

Gender as a Performative Act in Urban Spaces: Non-Verbal Marks of Masculinity & Femininity

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Abstract

Women's seclusion and hegemonic oppression on the subjugation of women can alternatively be well understood in contrastive analysis of how masculinities and femininities come in a clash in public spheres and urban spaces. In this regard, this text will provide a sequence of ethnographic analyses on urban events and celebrations, public spaces and gendered interactions through non-verbal marks so that what's deemed as socially appropriate or improper are vividly presented. The main objective of this compact ethnographic analysis is that the subordinate femininities must be unearthed so that there could be a hope for a social cessation of internalization of both the seclusion and subjugation of female members of the subject society. The case instances are drawn from such a society, Turkey, which has a fluctuant politics of gender and where the society is stigmatized with the ongoing repercussions of post-colonial identity collision.

Keywords: *Gender studies, Cultural anthropology, Non-Verbal communication*

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Kentsel Mekanlarda Bir Eylem Yasası Olarak Toplumsal Cinsiyet: Erkeklik ve Kadınlığın Sözsüz İşaretleri

Öz

Kadın gizliliği ve kadınların boyun eğdirilmelerine ilişkin hegemonik baskı, alternatif olarak maskülenliğin ve feminenliğin kamusal ve kentsel alanlarda nasıl bir çatışmaya girdiğinin karşılaştırmalı bir analizinde anlaşılabilir. Bu bağlamda bu metin, kentsel etkinlikler ve kutlamalar, kamusal alanlar ve cinsiyetle etkileşimler üzerine sözel olmayan işaretlerle bir dizi etnografik analiz sağlayacak ve böylece sosyal olarak uygun veya uygunsuz olarak kabul edilenlerin canlı bir şekilde sunulmasını sağlayacaktır. Bu kompakt etnografik analizin asıl amacı, bastırılmış feminenliğin ortaya çıkarılması gerekliliğidir ki, böylece söz konusu topluluğun kadın üyelerinin tecrit edilmesinin hem de dışlanmasının içselleştirilmesinin toplumsal olarak durdurulması için bir umut olabilir. Durum örnekleri, çalkantılı bir cinsiyet politikasına sahip olan ve post-kolonyal kimlik çarpışmasının yansımalarının devam ettiği Türkiye sahası üzerinden alınmıştır.

***Anahtar Kelimeler:** Cinsiyet çalışmaları, Kültürel antropoloji, Sözsüz iletişim*

1. Introduction

This research is an academic attempt to examine both men's and women's experiences of being revered, feared and explicitly approved in public spheres primarily within the Turkish context. Using a social constructionist approach, the research provides us with an insightful analysis of how hegemonic masculinities collide with women's subordinate acts in urban spaces. The social interpretations and cultural perceptions of gender performance in public and civic spaces intersect with men's construction of masculinities and the ways in which men and women assign gendered definitions to urban spheres. In this regard, gendered non-verbal marks are analyzed based upon the extent to which they maintain and sustain certain code of socially acceptable gender performance, and the issues around women's seclusion through non-verbalized agencies and feminization of certain urban spaces are explored. In addition, the research methodologically utilizes the primary ethnographic observations the author has collected over time and secondary data mainly through critical content analysis.

1.2. Defining Space

The spatial scope of this paper are solely the realm of civic and public spaces excluding sacred and domestic spaces. The civic space refers to a wide range of political-administrative and entertainment spaces including city councils, shopping malls, urban coffee houses, and city squares, and the concept of urban space is used as a heterogeneous and complex structure in which the gendered attributions occur. For instance, a comparative base to this research can be drawn from the neighboring society that can be described as “Greek society was organized along clear dichotomies such as oikos and polis, private and public, *female and male*, nature and culture — dichotomies that have obvious consequences for the interpretation of *gendered space*” (Trümper, 2015: 296). Similarly, the binary use of gendered spaces through masculinized and feminized non-verbal marks are further explored in the following chapters.

2. Genderization of Urban Spaces

It is argued that “It is not just that the spatial that is socially constructed; the social is spatially constructed too” (Massey, 1994: 6). The social reflections of gender can be immensely seen in the construction of public spaces, and the spatial configurations tend to present us a certain set of gendered dispositions. The social interactions within socialization processes require gendered habitus through which the socially acceptable forms of gendered acting are implemented. It’s to say that “Society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them” (Wacquant, 2005: 316). A sense of habitus emerges and subtly dictates what is socially implemented which Bourdieu describes as “In this sense, habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, without any deliberate pursuit of coherence, without any conscious concentration” (Bourdieu, 1984). Moreover, it’s relevant to say that the spatial ideology that has implications on gendered attributions comes along with the public deployment of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities as well as the seclusion and subjugation of women to the spatial normativity. In this regard, it’s essentially important to mention the involvement of Turkish women in the public sphere as a means of women’s concern to publicly reflect on their femininity. There has been a sense of emancipation through the unveiling of women in clothing and some other non-verbal aspects, however, the women remain unliberated as the Kemalist approach to women

