

Modernity as an Ottoman Fetish: Representations of Ottoman Masculinity in *Kesik Bıyık*¹

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Abstract

Because masculinity was a central part of Ottoman culture and politics, changes in these domains had a fundamental impact on discussions about masculinity. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire's dominant role in world politics began to weaken due to the increasing influence of modernity. This generated socio-political anxieties. Ömer Seyfettin's short story, *Kesik Bıyık* (*Trimmed Moustache*), is a good example to use when discussing the influence of modernity in relation to the issue of masculinity. The transformation of a moustache into a fetish object can be read as an allegory of the Empire's socio-political anxieties caused by the process of modernisation. This paper discusses the way in which *Kesik Bıyık* allegorically represents the Ottoman Empire's socio-political anxieties as castration anxiety, and how modernity becomes a fetish throughout the narrative.

Key words: castration anxiety, modernity, fetishism, Ottoman-Turkish literature, Ömer Seyfettin

Bir Osmanlı Fetiři Olarak Modernite: *Kesik Bıyık'ta* Osmanlı Erkekliđinin Temsilleri

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Özet

Erkeklik, Osmanlı kültürünün ve siyasetinin merkezi bir parçası olduđundan bu alanlardaki deđişimler Osmanlı erkeklik tartışmalarını da önemli ölçüde etkilemiştir. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun dünya siyasetindeki egemen rolünün modernitenin artan etkisiyle zayıflayamaya başlaması pek çok sosyo-politik endişe doğurmuştur. Ömer Seyfettin'in *Kesik Bıyık* öyküsü, modernitenin İmparatorluk üzerindeki etkisini erkeklik tartışmaları bağlamında incelemek için iyi bir örnek teşkil etmektedir. Metin boyunca bıyığın bir fetiş objesine dönüşmesi, İmparatorluđun modernleşme sürecindeki sosyo-politik endişelerini alegorik bir şekilde okuma imkanı tanır. Bu makale, *Kesik Bıyık*'ın Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun sosyo-politik endişelerini nasıl alegorik bir şekilde hadım edilme endişesi olarak temsil ettiđini ve bu endişeden hareketle, modernitenin metin boyunca nasıl fetişleştirildiđini tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: hadım edilme endişesi, modernite, fetişizm, Osmanlı edebiyatı, Ömer Seyfettin

The ubiquitous trope of sexually differentiating “the West” from “the East” has been a long-lasting and reciprocal one. As Edward Said wrote in *Orientalism*, in Orientalist representations, the West persistently associated the East with sex, and regarded it as an entity that “seem[ed] to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies” (1994: 188). The affinity between sexual and political dominance perpetually occurred in the colonial history of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Western colonialism represented the political and socio-economic domination of the West as the domination of masculinity over femininity (Nandy 1993: 4). Although Irvin Cemil Schick contended that the East was not invariably feminised, gender and sexuality were nonetheless used to create contrasts that supported the self-definition of the West and its imperial agenda (1999: 4-5). Conversely, the Ottoman Empire applied similar sexual metaphors to define itself via a contrast with ‘the other’ – the West, in this context. In the work of Ottoman authors in the *Tanzimat* period (1839-1876) – also known as the reformation period – the relationship between the East and the West was used to resemble a metaphorical marriage or a sexual relationship between a man and a woman. The East and the West were personified as the male and female sides of the relationship, respectively, with the East having superiority over the West (Parla 2004: 17).

Nevertheless, the advancement of Western science and technology, the increasing spread of modernity and the loss of important territories due to the emergence of nationalism started to undermine the representations of the Empire’s gender stereotyping and challenged Ottoman self-perception and self-identification. The identification of the Ottoman Empire with a masculine role in its metaphorical marriage with the West became problematic because of the changing power balance in world politics. The Ottoman Empire’s political predicament and its decreasing imperial power necessitated the modernisation of the Empire and highlighted its need to keep pace with the West. The decision to modernise the Empire in order to preserve its masculine role and to

compete with the West led to the rapid transformation of traditional representations into new socio-cultural settings. The issue of masculinity was discussed in conjunction with considerations regarding the extent to which Western modernity should permeate Ottoman traditions.

In his book *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, George L. Mosse linked masculinity with modernity in Western culture:

The ideal of masculinity was invoked on all sides as a symbol of personal and national regeneration, but also as basic to the self-definition of modern society. Manliness was supposed to safeguard the existing order against the perils of modernity, but it was also regarded as an indispensable attribute of those who wanted change. Indeed, the exhortation “to be a man” became commonplace, whether during the nineteenth century or the first half of the twentieth (1998: 3).

