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ABSTRACT

This article looks at the selected works by two artists, Kutlug Ataman and Cigdem Aydemir, whose works are tackling hair, with a particular commentary on veiled Muslim women in secular spaces. The article argues that the current discussions on the topic, as well as the artistic responses, are often shaped by the narrative that logic of coloniality produced, but rarely attempt to delink from this narrative to change the terms of the conversation – which is a decolonial praxis. The discussion contextualizes the works by unpacking the Turkish case, on which both artists comment, discussing the positioning of Muslim women in Western(ized) public spaces and the resulting dehumanizing hypervisibility. I argue that while Ataman makes an important intervention on the topic with, Aydemir goes further, rejecting dehumanizing classifications and delinking from the existing narrative.

In 2016, a photo emerged of a woman on a beach in Nice, being forced, by the police, to remove clothing. She was fined for not wearing 'an outfit respecting good morals and secularism' (Quinn 2021). This was the result of a ban introduced by authorities in 15 towns in France, following the terror attacks in the country. The photographs show the woman removing her outer clothing, after police intervenes, exposing her arms, presumably to find a way to be more 'respecting of good morals and secularism'. It is worth thinking whether or not this would have been her experience if she was wearing the exact same clothes without the headscarf. Covering her hair makes her visibly Muslim. Forcing her to expose her arms, which many Muslim women believe they should not, is a concession required to exist in French public sphere as a visibly Muslim woman.

Nice was not the only place to introduce rules and regulations around headscarf in public as different towns cited different reasons for introducing similar bans.[1] According to Vergès, this particular period was 'bolstering season for white feminism and femonationalism'[2] as the debate 'bikini vs burkini' took over the media, equating bikini

with women's freedom (Vergès 2021, 70–71) making it a 'progressive act' for local governments to seek ways to regulate beachwear. For example, according to the Mayor of Corsica, 'Villeneuve-Loubet, who has enacted a burkini ban, swimming in a burkini [is] "unhygienic"' (The Guardian 2016), a discourse that goes back to colonial ideas about non-western cultures. This, and many other similar bans and regulations, as well as the existing rhetoric on Muslim women, as I will argue below, is directly related to the logic of coloniality and the cultural archive it has created.

In what follows, I will look at selected art works by two artists whose works are tackling hair, with particular commentary on veiled Muslim women in secular spaces. The artists, Kutlug Ataman and Cigdem Aydemir, both engage with the experiences of women who wear the veil while scrutinizing the discourses around hair. The paper discusses Ataman's four channel video installation *Women Who Wear Wigs* (1999) and two separate works by Cigdem Aydemir -*Hair/Veil* (2011) and *Nothing to See Here* (2013). Ataman's *Women Who Wear Wigs* (*WWWW* hereafter) features four women from Turkey, who wear wigs in their daily lives, as they talk about why they decided to wear them. One of them is a practicing Muslim woman, who decided to wear a wig on top of her veil to attend university, since the country had a ban on veil in some public spaces at the time, such as universities. Cigdem Aydemir, on the other hand, often uses her own body with a particular and ongoing interest in issues around hair and veil. The two works I focus here, and most of Aydemir's artistic output, tackle questions around the visibility of Muslim women in secular public spaces and the dichotomy between exposed hair and veiling.

Both Ataman and Aydemir contextualize their criticism by looking at the Turkish case as the country presents an intriguing case: a predominantly Muslim country, where participating in public spaces came with various regulations for women wearing the headscarf until recently. Yet, as I will unpack below, although both Ataman and Aydemir comment on the discourse around veil in secular public spaces, their engagement with the topic is different. While Ataman's intervention is powerful and important, it is Aydemir's work that strives to change the terms of the conversation, the assumptions that exist on discussions around hair/veil, and the language used (agency vs oppression, progressive vs backward) in secular, Western(ized) spaces. In other words, while Ataman highlights the marginalization and the injustice, Aydemir goes beyond this and seeks to change the terms of the conversation. I read Aydemir's works as pushing against the idea that secularism and gender equality are intertwined. Her works reject developmental feminism and, to borrow from Vergès, centre around the 'questions of liberation rather than discrimination' (38). This is not to say Ataman's *WWWW* is in opposition to such liberation, it is, however, to say that his work does not go beyond acknowledging the existing discrimination. As such, while Ataman reproduces the dominant visuality to highlight an existing discrimination, Aydemir offers a different kind of visuality, one that works towards decolonial feminism.

