



PROJECT MUSE®

Beauty Is Nothing to Be Ashamed Of: Beauty Contests As Tools
of Women's Liberation in Early Republican Turkey

Ada Holland Shissler

Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Volume
24, Number 1, 2004, pp. 107-122 (Article)

Published by Duke University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/181225>

Beauty Is Nothing to Be Ashamed Of: Beauty Contests As Tools of Women's Liberation in Early Republican Turkey¹

A. HOLLY SHISSLER

My concept of beauty pageants has largely been colored by the analysis and critiques of second wave feminism, epitomized by the women's liberation demonstrations against the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1968 and 1969. There, the demonstrators protested the use of women's bodies for purposes of commercial advertising, and the reinforcing of stereotypes of femininity and beauty (tall, slender, young, and white), of good women and bad women, and of the notion that a woman is valuable for her body, not her brains. In short, the pageant was denounced for embodying a whole package of sexist evils that came to be summed up, more or less, in the phrase "the objectification of women." An activist of the period expressed it thus: "Women in our society are forced daily to compete for male approval, enslaved by ludicrous beauty standards that we ourselves are conditioned to take seriously and to accept."²

Given the influence of these views with respect to beauty pageants, it can come as rather a shock to look at Turkish newspapers from the late twenties and early thirties and come across page after page of headline coverage of a beauty contest presented as part of a radical repositioning of women in society—to see beauty pageants used as tools of women's emancipation and modernization. Yet, in a society where women historically had been segregated from men not of their immediate family and carefully preserved from the gaze of outsiders, where family honor was understood to reside in the family's women, and where "fallen" women were sometimes killed to regain that lost honor, the ability to show one's physical self in a public forum without fear of harm or dishonor was deeply radical. It must have been liberating, even though the introduction of women into public space and public life was undertaken to serve ends other than the development of each woman's autonomy, and despite the fact that it entailed an objectification of the women in question. To put it another way, beauty pageants or contests in Turkey represented a profound alteration of the rules of the game. They did not get rid of notions of good and bad

women, gender roles, or family honor, but the transformations with which beauty contests were associated changed the parameters of where women could go and what they could do without being understood as "fair game." In fact, they represented a redefinition of the concept of respectability or honor, *namus*, and an expansion for women of the limits of the social contract. This paper will attempt to demonstrate that the beauty contests in Turkey were designed precisely with this intention.

Beauty contests arose in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, really took off towards the close of that century, and became a veritable craze in the 1920s—a craze that spread around the globe and in which Turkey shared. The idea of a "Miss Turkey" (*Türkiye Güzeli*) contest was first floated by *Cumhuriyet* in 1929, and the newspaper proceeded to sponsor the contest and to cover it in excruciating detail and with enormous fanfare. The appearance of the *Türkiye Güzeli* contest coincides with the beauty contest fad then prevalent in the United States, Europe, and indeed in many "non-Western" countries, and, roughly speaking, with the advent of the Great Depression. One might therefore assume that its deeper content mirrored theirs: that beauty contests in Turkey were supposed to fill no larger function than fanning the flames of consumerism, presenting the image of a "modern," civilized Turkey abroad, or promoting a nationalist domestic agenda that involved high birth rates and race hygiene. Indeed, the *Cumhuriyet* contest contained elements of most of the above, but these were not its primary purposes. In order to reveal this fact more clearly, we will first discuss the nature and development of beauty contests in the United States and Japan as a basis for comparison, and then describe the procedure of the *Türkiye Güzeli* contests in detail.

Background and Comparison

It is generally accepted that the first modern beauty contest was attempted by P. T. Barnum as a publicity

stunt to attract audiences to his show in 1854.³ When he found that “respectable” women would not participate, he changed the format to a photographic competition with so much success that the idea was widely taken over by newspapers around the United States. By the close of the century, many newspapers sponsored such photographic beauty contests. In the 1920s, these contests began to be given a wider, more national character, to be used to attract tourists to specific resort locales, and to feature the appearance of women in person and indeed in what was considered to be a highly questionable state of dress (or undress), namely the bathing suit.⁴