Similarly, the transformation of Ottoman culture and tradition led the Ottoman elite to look for new ways to envision an ‘idealised’ and ‘hegemonised’ masculinity that would supposedly protect “the existing order against the perils of modernity”, as well as leading “those, who wanted change”, to the ‘right’ path in the process of modernisation. As R. W. Connell remarked, “hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual” (1996: 77). Based on Antonio Gramsci’s “hegemony”, Connell stated that hegemonic masculinity is a form of masculinity that is superior to other masculinities in terms of cultural hierarchy and power relations (1996: 77). In fact, hegemonic Ottoman masculinity, to a great extent, was constructed to affirm the Empire’s cultural fabric and political power. It provided a blueprint for the indigenous-cultural identity in keeping with the Empire’s masculine role. In this paper, the term “hegemonic masculinity” does not refer to a stable and unchanging masculinity; “hegemonic Ottoman masculinity” mainly refers to Turkish-speaking Muslim men, whose sultan was the caliph of the Islamic world and who were aware of ‘the danger of imprudent influence of the West’, who took precedence over other men because

they spoke the Empire's official language, and who outnumbered non-Muslim subjects.

Such masculinity was hegemonised in order to support the interests of the Ottoman Empire, particularly through literary representations. From the second half of the nineteenth century, various representations of masculinity began to be embodied in fiction. This embodiment resulted from – and also resulted *in* – anxieties involving society. As Nurdan Gürbilek suggested in *Kör Ayna, Kayıp Şark: Edebiyat ve Endişe (Blind Mirror, Lost Orient: Literature and Anxiety)*, similar to the Ottoman Empire's gender stereotyping, authorship was frequently associated with the male gender role by Ottoman authors whose narratives were deeply influenced by anxieties caused by Westernisation, national culture and cultural identity. These anxieties also became intertwined with the fear of losing one's masculinity in the form of writing/narrating (2014: 9-10). This intertwining of socio-political and literary anxieties shows how the modern West, as a concept, shifted “from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category”, as it is no longer confined to certain territories, but it takes place “in structures and in minds” (Nandy 1993: xi).

How did these anxieties regarding modernity and the form of narration affect the literary production of Ömer Seyfettin (1884-1920), who often commented on and attached importance to the existing political and cultural circumstances of his period? Ömer Seyfettin is often regarded as the founder of the short story genre, and he is one of the most important authors of Turkish national literature in the early twentieth century. In his brief life he witnessed significant wars such as the Turco-Italian War (1911-1912), the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and the First World War (1914-1918), all of which left their marks on his literary production (Alangu 1968: 14). As did his nineteenth-century literary precursors, Ömer Seyfettin occasionally employed the marriage *topos* between the East and the West with a nationalist emphasis. For instance, his serial stories *Fon Sadriştayn'ın Karısı (The Wife of Von Sadreistein)* and *Fon Sadriştayn'ın Oğlu (The Son of Von Sadreistein)*, first published during the First World War in 1917 and 1918, respectively,

are based on this marriage *topos*. The short story *Fon Sadriştayn'ın Karısı* praises German culture through the marriage of a Turkish man called Sadrettin to a German woman – after his first marriage to a Turkish woman, Sadrettin, who previously appeared physically weak, becomes sturdy thanks to his German wife. The follow-up narrative, *Fon Sadriştayn'ın Oğlu*, continues the plot and takes place twenty-five years later. Sadrettin's decision to leave his Turkish wife and marry a German woman results in a 'mischievously' brought up son, who is born from this transnational marriage and who steals his parents' money and runs away to America, which could perhaps reflect America's entry into the First World War in 1917.