Writing on decolonial feminism, Lugones points out that in using the term coloniality she means 'to name not just a classification of people in terms of the coloniality of power and gender, but also the process of active reduction of people, the dehumanization that fits them for the classification' (Lugones, 2010, 745). As I discuss below, Aydemir rejects such dehumanizing classifications that exist for Muslim women and instead works towards delinking from the narrative of the colonial logic, as 'delinking from the colonial matrix of power is not a question of content or a question of what we talk about; it is about presuppositions and assumptions on which we ground our talking and doing' (Mignolo 2021, 13).

With this in mind, the discussion below will first outline discourses around hair and veiling practices in secular spaces, with a particular interest in the logic of coloniality. As the works selected for discussion here are commenting on secularism and public spaces in Turkey, as well as marginalization of identities, the section that follows provides an overview of the Turkish context in relation to secularism and veil in public places. The final section, then, will discuss the works themselves with a specific focus on the ways in which they intervene with the existing discourse.

Before discussing the aforementioned artists and how they comment on the experiences of veiled women, it is important to point out that my reading of their work is not in relation to what they say about representation of Muslim women in art. Nor am I interested in focusing solely on women's experiences with veil in Turkey specifically. Therefore, my focus is not on discussing the history of veiling and/or cultural and political differences in reasons for wearing the veil among Muslim women.[3] I am, however, interested in how the cultural archive, and the formation of (secular) self as a result, positions the veil wearing Muslim women as a threat to secular way of life and how art speaks of/to it. My aim is to contextualize veil as an extension of hair-related practices and racialization of Muslim women and discuss two, in my opinion very different, approaches to the topic in art.

Secularism, decoloniality and hair

There are many discussions on how hair shapes and defines experiences in public sphere. The experience itself is not unified, but hair is often used for racial, religious and gendered discrimination. The conditions of visibility of veil in public spaces and the experiences of women who wear the veil is often discussed in various contexts, yet its relation to hair in its social aspects is given less importance.

Discussions around hair and its relation to public sphere are not limited to revealing or covering hair. Hair is as relevant as skin colour when it comes to discrimination, with many of current Western practices and perceptions going back to eugenics, colonialism and hierarchies created as a result. Such epistemological and discursive violence (on top of the physical) was dressed with the language of science with eugenics by the scientists who engaged in formulating the ideas behind it, giving legitimacy to structural racism, justifying injustices it imposes and normalizes. In 1907, one such scientist, Eugen Fischer, engaged in coming up with scientific explanations for white superiority based on hair. Fischer designed a device called Haarfarbentafel to determine racial purity based on hair. Emma Tarlo writes that the device 'was used not only to pin down racial differences but also to gauge levels of racial purity and impurity. Emma Tarlo took it with him to German South-West Africa (now Nambia), where he studied patterns of hereditary amongst people of mixed race'. The device was also used in Nazi Germany to determine Jewish ancestry (2017, 167–168).

The logic of coloniality continues to simultaneously infantilize, victimize and, often demonize, others as it thrives on the dichotomies it creates. One increasingly scrutinized community in Western societies is the Muslims, particularly Muslim women, often discussed in terms of 'progressive European values' vs 'backward Islam'. In western(ized) societies, veil became a topic of complex debates in the past few decades as Muslims became increasingly racialized. What is more, as Françoise Vergès writes, the global left aligning itself with

humanitarian/liberal agenda from late 80s onwards, the struggle for civilizational feminism became 'cultural and their enemy obvious -Islam' (Vergès 2021, 47). Before the burqa ban on beaches, in 2004, France passed a law banning the wearing of 'conspicuous signs of religious affiliation in public schools.[4] According to Joan Wallach Scott, although the ban included all overt religious signs (such as big crosses and skullcaps worn by Jewish boys), it was primarily 'aimed at Muslim girls wearing headscarves' (Scott 2007, 11).