In the long run, the most famous of this new breed of contest would undoubtedly be the Miss America pageant (then called the Inter-City Beauty Contest and part of Atlantic City’s larger Fall Frolic), first held in Atlantic City in 1921 as a scheme to get tourists to stay on beyond the prime summer season. The pageant was immediately denounced by many religious organizations, women’s clubs, and temperance groups as indecent and as corrupting American womanhood. Ultimately, the pageant at Atlantic City succumbed (though of course it was later revived) to the widespread disapproval and the businessmen sponsors’ fear that the negative publicity was driving customers away rather than attracting them. Nevertheless, such “bathing beauty” contests continued to be popular and were carried out in a number of cities and beach resort areas around the United States.⁵

These bathing beauty contests were always distinctly commercial in intent—as was the case with the Miss America pageant—and coincided with the explosive growth of consumerism and the mass leisure and entertainment industries, as well as with a larger process of the entrance of women into the public sphere in post-World War I America. This moment, which saw the introduction and growing use of the female form as an advertising technique, the great popularity of variety entertainments and “follies” that featured dancing girls, and the bathing beauty contest fad, also saw acting, dancing, and advertising become respectable careers for young women. The period further coincided with the growing, though controversial, trends towards more revealing bathing costumes for men and women, and towards mixed beaches.⁶ All of this serves to remind us, on the one hand, that before World War I modest young women of good families in Europe and America did not go out in public without a proper escort, usually a close male relative or older female connection, and on the other hand that in-person beauty contests, when they did take hold, *reflected* an ongoing process of broader social change but were *intended* as commercial instruments. Indeed, the manufacturers of the new, more revealing and active swimsuits were among the important sponsors of beauty contests. It may be said, then, that in the United States beauty contests were to some extent

the result of the greater social stage upon which women could act, and at the same time an attempt to use this greater space to sell women, to sell products through women, and to sell products to women.

In this period, as we have noted, beauty contests were a rising phenomenon not only in the United States but all over the world, including many countries, like Turkey, Japan, and Mexico, that had recently undergone modernizing revolutions. In these countries, beauty contests were often intended as tools for effecting a social revolution at home, and for projecting a revolution to audiences abroad. Participation in international beauty contests was an important form of nationalist expression and a means of representing the new state on the world stage, as an equal accepted among the “great” and “civilized” nations of the earth. In terms of domestic consumption, contests in these countries were less a reflection of social change and more a means of implementing it. Japan serves as an interesting example.

As Jennifer Robertson has shown in her article on beauty contests in Japan in the thirties, a worldwide concern with eugenics combined with a nationalist and imperialist project in Japan to create a desire on the part of the regime to increase the size of the Japanese population while at the same time purifying and improving the “quality” of the Japanese “race.”⁷ This was part of a larger vision of Japan as a “civilized” and “modern” nation and also as an Asian nation—Japan as preserver of Asian tradition and champion (through conquest) of Asian independence from Western colonialism. Robertson argues that the Miss Nippon contest was an important part of imperial Japan’s efforts to “claim and indoctrinate” its own people.⁸

The late twenties in Japan saw a rise in the popularity of programs and organizations promoting sport and fitness, as for example the Legs Society founded in 1925 by Ikeda Shigenori, who had studied eugenics in Germany, and affiliated with his Japanese Eugenics Exercise Association. The organization included both men and women from its inception and had as its focus fitness, including large-group precision calisthenics. Japan also pursued in the same period a natalist policy that had imperial aims and included among other things the establishment of matchmaking clinics (at first located in department stores!) to promote eugenic marriages, prohibitions on abortion and birth control, and the lionization of women with many children. In this context the newspaper *Asahi Shinbun* sponsored a beauty contest, the Miss Nippon contest, which got off the ground in 1931 and which was tied to ideals of “healthy-body beauty” and “Good Wife, Wise Mother” that were then being actively promoted by the regime.

The women in the Miss Nippon contest were over the age of fifteen and unmarried, and geishas or other professional beauties were excluded—in essence the

contestants were to be marriageable young women. The women seem to have been drawn from “good” families and to have possessed a certain level of education and culture. Contestants were asked to submit amateur photographs of themselves from specified angles (amateur photos were thought to be both more natural and less subject to manipulation), all taken the same day, to be judged. The Japanese contest outlined physical standards of beauty such as the “eight-head-body beauty” measure of “proportionality” for judging purposes. The entrants were further subjected to physical examinations, including gynecological examinations to establish their health, fertility, and virginity. The results of these examinations, summed up in measurements of height, weight, and chest size, and compared to similar characteristics of the older generation, formed part of the judging process. The fact that the young contestants were taller and stronger than women of earlier generations was given great emphasis.⁹