In addition, *Primo Türk Çocuğu – Nasıl Doğdu* (*Primo the Turkish Boy – How He Was Born*), first published in 1911 during the Turco-Italian War, narrates the story of a young Turkish engineer, Kenan, who was infatuated with Western culture and who married an Italian woman, Grazia. However, in the narrative – which takes place during the Italian invasion – both Kenan and his half-Italian son, Primo, gradually become nationalists and develop aggressive attitude towards the West. By presenting *Primo Türk Çocuğu* as an example, Halil Berktaş underlined the inclination of nationalist authors to develop a discourse that represented “a deceived macho masculine culture” in opposition to the Western perception, which often feminised the East in its cultural productions (1999: 362-363). Here, the term “hyper-masculinity”, – an exaggerated form of masculinity – corresponds to the impulse of the nationalist authors, who struggled against the Western influence. Ashis Nandy used the term hyper-masculinity to explain “a reactionary stance” that “arises when agents of hegemonic masculinity feel threatened or undermined, thereby needing to inflate, exaggerate, or otherwise distort their traditional masculinity” (Agathangelou & Ling 2004: 519). In *Primo Türk Çocuğu*, Ömer Seyfettin presented a representation of ‘Turkishness’ through hyper-masculinity. These transnational marriages follow the same pattern, namely marriage between a Turkish man and a Western woman whose nationality depends on with whom the Ottoman Empire was struggling at the time. Hence, masculinity becomes a domain of

contestation in which nationalism plays a key role in these narratives.

Nationalism, as a significant part of Western modernity, wittingly or unwittingly led Ömer Seyfettin to the internalisation of the West as a necessary reification and this had consequences for indigenous discourses surrounding masculinity as well as the political and literary representations thereof. A. Ezgi Dikici suggested that, similar to his other nationalist contemporaries, Ömer Seyfettin was confronted by the dilemma of Western modernity and Turkish national identity. This dilemma was depicted as “a sense of crisis” due to the feeling of being torn between contesting the economic and cultural hegemony of the West and the need to maintain a national identity (2008: 85). As Partha Chatterjee claimed, nationalist thought “simultaneously rejects and accepts the dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture” (1993: 11).

I suggest comparing this simultaneous rejection and acceptance of an alien culture to Sigmund Freud’s concept of fetishism. In his essay “*Fetishism*”, Sigmund Freud wrote, “the fetish is a substitute for the penis” (1927: 152). When a little boy notices that his mother does not have a penis, he perceives it as a threat – he might also lose his penis. The possibility of the loss of his penis creates castration anxiety. In order to address this anxiety, the boy disavows his mother’s lack of a penis. However, this disavowal causes a conflict – on one hand, the boy continues to believe that his mother has a penis; on the other hand, he acknowledges that she does not have one. He tries to find a middle ground and invents a fetish object that substitutes for his mother’s absent penis. In other words, castration anxiety is eradicated by fetishising a new object as a replacement for the mother’s penis (Freud 1927: 154).

With reference to Sigmund Freud, Homi K. Bhabha interpreted fetishism at the level of colonial discourse. He emphasised that “[f]etishism, as the disavowal of difference, is that repetitious scene around the problem of castration” (1994: 74). His reading of stereotypes with regard to fetishism is crucial for explaining castration anxiety in relation to colonial discourse in general and to late Ottoman politics in

particular. Although the Ottoman Empire was not actually colonised by the West, Homi K. Bhabha's reading functions well as a way of demonstrating the shift in the Empire's approach to gender stereotyping and castration anxiety both in politics and in fiction. In this regard, the question of whether one has a penis or not is similar to the question of what it means to 'be the other', and to having a different skin colour/race/culture, issues that constitute differences between cultures, and between the coloniser and the colonised. The recognition of the difference between the coloniser and the colonised might be seen as analogous to the sexual difference between the boy and the mother (1994: 74-75).

I argue that fetishism occurred in the form of modernisation in the late Ottoman context. The purpose of modernisation was to resurrect the Empire's weakened masculine role and to compensate for its political castration, which not only functioned as a disavowal of the difference between the Ottoman tradition and Western modernity, but also became the acknowledgement of the Empire's existing differences from the West and/or 'lack' of modernity. The Empire's simultaneous recognition and disavowal of its difference from the West challenged the imperial power and became representative of its castration anxiety. My contention, therefore, is that the dissolution of the implicitly masculine role of the Ottoman Empire, an empire that was becoming increasingly less potent, is represented via castration anxiety in fiction, an anxiety that is particularly reflected in Ömer Seyfettin's *Kesik Bıyık (Trimmed Moustache)*, published in the literary and political humour magazine *Diken (The Thorn)* in 1918. It narrates the story of a young man who has his moustache trimmed in an American-style in order to follow the latest fashion adopted by his friends. With regard to the modern manly look, George L. Mosse remarked that,

just as modern masculinity reflected the ideals and hopes of society, so its enemies were the enemies of society. Here manliness fulfilled its task of strengthening normative society against those who supposedly wanted to destroy its fabric, and who through their looks and comportment made

clear their evil intentions (1998: 12).