Scott notes that, in most European countries, the support for banning the headscarf came from the perception that saw veiling as the 'ultimate symbol of Islam's resistance to modernity' and a challenge to secular democracy (2010, 11–12). A similar perception of overt religious signs exists in Westernized spaces in Muslim countries. In her book *A Quiet Revolution*, Leila Ahmed talks about how, to the secular segments of the society in predominantly Muslim countries, wearing the hijab, according to her, signals 'presence of Islamism' (Ahmed 2011, 3) – a sentiment that also existed in Turkey, as it will be discussed below. This view is arguably inherited from Western secular logic that sees secularism as a guarantor for 'freedom and gender equality while Islam is synonymous with oppression' (Scott 2017, 1).[5]

It should be noted that neither the hostility towards headscarf nor the logic of coloniality is limited to Western countries. Different from colonialism, logic of coloniality, refers to 'long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations' (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 243). It is a global phenomenon and manifests itself in a variety of ways in different contexts without losing its main characteristics (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2009, 132). Consequently, not only there are 'non-Western' societies with hostile rhetoric regarding visibly Muslim women, there are also societies and/or ideologies positioning themselves against the idea of Western imperialism, yet their methods are identical as they appropriate the logic of coloniality. Iran is one such example as it positions itself against Western imperialism while appropriating the logic of coloniality. An example of this was seen in the country's response to the protests that started in 2018 against the forced veil and resurfaced in the mainstream in 2022 following the death of Mahsa Amin. Although in Western media the protests were predominantly presented as Iranian society's demand to implement western-style democracy, they should be seen as push back against the logic of coloniality. Presenting the protests as backward Islam vs progressive West is exactly how the logic of coloniality operates, by perpetuating the dichotomies it created.[6]

Although the struggles might take different forms and intensities, and might even appear to be contradictory, the intersection of both versions of regulating women's hair is an extension of regulating women's bodies. In this sense, Turkey is an interesting example as the country's almost militant secularism often penalized women wearing the headscarf in certain spaces, as they were perceived as resisting/opposing modernity. This also paved the way for the current political division in the country today between those who identify as religious and those who identify as secular.

Muslim women in Turkey

Turkey's population is predominantly Muslim, with a significant portion of that Muslim population identifying as secular. Secularism as a principle was established with the

modernization of the country at the end of the Ottoman Empire and with the establish-ment of modern Turkish Republic in 1923, as the country sought to position itself as Western, modelling its understanding of secularism on the French '*laicite*' ('*laiklik*' in Turkish). However, this was not a simple exporting of ideas as the country sought to distinguish itself from both 'Islamic tradition and from 'extreme' Westernization. The early nationalist ideology in Turkey attempted to create an 'authentic cultural Turkish identity' (Yeğenoğlu 1998, 129), a new Turkish cultural archive.[7]

Discussions on secularism are particularly relevant here as secularism was used to frame many of the discriminatory practices in Turkey. Since its foundation, Turkey aimed 'to create a secular public sphere as part of a process of Westernization initiated by the founders of the Republic' (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014, 57). The pro-secular elite who founded the Turkish republic 'promoted a national narrative rooted in a strict interpreta-tion of secularism as the absence of religion in the public sphere. This form of secularism was seen as a prerequisite for democracy' (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2014, 59).

