnational circuit provokes an “emotional excess” of cultural politics as Michael Fischer has argued in relation to Danish cartoon controversy (Fischer 2009: 27–63).

These controversies take place in different places, at different times, and mean different things to different national publics, yet they create overlapping spaces bringing together things, people, and ideas in new public constellations. The Salman Rushdie affair, the headscarf debate, the assassination of Theo Van Gogh, the Danish cartoon controversy – these are all constellation-events which destabilize the relations of proximity with and distance from Islam, operate religious and spatial transgressions, and manage visual, pictorial dimensions of performativity (including violence). New public constellations are constituted by transnational dynamics, and become autonomous in relation to the social interactivity in national spheres. By means of media technologies and migration flows, Arjun Appadurai argues that the “global modern” produces different interactive contexts from those that are bound to a nation-state; he offers “ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes” as a new way of mapping the world in a post-national world (Appadurai 1996: 47). He argues for an understanding of diversity beyond the multiplicity of different and distinct ethnicities, identities, and cultures and depicts a process of interactive and overlapping dimensions of the global which implies that in some instances different ethnicities can meet in the same ethnoscape. This applies to my understanding of the public constellations in which distant and distinct people, ethnicities, ideas, and things come into close interaction and confrontation. The Salman Rushdie affair can be considered as being a “*momentbilder*” of a public constellation that brought the domain of aesthetics and Islam, Europeans and radical Islam into close interaction and confrontation; it was followed by other such instances that took place in different parts of Europe, such as the Danish cartoons in Denmark, or the *Turkish Delight*

statue in Vienna. The latter did not attain the velocity and intensity of those listed above; it remained relatively circumscribed without extending the boundaries of controversy and confrontation. Yet it is part of the new mapping of European constellations. It reveals the realm of aesthetics as an interactive space between different cultural subjectivities and politics, which appears to be pivotal in the making of European public constellations.

The European public sphere cannot therefore be studied as the addition and extension of national public spheres but as the formation of public constellations that bring together the unexpected and the incommensurable. We can not clearly define the contours of this European public sphere, nor can we speak of it as an established entity with defined norms and values. It is an ongoing process at the present time, but should not be thought of as following a linear path of development. There is something sporadic, accidental, and at times violent in the making of European public constellations. It can not be fully rendered through institutional, representative, organized politics; nor by studying uniquely the intention of the actors whether they be political elites or citizens; it is through the dynamics of interaction, encounter, conflict, and mutual transformation, namely through the unintended consequences of a series of beliefs and practices, events, and controversies, that a European public sphere is taking shape. A number of apparently unrelated events, separated in time and in space, are linked to each other, creating a new form of mapping, a new pattern, forming a “constellation” in the sense described by Walter Benjamin.⁵ For Benjamin, who was critical of the linear conception of history, modernity is not a “one-way” pendulum but should be approached as a dynamic and relational interpretation of history, of which the most appropriate image is a constellation (Rollason 2002: 262–96). Constellations bring together seemingly unrelated events, separated in time and in space, and therefore create a new space of interpenetration and collision, which affects the course of change and meanings of the modern. The encounter between Europe and Islam is being shaped in a series of controversies and confrontations in the public sphere which reveals the ways the two are entering into interaction, conflict, and mutual borrowing, thereby creating new constellations. These constellations incorporate the paradoxical combination of the two, thus challenging established narratives that describe European modernity and Islam as mutually exclusive, distinctive, and fixed entities.

NOTES

1. What makes some words audible, public and not others? The words of the former French president would have been a “non issue” had they not opened a Pandora’s box and been followed by many other politicians, public spokespersons, historians, feminists, and the like, not only in France but across Europe, culminating in a series of political moves and decisions that

- made Turkish candidacy problematic, its legitimacy even being open to doubt. Turkey, which was granted EU membership status in 1999, faces the specter of a “third-way” proposal, a “special partnership” in 2008.
2. Edmund Burke and David Prochaska describe the shift in paradigm in thinking about the relationship between the West and the non-West and present a rich historiographical review of the field since Edward Said’s *Orientalism* was published. They show how the new readings of race and gender, and the role of visual culture have expanded the field in new directions (Burke and Prochaska 2008: 1–75).
 3. The first study to use the term, *Islamophobia: Fact not Fiction*, was conducted in Great Britain in 1997, by an anti-racist association, The Runnymede Trust. In France it entered into the debates with the publication of Vincent Geisser’s book, *La Nouvelle Islamophobie* (Paris: La Decouverte, 2007). Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, argue that Islamophobia reflects a “social anxiety” towards Islam and Muslims, which is not uniquely reserved to Europeans but also deeply ingrained in Americans; they examine these stereotypical images in American political cartoons (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008).
 4. Kenan Çayır depicts the emergence of personal and self-reflexive voices among young covered Muslim women authors in Turkey (Çayır 2006).
 5. “Benjamin devises the arresting symbol of the *constellation* ... as symbol of the relationship which emerges when the historian places a number of apparently unrelated historical events in significant conjuncture. The constellation links past events among themselves, or else links past to present; its formation stimulates a flash of recognition, a quantum leap in historical understanding. For example the French revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1870 would all be placed in a constellar relation, as events separated in time but linked by a common insurrectionary consciousness” (Rollason 2002: 283).

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