As mentioned above, Ottoman modernisation was often debated in relation to discourses on masculinity, both metaphorically and literally. Idealised and hegemonised masculinity became a destination that one might reach via the 'right' path to modernity, the limits of which were, to a great extent, determined by Ottoman tradition. In Ömer Seyfettin's corpus, from which I take *Kesik Bıyık* as an example, the connection between masculinity and Ottoman modernisation is already present. The American-style trimmed moustache, which exceeds the limits of the desired Ottoman modernity, might largely be indicative of opposition to hegemonic Ottoman masculinity and the implicitly normative content of modernity, and might conversely represent "evil intentions", as George L. Mosse stated. However, I contend that the analogy moves beyond such opposition and representation. As I will argue below, the act of moustache trimming can be read as an analogy for castration, which in itself can be seen as representing late Ottoman anxieties about modernity and as shown in literary production. By reading *Kesik Bıyık* in relation to castration anxiety, I will discuss the ways in which these anxieties produce different masculinities juxtaposed with hegemonic Ottoman masculinity as exemplified by the style of moustache worn.

Ottoman Masculinity is at Stake: A Subversive Reading of *Kesik Bıyık*

K*esik Bıyık* begins with a reference to Charles Darwin made by the protagonist:

One has to believe in the words of the guy called "Darwin". Yes, human beings must have absolutely evolved from monkeys! Because whatever we see we immediately imitate it; the way we sit, stand up, drink, walk, stop, in short in short everything... (6)²

The protagonist gives an example of men who needlessly imitate what they see:

There are many men who wear one-eyed glasses called a “monocle” without having a need for it. Because [the men in the] pictures they see in the fashion albums at the tailor [shop] have one-eyed glasses (6).³

After this brief criticism of those who imitate Western fashion, the protagonist refers to himself and remarks that he is also one of these imitators:

Six seven years ago, I saw that everyone used to trim his moustache American-style. You naturally might guess that I also immediately had [my moustache] trimmed. Ah, yes I also had [it] trimmed. I also had my handlebar moustache trimmed just because of mimicry; indeed I looked like my ancestors in the way Darwin wanted (6).⁴

This reference to the theory of human evolution implicitly alludes to Charles Darwin’s theory of sexual difference and civilisation. In his two-volume study *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* – first published in 1871 – Charles Darwin described the relationship of civilisation, reproductive sex and sexual differences. In addition to “man’s putative ‘descent’ from animal forms”, Charles Darwin suggested that human beings are superior to animals since they have morality, culture and civilisation. He valued Western civilisation above other civilisations by arguing that it is based on sexual selection and reproduction. With regard to means of reproduction, he placed specific emphasis on heteronormativity and stressed the differences between the sexes. Charles Darwin ascribed indistinct sexual differences to inferior races and savage societies such as the “American aborigines”. This importance given to sexual difference and reproduction ostracised Western homosexuality and regarded it as primitive, a kind of non-Western savagery. It rendered both the homosexual and the savage intertwined discursively in Charles Darwin’s theory (Gandhi 2006: 47-49, 50).

With reference to Charles Darwin’s theory, I argue that *Kesik Bıyık* allegorically highlights the challenges posed to hegemonic Ottoman masculinity by its Western counterparts in the process of modernisation.

The use of a manly sign – the moustache – initially underlines the sexual difference between male and female. The handlebar moustache – *palabıyık* in Turkish – is trimmed from the corners of the mouth downwards – above the mouth, it is allowed to grow in an unrestrained fashion. It represents hegemonic masculinity and Ottoman tradition in the narrative. The act of trimming, therefore, represents the Empire’s modernisation attempts that led to the alteration of hegemonic masculinity and constituted sexual ambivalence. After trimming his moustache to make it appear in an American-style, the protagonist admits that he does not look the way he had expected. However, after he shaves off the handlebar moustache, he regresses in terms of human evolution and resembles a monkey. If one considers the discursive Darwinian relationship between the homosexual and the savage, the protagonist’s monkey-like appearance transforms him into a savage, if not into a homosexual. The protagonist’s act of shaving his moustache annihilates the sexual difference between male and female and, implicitly, his masculinity. Correspondingly, the trimmed moustache functions as a critique of Ottoman modernisation based on the emulation of the West that prevents the Empire from being part of Western ‘civilisation’, and misdirects it in a Darwinian sense.