failed in fully accomplishing women's liberation in both civic spaces and public spheres. The exact same argument was made by Kandiyoti in her following words "Women would be refashioned as modern, equal, and active citizen-subjects. Kemalist perception of women's emancipation did not envision women's participation in the public sphere as a denial of patriarchal gender roles. In other words, women could be a part of the public sphere as sexual subjects and their primary role as mothers and house managers would remain intact" (Kandiyoti, 1987: 317). After all, the deeply internalized hegemonic display of patriarchal dominion of men remains intact, and women have been given a social platform to a certain degree which will not violate men's public space and the patriarchal order.

2.1. Non-Verbal Signs in Gender Performativity

Non-verbal marks play a tremendous role in the expression of gendered performativity in public spaces and are majorly implemented through the social and cultural construction of gendered signs. Kinesics is a major concept through which eye contact, gesture, and posture can be understood in social interactions. Haptics majorly deals with touching as nonverbal communication and includes handshakes, head contact for men, holding hands and hugs. Proxemics, on the other hand, is the study of spatial distances stemming from cultural and sociological aspects and this research will be mainly concerned for the public distance which is one of the four components of proxemics. There is also a need to explore the aspects of paralanguage which analyses pitch, volume, intonation and vocal characterizes such as laughter. Last but not least, artifacts play a significant role in our non-verbal interactions and deals with outer features such as clothing, facial hair as mustache, earring and jewelry being the case for this research (Littlejohn& Foss, 2009).

"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments" (Quran, 24:31). Despite the religious aspect defining the borderline of femininity, there has been a considerable shift in the application of gaze, modesty, and expressions of beauty in modern Turkey. However, though the modernization of Turkey shouldn't be underestimated, many of the conventional aspects in the expression of gender have remained intact due to the long-standing influence of social, religious and cultural gender narrations. For instance, a long-standing gaze upon a male person has

negative implications for the female gazer. There is a need to constantly turn the eyes away in order to protect modesty and female dignity. Conversely, the masculine image for a man is often presented through a long-continued gaze on women, and it consolidates the chaser and hunter image of men. There is even a proverb which well justifies the male gaze “Güzele bakmak sevaptır - To look at the beautiful is a good deed” and it has been commonly used by men to justify their desirous gaze. Similarly, walking habits has many implications on both the female subjugation in public and the performance of hegemonic masculinities. Wives or women following the lead of men in public isn't a rare scene in Turkey, furthermore, the lead has some excessive applications on women such as grabbing the woman's arm or hands and pulling her alongside himself as though she is a vehicle he is dragging along. Another aspect of gesture occurs when a woman accompanied by a man is speaking with another man, there is always a masculine/male confirmation between two men, meaning two men would often nod their heads to show gratitude. There is always a superior and often subtle connection between men showing the conversation with the woman was decent and everything is safe. Even when the same woman is helped by another man and thanks to the man in return, the accompanying guy often offers his own appreciation in a quite masculine manner. Correlatively, the posture has various reflections on the implications of gender such as sitting habits in public, and masculine manners in men's walking habits such as frowned face, sharp stares, open arms and legs. It's perhaps a common implementation of manliness that women cover less space than men when it comes to sitting in public. Wide-stretched legs occupying the space of women and showing a sense of masculinity and belonging to male normativity through this particular gesture of legs have been subject to complaints made by Turkish women. Likewise, binding hands on the back and walking with a rosary hanging from male hands are some salient examples of masculine gender performativity in public spaces.

Haptics which is the study of touching as non-verbal communication seems to have diverse applications when it comes to gendered dispositions of both male and female members of Turkish society. For the common women, a handshake is mostly used if encountered by a man, and more intimate hugs are preferred among women. However, men do not comply with an intimate way of greeting but instead prefer to touch the edge of

their heads instead of kissing where cheeks touch each other. This particular way of greeting that men perform has many implications on the political affiliation of the person as it has been adopted by many members of the nationalist party in Turkey. As well as the haptics, proxemics which is the study of spatial distances have consequences on gender performativity that has been both culturally and sociologically developed. For instance, public distance in civic spaces such as public transportation shows us that women avoid sitting in between or next to men with concerns over female dignity and piety. On the contrary, regardless of the sex difference, spaces such as cash point lines show closer distance violating the private space but the overall consensus is that there is a common practice of women's seclusion from any kind of touching to men in public (Wood, 2005).