The binaries created were seen as necessary for secularism to function, to offer religious freedom to all citizens by a non-religious state. However, there has been a significant shift in Turkey in the last two decades. For the past 20 years, the country has been ruled by a party, AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*/Justice and Development Party), whose success largely depended on mobilizing religious populism, taking advantage of the strong counter-force formed in the preceding decades against the 'secular elites'. AKP's democratizing mission did not go far as it perpetuates the same discriminatory logic against others. Yet, arguably, one reason for their success was the ways in which large portions of the public felt pushed outside of public life, of which practicing Muslims (particularly women) make up a large segment of. As women wearing the headscarf are more visible than equally religious men, the battle (as in many other cases) was, and still is, fought on women's bodies.

Although there is a long history of headscarf in public spaces in Turkey, as Deniz Kandiyoti (2021) succinctly summarizes in her article on gender activism in the country, there is a strong case to be made for the 1980 military coup and the February 1997 military intervention as key events that paved the way to the success of the current government in Turkey and the rise of religious populism. Headscarf was banned in public institutions in Turkey in 1981 and in universities in 1982.

> However, the harshest measures against the wearing of headscarves and the public expres-sions of religion came after the military intervention (or so-called post-modern coup) on 28th February 1997. [. . .] This period represented the zenith of Islamic constituencies' sense of grievance, and its central mobilising trope was the headscarf (Kandiyoti, 82).

The ban made access to various public spaces very difficult for women wearing the headscarf. Universities were one of those places where women with headscarf had to battle with it every day. Women were also, on occasion, denied attending graduation ceremonies for their children with their headscarf and they were not to attend parliament while wearing the headscarf. Issues with, and protests in, universities were ongoing as veil-wearing women were repeatedly denied entry to campuses or asked to leave the classes, unless they agreed to remove their headscarf. Many of these young women found the solution in wearing a wig on top of their headscarf. Unsurprisingly, headscarf was one

of the issues that helped get AKP elected as they promised to put an end to the discrimination against veiled women.

The decades-long resentment on the part of the practicing Muslims is partly the reason for the contemporary counter-resentment in response to shifting hegemony, as seculars now feel their lifestyle is under threat, and in many cases for good reason as the AKP government's increasing clamp down on dissent, particularly since 2013, has suffocated larger segments of the country. What is important to remember here, especially for those less familiar with the country, is that the dominant culture in Turkey, for a long time, pushed and promoted a westernized idea of individual and secularized practice of religion. This top-down effort materializing for instance in banning the veil in some public spaces was explained away, often regarded by the secular members of the public as necessary precaution for protecting religious freedom for all, a rhetoric directly linked to the sentiment that presence of veil wearing women is often a sign of 'Islamism', which is itself the product of colonial logic and the dichotomies it sustains. The discourse on Muslim women and veil in public spaces repeatedly tackles a particular dichotomy, agency vs subjugation, and the conditions of visibility in public spaces. Göle (2017) points out that although the term public space connotes accessibility for all citizens, it 'always knows frontiers of inclusion and exclusion; it is reserved for some and forbidden to others' (214). Göle notes that the entry of Muslim actors into public space 'violates the consensual norms and reveals these unacknowledged rules. From this angle, visibility should be conceptualised as a form of public agency that plays an active role in the emergence of dissent, contest and deployment of an area of conflict and confrontation' (214).

Similarly, in her book *In the Name of Women's Rights*, Sara Farris (2017) discusses the rise of European right-wing rhetoric, and its unorthodox affair with feminism, to explain how such rhetoric has formulated a common enemy: Muslims residing in Europe. Using the term 'femonationalism' to explain the intersection between neoliberals, nationalist and the feminists, Farris points out that the one thing these otherwise different positions share is that Muslim women are 'agentless objects at the mercy of their patriarchal cultures' (Farris, 7–8).

One of the most important interventions on the topic of agency in the contemporary feminist discourses on Muslim women and the veil was made by Sirma Bilge (2010). Bilge points out that Muslim women, in the West, are portrayed both as a victim (passive) of her culture/religion and as a threat (active) to Western values. According to Bilge 'despite significant ethnographic works revealing the complexity of contemporary headscarf/veil cultures, a dichotomous frame prevails in the literature and, not insignificantly, in feminist scholarship' (14). Referring to Yegenoglu's work, Bilge adds that 'this dichotomous framing of the Muslim veil either as a symbol of oppression or of resistance has its historical roots in the colonial subjugation where the "woman question", caught between colonial domination and anti-colonialist national resistance, has been instrumentalised in both' (Bilge 2010, 14).