The protagonist’s parents react negatively to him because he trimmed his moustache. In their eyes, the American-style moustache is a symbol of “excessive Westernisation”. In this context, the West is not limited to Europe – the emulation of American fashion shows that Westernisation expands into and includes Americanness. When the protagonist’s mother is told that he has trimmed his handlebar moustache and she enters his room, he tries to hide his upper lip with his hand as if he had a toothache. However, his mother starts crying and tells him:

- Ah traitor vile! You are not my son anymore! [...] Do you think that I do not understand? [...] freemasons cut their moustaches. This means you are a freemason too! May you get no benefit from the milk I gave you: Ah this means you are a freemason and we were not aware of it... (6)⁵

The protagonist's mother initially sees the trimmed moustache as being dreadful. She even threatens to disown her son. The protagonist's mother makes clear that having an American-style moustache is the equivalent of becoming a "freemason". The mother's accusation is not related directly to the protagonist's masculinity; instead, her anger is linked to the loss of the cultural heritage and/or the unity of the Empire. Hence, one might suggest that Ottoman masculinity is a central part of Ottoman culture – if one is lost, the other will be lost too.

The protagonist's father then arrives on the scene. The protagonist feels frightened and trembles with fear when he sees his father. He also tries to hide his moustache from him, but his father sees it. The protagonist feigns an excuse by saying "[...] while lighting my cigarette I burned one side of my moustache... That is why I had it trimmed" (6).⁶ However, he cannot convince his father:

- You cannot fool me with this, [...] it means that all those dandies on streets burned their moustaches with a match.

[...] Bringing the fez's tassel to the forefront, trimming the moustache all of it indicates something... Something, which is very vile... (6)⁷

The protagonist's father accuses the protagonist of being a dandy because he trimmed his moustache. According to the protagonist's father, when a man trims his moustache, he becomes a "dandy" and his masculinity becomes diminished. The association of the dandy with the loss of masculinity is a central issue in the discussions of modernisation in the Ottoman-Turkish novel. In these discussions, any Western influence is seen as an excessive influence; this excessive influence is frequently associated with the excessively Westernised, effeminate dandy, a figure that appeared frequently in the narratives of the time.⁸ The effeminate dandy was not only seen as having a "borrowed personality" due to excessive Westernisation, but also reflects the anxiety felt by some about turning to "borrowed sexuality" (Gürbilek 2014: 11, 55-56). By contrast, the sexuality of excessively Westernised female characters is reinforced and they become hypersexual. The hyper-sexualisation of these female characters leads them to lose their

chastity and virginity (Bilgin 2004: 106). Thus, it may be concluded that excessive Westernisation is considered the equivalent of having sex with a man – the West in these examples – that ultimately results in a loss in one way or other, either of chastity and/or virginity, or masculinity.

It is remarkable that when the father disowns the protagonist and throws him out of the house, he displaces the widely debated issue of female chastity to the loss of male chastity:

- Leave now! [...] do not ever think of coming here again...
Because even if your moustaches grow your chastity is not
be restored... (6)⁹

This displacement of female chastity with male chastity depicts the extent to which the excessively Westernised Ottoman man surrenders his virility and becomes as effeminate as a hypersexual female character. The juxtaposition of moustache and chastity depicts the loss of masculine characteristics that one experiences as a result of the influence of Western modernity. Accordingly, ‘womanly’ issues, such as the loss of chastity, are also ascribed to the protagonist. The loss of chastity due to the trimmed moustache becomes the yielding of Ottoman tradition to excessive Western influence. Elif Bilgin suggested that the private sphere and, consequently, the family became a “castle of chastity” that should be kept safe from excessive Westernisation (2004: 90). Therefore, the father, who was seen as the guardian of the family in early Ottoman-Turkish novels (Parla 2004: 19), banishes the protagonist from the house in order to wage war on the excessive influence of Western modernity and to protect the “castle of chastity”.