Paralanguage is another aspect of non-verbal communication which has been subject to both public and political debates. Despite the fact that there is a common understanding of women making use of higher pitch and fluctuating intonation, laughter, one of the vocal characterizers, has been attempted to be disregarded as shameful and degrading for women. Using high volumes of laughter in public places is thought to bring shame and defame to women's honor. Moreover, this argument was posited by the former deputy prime minister, Mr. Bülent Arınç, suggesting that women should not burst into laughter in public. It has both socio-religious and political implications of how vocal use can be a threat to women's honorable femininity and gender expression.

2.2. Gendered Artifacts

Another example can be drawn from the use of artifacts through clothing and use of facial hair as a means of gendered expressions in public. One of the most outstanding cases in clothing as a means to perform gender is the practice of cross-dressing which has a long history in both Turkish show world and public life. Huysuz Virjin, a well-known Turkish figure who has pioneered cabaret in Turkey, stands out to be the first cross-dressed man publicly appear in the form of a drag queen. He can be counted as the first drag queen of Turkey and has reached a reputable level of fame and respect through his crossed-dressed man image. It's a common phenomenon in Turkish society that the televised reflections of men in woman's clothing are excluded from the public judgement and shaming. These televised images of men in exaggerated femininity are far away from hate speech

and defamation as it is done to transgender women. Moving from the world of television to the public scene, another well-known comedian, Fehmi Dalsaldı, appears in public spaces as ‘Azize’ and interviews people while being recorded for a TV appearance. Azize is a woman in fancy woman’s clothes and has the man behind her which can be vividly seen based on her voice tone and body shape. However, she is well accepted by the public community and people show a great level of interest to her. She refers to common women with her emphasized femininity and tackles issues such as marriage, men’s issues, and so on. Contrary to their public space appearance, there are hundreds of crossed-dressed men under disguise who enjoy appearing as a woman in their private life. Based on the testimonies, some of the clients of Turkish sex workers are ordinary looking family men who cross-dress to have sexual intercourse with them.

From the sexual repression of desires towards the explicit and public representation of sexuality, clothing has been a significant platform to express gender and sexuality. A great example of it can be drawn from the homosexual masculinity which has been subject to a considerable shift over the last decade both in the sense of clothing and body marks such as plucking of the eyebrows and skinnier features in men’s outfit being two of the examples. Certain body moves and gestures can as well be attributed to homosexual men that differ from those of the heterosexual masculinity performance. Resembling the wide-spread female attributions, narrower and upright sitting positions, bendy hand gestures, and most importantly cramped walking manners have been adopted by Turkish queer community to non-verbally indicate a sense of femininity that they consider is in alignment with their sexuality. As a matter of fact, these gendered configurations applied through non-verbal marks have gradually served the emergence of a social schema defining and drawing the lines of male homosexuality and femininity. Similar to the global perception, short hair is not deemed as feminine and women with short hair has been criticized to lack femininity and to be lesbians. Similarly, for a common Turkish man of conventional family background, it is one of a big challenge to appear in both family and public life with earrings simply because it is believed to take away a man’s masculinity and desired gender role. In the case of growing mustache, it has various social and political implications on the public performance of masculinity, and represent nobility and honor. Though having a mustache represents the group of men affiliated

with the conservative party nowadays, it used to, and still does to a certain degree, symbolize the middle-aged secular middle-class men and publicly demonstrates a degree of manliness and belonging to the patriarchal ancestry. Because it's socially linked to bravery and connotes Ottoman-like masculinity, many of the male members of the current generation grow mustache not with those political and class concerns but with concerns over their masculine and manly image in public (Ghoussoub, Sinclair-Webb, 2006).

On the other side, jewelry and make-up are considered as a woman's symbolic weapon for her femininity. As well as the socially expected overdone make-up on women, the public display of golden bracelets collected at the wedding ceremony as a gift from the guests carry such deep cultural and social definitions. One of them is that the bride who is wearing it shows to the public in a given public space that she is an honorable married woman, and she honors her husband and his family by publicly showing them off. A golden bracelet, overall, has a profound gendered meaning which is the symbolic power and independence of Turkish women, meaning women should strive to earn enough money to buy herself a golden bracelet. This example can be compared to men carrying rosary beads as a means of portraying their masculine image. Last but not least, it's of significant importance to touch upon the cultural perception of red lipsticks. Many women have feared to apply red lipstick which might imply low dignity and bring about shame. There are stories told by women about how they were beaten by their families because of their choice of red lipstick. It culturally represents an inferior woman, a woman of less dignity and honor, and a woman who is engaged in sex work.

3. Gendered Spaces and Events

In this section, certain spaces and events that have cultural and social indications are analyzed based on the extent to which they foster gendered performativity in Turkish society.