Yet in Japan the contestants were never seen in person by the judges, did not travel abroad later to participate in the international beauty contest scene, and while the winner’s image was heavily employed for propaganda and sales, she herself never appeared in public except once to accept her award. Miss Nippon was, then, “a disembodied body” produced by a contest whose “express purpose ... was to select a living, if disembodied, emblem of a purported racially homogenous nation.”¹⁰ Her image was also used to reinforce the connection between women and commodity culture, which fit within a model that defined female citizenship largely in terms of consumerism. Women were not viewed as subjects in this project, since “despite their symbolic investment and active participation in propagating the nation, Japanese females were not recognized by state ideologues as direct political agents or equal citizens.”¹¹ All of this, despite certain superficial similarities, such as the stipulations regarding the age and single status of contestants, stands in striking contrast to the structure and content of the *Türkiye Güzeli* contest.

The First Four *Türkiye Güzeli* Contests

This paper concentrates on the *Türkiye Güzeli* contest from 1929, when the first contest took place, to 1932, when Miss Turkey was selected as Miss World. In this section I will describe both the process of the actual contests, and the coverage surrounding them, in order to give some sense of how the event was realized, the importance it was given by its organizers, and the quality of its reception by (at least) the Istanbul public.

Cumhuriyet, an Istanbul daily paper largely sympathetic to the goals of the new Republic’s radical and modernizing regime, organized the first beauty contest in 1929 at a time when a state of exception had just been lifted and there was suddenly a greater measure of press free-

dom than had been known in the country for the previous five years at least. *Cumhuriyet* seems to have prepared the ground for the novel idea of a beauty contest rather carefully. In the weeks preceding its announcement of the contest, the paper was full of photographs of foreign female dignitaries touring the country unveiled and looking quite modern and chic—these figures included the queens of Serbia, Rumania, and Afghanistan, among others. Together with these images, which generally appeared on the front page, a regular column in the later pages called “What’s Going on in the World” (*Dünyada ne oluyor*) often depicted women in Europe or America swimming at the beach, or glamorously attired movie stars enjoying the nightlife in European capitals.

Finally on 4 February 1929, *Cumhuriyet* published a front-page story showing U. S. beauty queens wearing their state sashes and posing on the beach in their bathing suits with a headline that asked the question, “Why Shouldn’t We Do the Same Thing: I Wonder Who Turkey’s Most Beautiful Woman Is?” The piece notes that every year in Europe and America local beauty queens are selected who then go on to compete in a world beauty contest in an American city. The author rhetorically asks if Turkey’s women are less beautiful than those of other nations, and then wonders why there is not a beauty contest in Turkey as in other “civilized” countries.¹² The next day the paper followed up with a story announcing that it would sponsor a beauty contest and assume the costs of sending the winner to the international competition. This article was accompanied by a three-button portrait of Miss Brazil.¹³ Front-page coverage continued the following day with a drawing of a flapper-type female face and a headline asking, “Who is Turkey’s Most Beautiful Woman?” The article clarifies that the contest will be a serious event for women between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, and asks readers for their suggestions on how to organize the event.¹⁴ Often repetitive front-page articles continued virtually on a daily basis, generally accompanied by a photograph of a beauty queen from some other country.

Rules for entering the contest were published on 11 February 1929. They stated that any honorable (*namuslu*) Turkish woman aged fifteen or over (as we shall see, the requirement turned out to be rather flexible) could participate regardless of race, religion, or sect. Contestants should be fair of face and figure, and “bar women” were excluded from participating. Entrants were asked to send a photograph at least nine by twelve inches large along with their names and addresses to *Cumhuriyet*; the photographs would be printed in the paper and the most beautiful fifteen girls selected by the readers. A judging committee composed of sculptors, authors, theater artists, and the like would then select the winner from the finalists. Those who did not want their identi-

tics published were asked to provide a false name to accompany their picture at publication. In order to facilitate participation from all over the country, the submission period was set at one and a half months.¹⁵

From this moment on the contest was discussed in the newspaper endlessly. It was announced that women who wanted to compete could have their pictures taken at a professional studio in the Beyoğlu neighborhood of Istanbul at the paper's expense.¹⁶ The date for the submission of portraits was extended several times. On 7 March 1929, the photograph of the first contestant, Necia Refik Hanım, was published; it was a wonderful portrait of a young woman with bobbed hair and a tight-fitting cap, her elbows resting on a table, gazing into the camera while holding the string of pearls she was wearing in each hand and in her teeth—a pose somehow reminiscent of silent film heroes with roses in their mouths. The young woman thus depicted had written in earlier to say that although she knew that she was not sufficiently beautiful to win the contest, she hoped to have the honor of being the first contestant.¹⁷