After being thrown out of the house, the protagonist decides to go to his friend’s house in Topkapı. On the way, he encounters some of his friends. They salute him and react to the trimmed moustache in exactly the opposite way from that of his parents:

- Bonjour, bonjour! [...] here now you look like a man...
What was that handlebar moustache! Like a chief officer of
the Janissaries who arose from the grave... (6)¹⁰

The Janissaries (the *Yeni Çeri*, or the “New Army”) were a powerful military force in the Ottoman Empire until the mid-seventeenth century. Later, their malpractices and military inadequacies against Western armies led to their execution by Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839) in 1826. These executions were called the “Auspicious Event” (*Vak’a-i Hayriyye*). A Western-style army replaced the Janissary corps in one of the most significant and pioneering attempts to modernise the Empire. The renowned Ottoman-Turkish poet and diplomat Yahya Kemal (1884-1958) discussed late Ottoman masculinities in relation to the execution of the Janissaries. He noted:

[...] following the Auspicious Event our old customs disappeared completely because of the aim to raise a dignified and well-mannered generation and in the end, under the Ottoman garment that is called *İstanbulî*, just as that government wanted, a generation that was well-behaved, well-advised, kowtowing, lickspittle, lowly, silenced, deprived of all sorts of manly appearances, walks and movements was fostered. A foreigner, who would look at Ottoman generation in this era, would not recognise the sons of the old quarrelsome, strong voiced and manly Ottomans (1975: 97).¹¹

I contend that the similarity between the protagonist’s previous appearance and the Janissaries, as remarked upon by his friends, is a significant indicator that demonstrates how hegemonic Ottoman masculinity was altered by modernisation. As the handlebar moustache allegorically signifies Ottoman tradition, the trimming thereof causes the protagonist to cease being a man in the traditional sense. However, he becomes a ‘modern’ and ‘real’ man in the eyes of his Westernised peers. Each character adopts a different attitude towards the American-style moustache: it is either interpreted as the loss of hegemonic Ottoman masculinity, or it receives approval as the symbol of modernity.

When the protagonist takes the tram to Topkapı, he sees a religious hodja who looks at him. The protagonist becomes concerned that he will receive further criticism because of his moustache from the

hodja. He makes ready to escape from the hodja's sight. Meanwhile, the hodja smiles:

- May God bless you my son. May you live long! [...]
- For what sir? [...]
- Seeing elegant youngsters like you being circumcised is the biggest pride for us! [...]
- But how did you understand that I am circumcised sir?

The hodja smiled:

- You have your moustaches trimmed my son [...]. Isn't it a sunnah? (6)¹²

This grotesque misunderstanding becomes highly explicit in the original parlance of the narrative, because the words circumcision and sunnah, a set of religious customs and practices introduced by the Prophet Muhammad, are the same word in Turkish: *sünnet*. Since the hodja is the cult leader, his position requires that he does not criticise undesirable acts directly; instead, he likens them to something pleasant. As readers, we are uncertain whether he criticises the protagonist implicitly or whether he appreciates the trimmed moustache because it is recommended for religious reasons.¹³ The hodja's allusive use of the word *sünnet* maintains the tension between hegemonic Ottoman masculinity and 'modern' masculinities until the end of the story.

Both penises and moustaches are exclusively male. Furthermore, circumcision and moustache trimming both consist of "trimming" at a physical level, either of the foreskin or of the hair on the upper lip. However, the act of trimming the foreskin does not have the same connotation as does trimming the hair on the upper lip. In Ottoman-Turkish culture, the loss of foreskin via circumcision is never seen as a loss. Instead, circumcision is a signifier of masculinity. It is considered a transition from childhood to manhood. Unlike the circumcision tradition in Jewish culture, which is generally performed early in the neonatal period, Muslim boys are circumcised when they are aged between five and twelve. Thereafter, they are supposed to "become socially gendered beings" (Delaney 1994: 164). One of the stages of manhood is the growth of pubic hair and facial hair, which occurs at a later age than does

circumcision. The growth of male hair proclaims the beginning of puberty and sexual maturity. In terms of sexual maturity, Dror Ze'evi divided male sexuality into two prominent periods; the period until puberty during which a young boy is an object of desire for older men, and the period when he grows in maturity and is attracted to women and younger men (2006: 93). In the period of maturity, facial hair not only differentiates men from women, but also from younger, beardless men (Najmabadi 2005: 142). Accordingly, facial hair – beards and/or moustaches – becomes a reinforcing sign of sexual maturity and adulthood. In many Islamic traditions, the transformation of vellus hair into a moustache is particularly seen as indicative of virility (Bromberger 2008: 381).