A similar dichotomy was at work in Turkey, as colonial logic positioned veiled women as either a symbol of patriarchal oppression or a figure resisting the Modernization/Westernization efforts. The dichotomous frame on the topic, victim vs threat, not only dominates the scholarship but also shapes the contemporary culture. This is visible in discussions, art works and other cultural outputs that are engaging with the existing tensions. The discussion that follows will highlight two potential approaches to the topic

of veil in public sphere. Ataman's approach, I will argue, responds to the existing narrative the logic of coloniality dictates, while Aydemir delinks from this narrative as the artist seeks to change the terms of the conversation.

Women who wear wigs

Turkish artist and filmmaker Kutlug Ataman is a well-known name globally for the art scene, with works shown around the globe and a Turner Prize nomination in 2004. Much has been written about him as an artist and on the work in question here -*Women Who Wear Wigs*.[8] Inevitably, many of these scholars, while discussing various aspects of his work, point out the way Ataman created a community of women in *WWWW*, who, although have very different experiences and backgrounds, all utilize the wig in their daily lives. The four-channel video installation (Figure 1) focuses on four women: Melek Ulagay, a left-wing political activist, started wearing a wig to change her appearance to hide from the police in the 70s. Demet Demir, a transexual woman, a feminist and a sex worker, talks about police harassment and how, as a form of intimidation and punishment, they cut her hair (which is not a rare situation for transwomen to find themselves in) and how she found a solution in wearing wigs. Journalist Nevval Sevindi, on the other hand, talks about her introduction to wigs as a result of losing her hair following chemotherapy after being diagnosed with breast cancer. And finally, the unnamed woman (Woman X) is a practicing Muslim woman who decided to wear a wig on top of her veil to be able to attend university.

Ataman looks at these women, with very different experiences and backgrounds, at the intersection of their relationship to their hair and their utilization of wigs. However, unlike the other women who are represented with synchronous audio-visuals, Woman X is only

Figure 1. Women who wear wigs (1999) installation view Proje4L, 2002. Courtesy of salt research.

heard, as her image is replaced by a black square. As this is a four-channel projection, her story appears simultaneously with the other three, making the lack of imagery more salient than it otherwise would have been. This, according to Lebow, makes Woman X's story appear in even more stark contrast with the rest as the visual is white subtitles on a black square. For Lebow,

> The black screen with white subtitles is extremely affecting in its stark, unadorned bluntness. Her words are all the more arresting due to the limited visual information competing for the viewer's attention. Here the subtitles take on the quality of a character, a graphic metonym standing in for her physical presence. Needless to say, this makes the subtitles even more critical to the reception of the piece as a whole. (Lebow, 68)

Yet, by providing imagery for the other stories (whether it is the footage of the women who are talking or other footage) while using a black square for the Woman X's story, Ataman creates a decided contrast, with or without subtitles. It not only offers an entirely different visual language but the tension between stillness and movement adds to the perceived difference between this story and the others. Ataman, could instead, as Lebow herself points out, employ another visual strategy that would obscure her face but show images from her daily surroundings as it is done with Melek Ulagay. Ulagay's face is also never shown yet the visual strategy employed here is not that of black square but shots that obscure her face. A similar strategy would therefore have also protected Woman X's identity while making her story part of other women's stories on a visual level. However, Ataman's decision to show a black screen for Woman X, intentionally or not, marks her difference and ends up reproducing the invisibility forced upon veil wearing women experienced in public spaces in Turkey at the time. Seeing her occupying the spaces she ordinarily occupies would have positioned her differently than it is done with the decision to show a black screen.