The portraits of the young entrants were published in the paper every day thereafter, at first one by one, but later, as the numbers grew, in groups of three or four. Readers were asked to save all the pictures so that later they could send in the name and number of the contestant they favored. (This seemed to create distress, as the readers wanted to keep the photographs, and the paper was forced to clarify that only the coupons published in the paper for the contest need be sent in, not the pictures themselves.) There was extensive discussion over who would be on the judging committee, with the readers weighing in with their own opinions. Finally, in early August, reader votes were collected and the names of top vote getters began to be published. A number of women received more than a thousand votes. While all of this was going on, it was announced that the beauties would be filmed towards the end of August by the same man who made movies of Atatürk's model farm.¹⁸

The number of women to be invited to the in-person finals fluctuated, and some women who were invited never responded to the invitation, but in the end forty-eight women appeared before a fifty-person judging committee in the offices of *Cumhuriyet* on the morning of Monday, 2 September. They were required to wear gowns that revealed their necks and shoulders and to show their national identity card to prove that they were Turkish citizens and unmarried. The women appeared before the judges first as a group and later individually. The judges' identities were kept from the public in 1929, as in subsequent years, until after the judging was over, to prevent their being pressured in any way. The committee was composed of men and women, all prominent figures in the world of arts, letters, medicine, and politics. Some were very famous, like the authors

Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar and Halit Ziya, and the intellectual and poet Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan. The names and picture of the three winners—Feriha Tefvîk Hanım (aged fourteen and the granddaughter of a former government bureaucrat), Semine Hanım, and Mlle. Araksi Çetiniyan—were published the day after the contest, that is, six months after the paper announced its intention to run a beauty contest.¹⁹

The *Türkiye Güzeli* contest had occupied the front page of *Cumhuriyet* almost every day of those six months, and the coverage did not stop once the contest was decided. On subsequent days pictures of Turkish contestants were paired in the paper with winners from other countries and the readers were asked to make comparisons. It was also announced that the contest would be held every year and that the 1930 contest would be conducted in good time to send the winner to the Miss Europe and Miss World contests. Those readers who had voted for the winner in 1929 were to receive some sort of token or reward from *Cumhuriyet*, and the paper began to look at the mailed-in votes in order to determine who those people were.

The preparations for the 1930 contest began very early and if anything even more excitement seemed to surround the event. New contestants were solicited and old contestants reentered. On January 9 the young women were invited to a dress ball held at an Istanbul *gazino*—a kind of dinner and entertainment nightclub—called the *Türkvaz*. The contestants were sent invitations and allowed to bring a chaperon. They were also directed to various hairdressers around town where they could have their hair done for free on the day of the ball. The ball started at ten, the contestants were presented around midnight, and the dancing continued until dawn. In this manner twenty finalists were chosen.²⁰ These returned to the *Türkvaz* club at four on the afternoon of 12 January 1930. They were received and ushered into a special room where they were photographed and filmed individually and in groups. Public excitement surrounding the event was so great that the *Türkvaz* was mobbed early on and its doors had to be barred despite a police presence. Some judges were not able to get into the club because of this. At around five, the women were ushered into the judges' presence as a group and filed by them for some time. Then the contestants were stood one by one on a table and examined by the judges. After they left the room, the judges voted—the manner of voting was decided on the spot—for their three favorites. The results were announced to the multitude of people assembled in the public rooms of the club, who had paid to be present for the proclamation of the new queen: first place, Mübeccel Namik Hanım, aged eighteen; second, Feriha Tefvîk Hanım (for the second time); third, Nüzhet İhsan Hanım. After the results were announced, the winner was presented to the

cheering, applauding crowd in the public halls, drank a toast, sat briefly at the table of *Cumhuriyet*'s editor, danced with men who eagerly offered their arms, and retired to a back room to be interviewed by reporters.²¹