3.1. Circumcision Ceremonies

A little boy clothed in traditional circumcision apparel is taken on a city tour inside a fancy car followed by other family members in a convoy. The onlookers are amazed by the excitement of the little boy and the

family proudly looks out the window celebrating their son's entering into manhood. There is perhaps not a greater event that shows off a little boy's entering into manhood and demonstrates a public event of masculinity. Surrounded, appreciated, and applauded by other men, a circumcised boy internalizes both his social and physical difference from the opposite-sex and absorbs his new identity together with the masculinity it comes along with. He is now compatible with the religious commandment, but most importantly, is a complete male member of his society. Seated like a king in apparel similar to kings, holding a staff with a crown on top of his head, a circumcised boy ideologically represents the society's appreciation of manhood and masculinities attached to it.

3.2. Soldier Send-Off

The military service and manhood are inseparable components in Turkish society where it has been traditionally believed that a man is incomplete without a military training. It is a platform where almost everything consolidates and reinforces the hegemonic masculinities one learns before the military service. What's interesting is that the public celebration of these soldier send-off ceremonies stands out as one of the most remarkable examples of publicly praising the soldier's journey to complete manhood.

Carried on the shoulders of other men with the sound of drums and fierce ovation, the soldier is sent off to the realm of militarized hegemony of men (Ghoussoub, Sinclair-Webb, 2006).

3.3. Coffee Houses

Referred as "Men's domestic alienation and their tendency to seek confirmation and male companionship outside the home" (Kandiyoti, 2003: 209), men's desire to constitute his male identity with other men turns into a gendered space such as coffee houses where men entertain one another, drink Turkish tea, gossip and play board games. Turkish coffee houses have always been a public space where men who are often irresponsible and non-domestic escape to spend the whole day with other like-minded men. A certain dress-code is applied in these coffee shops; men whose jackets hang on their shoulders with pointy-toed shoes and rosary beads in their hands. In such a public space where the masculinity is performed in pure performativity, coffee shops of Turkey serve as a stage for gendered entertainment for the day without masculine gender

roles such as bread-winning and family protection. Far away from all these conventional gender roles, male companionship in these male-dominated public houses reflect the social burden the gender roles put on men.

3.4. Shopping Malls

The image of a “Young, slim women who care how they look” comes to one’s mind when it comes to the genderization of shopping malls. A woman image who is fashionable, self-controlled, young and skinny and whose hair and make-up is nicely done, kind and meek-mannered, doesn’t ask for her rights, and easily adapting to the changing demands of the store manager (Özbay, 2016: 81). There is not only the practice of an emphasized femininity but also a need for extra femininity where women consciously act on the role of a female with exaggerated femininity. The performative act of extra femaleness and exaggerated femininity in shopping malls is not only a means to subjugate to the demands of men but also to the interests of the company. Requiring women to be well- mannered, stylish, and meek, shopping malls in Turkey are gendered spaces where femininity play a much more emphasized role than the male masculinity (Özbay, 2016: 82).

3.5. State Buildings

Administrative spaces construct a huge part of the urban spaces within Turkish society and have their unique codes in gendered mannerism, clothing and other non-verbal aspects. For instance, contrary to the social expectations in women being modest, spaces that deal with administrative tasks such as city halls represent women in a completely opposite way whereas men remain quite conventional being calm, middle- class, mustached, and domestic. Women in these spaces are fashionable, outspoken, and wear dresses and make-up in a quite feminine form. Though the outlook is highly feminized, the manners including gestures, voice, and body postures comply with the masculine features. A woman image with a skirt above the knees and thick masculine voice, smoking and single parent, can be drawn based on the female representations occurring in administrative spaces. However, this image has been subject to change as the current government has allowed veiled women to work on state buildings.

4. Concluding Remarks

As a matter of fact, Turkish society offers us gendered aspects from almost all corners of social and cultural living. The gendered performativity is not only implemented through verbal speech, virtual elements, and the use of certain hegemonic vocabulary but also through the means of non-verbal marks people both consciously and subconsciously use. Overall, it can be said that in most of the aspects of gendered dispositions in Turkish society, there are dichotomies in both femaleness and maleness depending on the public space. On one side, shopping malls, which are in-door spaces, can possess highly feminized attributions, and on the other hand, there is female seclusion in outdoor spaces through social prohibition and condemnation in touching, laughing, clothing, eye contact, and gestures. On one hand, the entertaining cross-dressed men both in public and television are well-welcomed, on the other hand, the statistics place Turkey in the first seats when it comes to transgender killings. In conclusion, in spite of a modernized Turkey with her westernized institutions, the hegemonic masculinity remain internalized, sneaked into the social DNA of the society, and the aftermath of the Ottoman hegemony will long show its devastating consequences on the post-colonial identity of the members of the Turkish society.

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