One could argue that highlighting her invisibility is the only way to foreground what forced her to be invisible in public spaces at the time, while simultaneously rendering her hyper-visible. Yet, replacing her image (anonymizing her identity or not), arguably, reproduces Woman X's experience while attending the university, i.e. having to choose between being absent from the public space or being hyper visible. It is also important to remember that these women were rarely passive victims as they mobilized and were active in speaking up against the practice, which is non-existent in the image. After all, if 'the subtitles take on the quality of a character [. . .] standing in for her physical presence' (Lebow, 68), what happens to her presence without subtitles or when viewers do not speak English, as the work was shown with English subtitles in Turkey?

Although *WWWW* is a powerful work, one that looks at a single object – wig – to tell very different stories and the intersections of those stories, i.e. hair and its significance, Ataman positions Woman X within the, then in circulation, discourse on veiled women in public spaces by locking the work in this binary of visibility/invisibility. The question of the possibility of articulating these stories outside of the existing discourses and binaries, while simultaneously acknowledging the existence of those discourses, is an intriguing one. As I discuss below, Cigdem Aydemir's work attempts to do this by delinking from the colonial matrix of power and the dichotomies it operates on, seeking to change 'the terms of the conversation' on veil wearing women.

Cigdem Aydemir: nothing to see here and hair/veil

Cigdem Aydemir is a Turkish-Australian video, performance and installation artist whose works repeatedly deal with issues around hair and the veil, and many of her works include veiled women (usually the artist herself). Aydemir describes herself as a proud Muslim woman, adding that she wore the veil for many years, although she no longer does (Aydemir 2020). Her works are often subversive and witty in their approach to veil in public spaces, as she tackles issues around visibility and discourse on agency.[9] Below, I will be giving a brief overview of the artist's works and her continuous engagement with hair and veil, with a particular focus on two of her works, *Nothing to See Here* (2013), *Hair/Veil* (2011).

Probably the most salient aspect of Aydemir's works, other than her continuous interest in discussions around hair, is how she utilizes humour. Humour has the power to shift perspective unexpectedly. It rearranges things, albeit momentarily, to make both the current arrangement and, as a result, the previous one random and often ridiculous. The rules and logic that dictated the novel arrangement are not different then the rules and logic regulated the previous arrangement yet the randomness and the ridiculousness occur to us when the order is rearranged. In this sense, humour has the potential to mock the assumed power of authority as, according to Bakhtin, it demolishes hierarchical distances (2008, p.23). Similarly, Hannah Arendt also comments on laughter, pointing out that authority requires respect for its authority and the 'surest ways to undermine it is laughter' (Arendt 2008, 45).

Such an approach to humour, one that disregards existing hierarchies and authority, is visible in Aydemir's work. For instance, in a series of works titled 'Extremist Activity' (Figure 2), Aydemir tackles the Islamophobia, directed particularly at women wearing the burqa in Western public spaces. While wearing the burqa, she places herself in situations that make her hyper-visible. One of these is called *Dry*, where Aydemir is seen to be sitting on a chair in a hairdresser's window, reading a glamour magazine, unfazed by the stares she is receiving from the passers-by. *Dry* forces the onlooker to think about what happens when a person, whose visibility in public places is always hyper-visibility, is placed in a shop window? And how can we think about Aydemir's, and other similar interventions in relation to the logic of coloniality?

Maldonado-Torres writes that 'What is invisible about the person of colour is its very humanity [. . .]. Invisibility and dehumanization are the primary expressions of the coloniality of Being' (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 257). What is hyper-visible is the condemned being, or as Maldonado-Torres puts it: the *damné*, and the *damné* is either invisible or excessively visible. Aydemir's performance highlights this double-edged sword, making conscious references 'freak shows' and 'human zoos' in early 20th century Europe, where white Europeans exhibited people from different parts of the world who looked 'looked different', for their entertainment. Performativity of the act in Aydemir's work and her particular use of humour arguably exposes the colonial logic, as existing arrangement ceases to be a 'natural outcome of the dynamics of creation of meaning' (Maldonado-Torres, 257). Aydemir's works are decolonial in the sense that they highlight the 'expressions of coloniality of being' – invisibility/hypervisibility and dehumanization – with regards to Muslim women in Western(ized) spaces. Humour, in this sense, is part of

Figure 2. Extremist activity (dry), 2013, courtesy of the artist.