A few days later the new *Türkiye Güzeli* left with her father for Paris and the Miss Europe contest. The Sirkeci train station was mobbed when she departed and all the stops along the way to the border were full of well-wishers.²² In Paris the Turkish beauty was warmly received and her travels and adventures were discussed in *Cumhuriyet* in great detail. When Miss Greece was declared the winner, there was a strong reaction in Turkey. The paper invited comparisons with Mübeccel Hanım, and even went so far as to insinuate that the Greek beauty's victory had been owing to the sentimental attachment of Europeans to classical civilization (fired by the fact that Miss Greece, unlike the others, had showed up before the judges in some sort of classical attire), and perhaps to the influence of a powerful patron.²³ After touring some European cities with extensive newspaper coverage, Miss Turkey of 1930 returned home. Stories about her continued to appear from time to time, but without the daily intensity demonstrated earlier. Ultimately she did attend an international contest in Rio, while Feriha Tevfik was sent to Galveston.²⁴ But by the end of March the contest per se appeared only very occasionally in the pages of *Cumhuriyet*. Although the 1930 contest had provoked great interest and fervor, after the loss in Paris coverage and interest seemed to die down.

Nevertheless, in 1931 a third contest was carried out by *Cumhuriyet*. Once again, photographs were published intensively on the front page of the paper, but as in 1930 women were also allowed to participate in person without first publishing their names and photographs. Indeed, contestants could sign up until the very moment that the preliminary selection began. On the night of 15 January they had to present themselves (with a chaperon if they wished) at the Türkuvaz by nine o'clock. The doors to the club were closed after this. A large public was assembled in the main halls of the club, eating dinner and dancing, while the young women and their escorts ate in a private room. Of the roughly ninety-six women who had signed up in one way or another for the contest, only thirty-seven showed up for this stage of the competition. At midnight, the young women were brought into the main salon, where they were supposed to parade before the guests, but the place was so packed that they were shown to the public by standing up one by one on a chair. After this, they left the room and the more than a thousand diners wrote down the numbers of their favorites on voting papers that had been distributed beforehand.

These were counted and the twenty-two top contestants were invited to another round at the Türkuvaz on

the evening of 18 January, although, in the event, basically any young woman who turned up was allowed to participate. The judging started at five, while the public enjoyed a tea dance in the main salon of the club. As in the previous year the women made a formal parade through the public hall and outside for the assembled crowd. They then paraded before the judges in a separate room. Finally they were brought before the judges one by one, set on a table and looked over carefully, while they blushed and shook under the strong lights that had been set up for the cameramen and photographers. This time, three finalists were chosen from the group and brought back for a second pass before the judges, after which they were ranked. The winner, Nashide Saffet Hanım, a school teacher and the daughter of a postal official, went to the Paris contest, arriving there on 1 February 1931, and was back in Istanbul by 7 April of that year.²⁵

Again, disappointment reigned when she failed to win any title. The disillusion was so great that in 1932 the contest was not held for lack of contestants, but then in March, at the specific invitation of the Belgian organizers of that year's Miss World contest, a Miss Turkey was hurriedly selected. One of only eight candidates, Keriman Halis Hanım, the eighteen-year-old daughter of a merchant, had been enrolled in the contest only minutes before the final selection began. The young winner was sent off to Spa for the international contest in great haste and with considerable fanfare—her train was met by great crowds at every station stop as far as the Turkish border—despite what had appeared to be public lethargy towards the topic up to that point. And then, to everyone's great joy and astonishment, she won.²⁶ This of course led to an extended tour of Europe for the winner, and to extensive coverage of the victory in the press at home, with a congratulatory statement sent by Atatürk himself to *Cumhuriyet*.

Social Meaning of the Contests

We may first of all gather from this account that in Turkey, unlike Japan or the United States, contests did not have a substantial commercial basis or orientation. Doubtless *Cumhuriyet*'s editors and owners hoped that the daily excitement surrounding the competition and publication of pictures of pretty young women would not hurt the paper's sales. Nevertheless, when *Cumhuriyet* first began to sponsor its *Türkiye Güzeli* contest in 1929, it undertook all the expense of running the contest, and of the winners' participation thereafter in European and international competitions. These were not inexpensive outlays. The contest boasted no commercial sponsors or backers whose products the contestants endorsed or whose names were prominently associated with the contest.²⁷ In fact, Turkish businesses seem to have been a bit slow to appreciate the commercial possibilities of

the contest, and of the female form in general.²⁸ Various establishments came forward offering gifts to the contestants (cologne, cosmetics, chocolates) after the contest, or services like hairdressing or dressmaking while it was ongoing, and these donations were always listed at the end of articles covering the contest as they were made. That mention constituted a sort of free publicity for merchants, but clearly it was not the driving force behind the contest. Rather, in addition to the other costs, *Cumhuriyet* worked with commercial studios to have the women's portraits taken at the paper's expense. Furthermore, in the first year when, to stimulate interest in the contest, the readership was invited to participate by voting for the most beautiful contestant, the paper promised the readers prizes if they turned out to have voted for the winner.