The correlation of male hair with virility is explained by Wendy Cooper as “a simple equation: male hair equals virility, equals power, equals strength” (1971: 38). In his book *The Unconscious Significance of Hair* (1951), Charles Berg described this association in reverse and suggested a symbolic relationship between hair cutting and shaving with castration.¹⁴ In her analysis of the biblical story of Samson and Delilah, Mieke Bal also underlined the symbolic relationship between hair cutting and castration. Samson’s loss of hair leads to the loss of his strength, as his strength in general and his masculinity in particular are reliant on his hair. The loss of his hair diminishes his masculinity. Samson’s diminished masculinity generates “hair envy” and, by extension, penis envy in the story (1987: 55). Drawing on Mieke Bal’s reading of the story of Samson and Delilah, I contend that the parents’ negative reactions to the protagonist’s trimmed moustache also transform castration anxiety into “hair envy” on behalf of the protagonist. Since he does not have an ‘adequate’ moustache according to his parents, he embraces the ‘womanly’ psychological conflict of “penis envy” in the guise of “hair envy”.

In *Kesik Bıyık*, circumcision and the handlebar moustache are juxtaposed as constitutive elements of virility. This juxtaposition forms the basis for the interrogation of hegemonic Ottoman masculinity. Circumcision is one of the prerequisites for being a man. An

uncircumcised man is one who does not conform to the physical perception of an Ottoman man. A circumcised penis becomes the symbol of power and transforms the penis into the phallus (Barutçu 2015: 134). The handlebar moustache – like circumcision – is also representative of hegemonic Ottoman masculinity, and consequently functions as the phallus in the narrative. The loss of the handlebar moustache – with the aim of having a ‘modern’ or ‘civilised’ look – diminishes the protagonist’s virility, as it does in the story of Samson and Delilah. Given the association of circumcision with the trimming of the handlebar moustache, the American-style moustache moves the idea of circumcision beyond its reinforcing meaning in relation to hegemonic masculinity and turns it into castration anxiety. Furthermore, although circumcision is usually called *tahara* (purification) in Arabic (Bouhdiba 2000: 21), I argue that trimming the moustache in contrast to circumcision does not signify purification, but rather ‘deterioration’ of the protagonist in the narrative.

In addition, circumcision is also a necessary condition for one to marry. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba drew attention to the similarity between circumcision and wedding ceremonies:

It is as if circumcision were only a mimicry of marriage and the sacrifice of the foreskin an anticipation of that of the hymen [...]. It is as if circumcision were a preparation for deflowering and indeed is it not a question of preparing oneself for coitus, of sensitizing oneself to the genetic activity, of valorizing in a sense the phallus, which is thus in turn purified and placed in reserve? (2000: 27).

The trimming of the handlebar moustache in an American-style as a reflection of circumcision and of symbolic castration prevents the protagonist from practicing marriage in the sense of Abdelwahab Bouhdiba. This inability might also be interpreted as a prevention of the metaphorical marriage between the Ottoman tradition and Western modernity, which reflects the Empire’s ‘dysfunctional’ attempts at modernisation.

Trimmed Moustaches and 'Modern' Masculinities

K*esik Bıyık* enables an allegorical reading, a reading that relates Ottoman modernisation to the issue of masculinity. I have read this short story as a sexual allegory of late Ottoman anxieties caused by the Empire's socio-political predicament with regard to Western modernity. The narrative revolves around the protagonist, whose American-style, trimmed moustache receives different responses from the people around him. Using these responses, Ömer Seyfettin presented various alternative masculinities without singling out a particular masculinity. He did not privilege or criticise one particular masculinity throughout the narrative. The refusal to take a side creates an ambivalent ending and suggests a tension between hegemonic Ottoman masculinity and 'modern' masculinities. This tension represents the changing – and perhaps decreasing – masculine role of the Ottoman Empire in its metaphorical marriage with the West at the turn of the century. At the end of *Kesik Bıyık*, Ömer Seyfettin leaves readers in suspense, which intensifies the Ottoman Empire's socio-political anxieties caused by Western modernity.

Making use of the well-established analogy between trimming and castration, I have read *Kesik Bıyık* in terms of fetishism and castration anxiety. I have argued that Ottoman modernisation, symbolised by an American-style, trimmed moustache, is fetishised in order to overcome the Ottoman Empire's socio-political anxieties, represented by castration anxiety. However, the trimmed moustache is not considered the equivalent of modernity, as it remains simply a fetish object – a substitute for modernity. Therefore, modernity becomes an Ottoman fetish, simultaneously acknowledging and disavowing the Empire's difference from the West. By placing Western modernity and Ottoman modernisation within the frame of masculinity, *Kesik Bıyık* illustrates the extent to which discourses on masculinity were interrupted and challenged by modernisation.