Aydemir's methodology towards decolonial praxis, and a powerful one at that, as it 'disarms' authority.

Aydemir's interest in dichotomies around visibility/invisibility, oppression/freedom and victim/threat in relation to hair/veil is also evident in her performance/video installation *Hair/Veil* (2011) (Figure 3) where Aydemir cuts her long hair, pausing momentarily with locks in her hand, looking directly at the audience, then proceeds to cut another lock. When she finishes cutting, she lays her hair on the floor, making a square shaped garment out of the hair locks. The artist then picks up the garment and covers her head with the veil she just made out of her own hair. Where, then, lies the boundary between veil and hair, between agency and victimhood, between religious submission and secular emancipation? Is the subjugation the result of veiling or positioning of veiled women with a discourse that projects uniform intentions (refusing to assimilate while simultaneously being a victim)? The ridiculousness of the act of wearing a veil made out of hair to cover one's hair speaks to the ridiculousness of the discourse when trying to explain itself. Her dedication to each step during the performance is never comedic, which turns the rhetoric inside out, making it humorous and arresting at the same time.

Although *Hair/Veil* is not particularly linked to the Turkish case by the artist, the idea of covering the veil with hair is very much linked to the work as the act of veiling is reversed in both cases. In *Nothing to See Here* (2013) (Figure 4), Aydemir decidedly frames the work by dedicating it to women in Turkey who suffered as a result of the headscarf ban in the country. The artist's website describes the work as referencing the three decade-long Turkish headscarf ban that was only partially lifted in 2011. It goes on to contextualize the work, indicating that

> The ban restricted women from entering government offices, universities and schools - impacts of which are still felt today. During its inception, the ban saw a significant rise in the sale of wigs to desperate university students and mothers keen to attend their child's

Figure 3. Hair/Veil (2011) courtesy of the artist.

Figure 4. Nothing to see here (2013) courtesy of the artist.

graduation ceremony. Some, particularly older, women chose to wear these wigs over their veils. As painful as those images of humiliated women are for me today, this work is about engaging with that memory as a courageous, resilient and empowering act. (https://cigde maydemir.com/nothingtoseehere.html)

Nothing to See Here consists of a performance and a sculpture. While the sculpture is called *Swept Under the Rug* and made out of human hair collected in Turkey, the performance is called *Untitled* and shows the artist repeatedly putting a wig on top of

her veil. She is seen to be wearing a plain white headscarf (*tülbent* as it is known in Turkish), and puts a wig on top of the headscarf. In the video of the performance, the framing is similar to passport photographs. She pauses (poses?) momentarily after putting the wig on, looks at the camera, and proceeds to put another white scarf on top of the wig, and another wig on top of the scarf. The video is over 13-min long and plays in a seamless loop, becoming an exhausting act to watch and a surprising one for the resilience she displays as she keeps going.

The performance makes it impossible to determine whether the veil is placed on top of the wig or the hair/wig is covered with veil. As she is using identical wigs and headscarves, it becomes impossible to determine the starting point (did we start with wig or hair?) and this confusion, on the part of the audience, in return makes it harder to position the act (Resistance or acceptance? Enunciated or forced?).

The sculpture, on the other hand, is made out of human hair collected in Turkey, and is reminiscent of a specific type of rug that can be seen in many households in the country. These rugs would ordinarily be made out of sheepskin and be used either as a daily rug or a designated prayer rug. In Aydemir's sculpture, hair is arranged to mimic the shape and look of these rugs although it does not lose its likeliness to human hair, placing the sculpture on the border of uncanny. The performance and the sculpture together play on ideas of visibility by referring to the conditions of that visibility, from its title to the act of covering hair with scarf and then the scarf with the wig.

As the examples above demonstrate, Aydemir breaks out of the dichotomies mentioned earlier – oppression vs resistance, victimhood vs agency. Her works displace the question regarding oppression, resistance and agency, and as a result, they no longer function within that discourse. This is not to say she ignores the existence of such discourses around veiled women. These works cannot be received without the knowledge of the existing discourse (or they would be received entirely differently) that repeatedly speaks for the veiled women and positions them as nothing other than veiled women. Yet, her intervention is subversive and refuses to engage with reasons for wearing the veil but instead produces a critique of the discourse itself. Cigdem Aydemir's work is unfettered by neither the existing meanings of veil and being a Muslim woman, nor the dichotomies coloniality purports as the artist delinks from the dominant narrative.

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I started this article with an example from France where a Muslim woman was forced to dress according to 'respecting good morals and secularism' that was set out by the French authorities. She was targeted because of her veil, which made her hypervisible as a Muslim woman and invisible as a human being. My aim was to establish connections between this and other practices, arguing that such attitude is framed by the logic of coloniality. The context in Turkey, when veiled women were banned from certain public places, was also framed by the same logic. The two artists whose works I discuss here respond to the conditions created by this logic, albeit in very different ways.

Both artists position the veil in relation to hair. This juxtaposition frees debates on veiling and Muslim women from the dichotomy of agency vs oppression and proposes questions about how relations with hair are constructed. While in Western societies Muslims are racialized and Muslim women are made objects of a secular scrutiny, as well as targets for femonationalism, in Muslim countries with a particularly bumpy history of modernization, where modernization oftentimes

equals Westernization, the discursive formation travels and goes through a shape-shift. In these instances, it is no longer straightforward racialization, yet appropriating the very logic forms a solid base for discrimination. This is where the logic of coloniality becomes an important framework to help us expose the connections as the logic itself shapes both positions.

I argued that Ataman, in an effort to capture the experiences of young women who was left with no choice but to wear a wig on top of her veil to be able to attend university, reproduces her erasure from the public sphere. Aydemir, on the other hand, is not in conversation with the subjugating rhetoric and rejects dehumanizing classifications. She speaks of it, mocks it, but does not reproduce it. Her effort to delink from the existing narrative, and her use of humour, demands the audience to think about their own position, and invite a similar delinking where we are asked to think beyond the agency vs. victim dichotomy.

Notes

1. A similar ban was discussed in Switzerland recently and resulted in a referendum with 51% of Swiss voters supporting the banning face coverings in public, including the burka or niqab worn by Muslim women. What is intriguing here is that this ban cannot be applied to all face coverings as many opt in to wear masks due to Covid 19. Once again, one can cover everything and get around this ban as long as one leaves the hair exposed (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-56314173).
2. 'Femonationalism' (discussed also below) is a term coined by Sara Farris (2017) and refers to increasingly right wing and xenophobic rhetoric, capturing feminism and framing Islam as the enemy of the European values. The term was then used by Vergès in her book *Decolonial Feminism* (Vergès 2021).
3. Veiling has a long and complex history with differing practices in different regions. See El Guindi (2000) and Heath (2008).
4. See Koteweg and Yurdakul for a discussion of regulations introduced regarding visibility of veil in France, Germany and Netherlands.
5. Scott argues that this is not only false but was 'used to justify claims of white, Western, and Christian racial and religious superiority' (Scott 2017, 3). It should be noted that the issue here is not with the idea of secularism but how it is utilized to organize structures and to create hierarchies in lived experiences.
6. It is also important to highlight that Mahsa Amin was a young Kurdish woman and violence she was subjected to should not be thought separately from her ethnicity as Kurds in the region have suffered (and continue to suffer) long and violent history of oppression.
7. See also Navaro-Yashin (2002) and Ozyurek (2006).
8. See Kural-Shaw (2004), Lebow (2008), Rogoff (2009), Cakirlar (2013).
9. See https://cigdemaydemir.com for full list of her works.

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