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² “Darwin” denilen herifin sözüne inanmalı. Evet, insanlar mutlaka maymundan türemişler! Çünkü işte neyi görsek hemen taklit ediyoruz; oturmayı, kalkmayı, içmeyi, yürümeyi, durmayı, hâsılı hâsılı her şeyi...

³ Ne kadar adamlar vardır ki hiç ihtiyaçları yokken “monokl” dediğimiz tek gözlükleri takarlar. Çünkü terzide seyrettikleri moda albümlerindeki resimler tek gözlüklüdür.

⁴ Altı yedi sene evvel, gördüm ki herkes bıyıklarını Amerikanvari kesiyor. Benim de hemen kestirdiğimi tabii tahmin edersiniz. Ah, evet ben de kestirdim. Ben de palabıyıklarımı sırf taklitçilik gayretiyle kestirdim; hakikaten “Darwin”in istediği gibi ecdadıma benzedim.

⁵ - Ah hain alçak! Artık benim evladım değilsin! [...] Beni anlamaz mı sanıyorsun? [...] bıyıklarını farmasonlar keserlermiş. Demek sen de farmasonmuşsun! Verdiğim süt sana haram olsun: Ah demek sen de farmasonmuşsun da bizim haberimiz yokmuş...

⁶ [...] cigaramı yakarken kazara bıyığımın bir tarafını tutuşturdum... Onun için kestirdim.

⁷ - Sen bana dolma yutturamazsın, [...] demek ki sokakları dolduran züppelerin hepsinin bıyıkları kibritle mi yandı.

[...] Fesinin püskülünü önüne getirmek, bıyıklarını kesmek hep bir şeye delalet edermiş... Öyle pis bir şeye ki...

⁸ For a detailed discussion of the dandy in Ottoman-Turkish literature, see Gürbilek, N. (2003). Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness, and the Turkish Novel. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102 (2), 599-628, and Mardin, Ş. Super Westernization in Urban Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century. In Benedict, P., Tümertekin, E., & Manşür, F. (1974). *Turkey: Geographic and social perspectives* (Études sociales, économiques et politiques du Moyen Orient; nr. 9). Leiden: Brill.

⁹ - Hemen çık! [...] bir daha sakın buraya geleyim deme... Çünkü artık bıyıkların çıksa bile namusun yerine gelmez...

¹⁰ - Bonjour, bonjur! [...] işte şimdi adama benzedin... Neydi o palabıyıklar! Mezardan kalkmış bir yeniçeri ağası gibi...

¹¹ [...] Vak'a-i Hayriyye'yi müteâkip efendi ve çelebi bir nesil yetiştirmek gayreti yüzünden eski sporlarımız tamâmiyle zâil olmuş ve nihâyet, İstanbul'den denilen Osmanlı kisvesi altında, o hükûmetin tam istediği gibi, uslu, akıllı, el pençe dîvan durur, mütebasbıs, başı aşağıda, sessiz, erkeklığın her türlü gösterişinden, yürüyüşünden ve hareket edişinden mahrum bir kâtip nesil yetişmişti. Bu devirde Osmanlı nesline bakan bir ecnebî, eski döğüşken, gür sesli ve erkek Osmanlıların oğullarını tanımazdı.

¹² - Eksik olmayınız oğlum. Varolunuz! [...]

- Niçin efendim? [...]

- Sizin gibi şık gençleri sünnetli görmek bizim için en büyük bir iftihadır! [...]

- Fakat sünnetli olduğumu nereden anladınız efendim?

Hoca güldü:

- İşte bıyıklarınızı kestirmişsiniz ya oğlum [...]. Bu sünnet-i şerif değil midir?

¹³ See hadiths: Imam Malik, *The Description of the Prophet, may Allah Bless Him and Grant Him Peace* (Muwatta) 3 (<http://ahadith.co.uk/chapter.php?cid=99>);

Sahih Muslim, *Purification* (Kitab Al-Taharah) 496

(<http://ahadith.co.uk/chapter.php?cid=71&page=7&rows=10>).

¹⁴ For further discussions of hair and its symbolic use, see E. R. Leach, *Magical Hair* (1967), C. R. Hallpike, *Social Hair* (1964), P. Hershman, *Hair, Sex and Dirt* (1974), G. Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience* (1981), A. Hildebeitel, and B. D. Miller, (eds.), *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures* (1998).

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