But if the Turkish contests were not fundamentally exercises in consumerism, they certainly were exercises in nationalism and the projection of a "modern," positive national image. From the beginning they had a distinctly nationalist content and were supposed to help promote an image of Turkey as a "civilized" nation. In contrast to the Japanese case, in fact, Miss Turkey was sent to compete abroad, and there was no attempt to "repudiate" undesirable traits of "enemy" women: the image of the Western woman was positive. From the beginning, the overt discussion of the contest, its meaning and purpose, by the editorial staff of *Cumhuriyet* and by the young women participants themselves, was couched in terms of nationalism, national pride, and Turkey's status as a "civilized" and progressive country on the world stage. From the very earliest mention of the contest, when *Cumhuriyet* asks rhetorically if it can really be the case that Turkish women are less beautiful than those of other nations and invites its readers to look at pictures of foreign beauty queens and compare, to the endless comments by the contestants about the honor of representing Turkey abroad, to editorials about how the revolutionary changes in Turkey have taken Turkish womanhood from the harem to the silver bridge of a Paris nightclub, the theme of the beauty contest is unabashedly linked to Turkey's national image in the "civilized" world.

Columnists triumphantly comment on a number of occasions that Miss Turkey's foreign tours have a propaganda value in presenting the "new Turkey" to the world that could not have been achieved with the outlay of many millions. Nâzide Saffet, Miss Turkey 1931, said it all with a disarming baldness upon her return from the Miss Europe contest:

When I set out from here I was very happy ... I was going to represent my esteemed country in an illustrious center of civilization like Paris. And who would Europe's beauty [queen] be in the end, I wondered? What would my place be among the beauty queens of

Western countries with much more advanced civilizations than ours, [women] who had been chosen at thousand of liras' expense?

She continues by describing her arrival in Paris and her reaction to the posh Claridge's Hotel having hung out the national flags of all the contestants staying there:

When you see this, is it possible not to feel a matchless pride? To represent my esteemed country here is one of the greatest distinctions in my happy life ... An Estonian beauty, an English beauty, and a German queen ... asked [me] very sincere and probing questions: "Do all Turkish women dress like you? Don't you wear baggy pants and a face veil?" They were surprised at the answers I gave to these questions, but finally they believed [and] were convinced that my esteemed country had adopted European behavior. And because of this ... they applauded and congratulated me.²⁹

Domestically, in Turkey, as in Japan, the beauty contest was occasionally accorded an overtly racial tone, and interest in ideas of race hygiene and racial improvement helps to account for the rise of the sports and athletics movement. An early editorial on the beauty contests comments:

Beauty does not consist only of a semblance which pleases the eye; it can be said at the same time ... that it is the shining mark of health and happiness ... beauty means above all health and firmity and so the first condition for success in life individually and nationally is this and this alone.³⁰

Thus, in the pages of *Cumhuriyet* in the years 1929-32 we find much discussion of physical fitness for men and women, including athletic expositions of various kinds and innumerable competitions for both sexes including running, jumping, gymnastics, rowing, and swimming—the last rather striking as the whole question of women appearing in swimsuits in public was controversial, both in the United States as we have seen, and in Turkey as will be discussed below. In addition, many articles aimed at women discussed the benefits of sports (such as fencing) and calisthenics, and covered the athletic activities of women in other countries.

The idea of improving the "race" was also connected in some ways to the desire to increase the country's population. Thus, in the same years we find parliament debating a so-called singleness tax, which would have taxed the unmarried in order to provide additional support to women with six or more children. Indeed, the government at this time began awarding medals to women with five children and with ten children. Resolutions were also passed forbidding new mothers to work for a three-week period before or after a birth.³¹ Discussion of the changing position of women in society was often linked to the concept of the "the mothers of the nation." One editorial that celebrated the end of polyg-

any in Turkey put it this way: “Protection and respect are owed to every woman, but even more to a married woman and most of all to a mother ... because they are going to give birth to and bring up the great Turkish nation.”³²

Furthermore, beauty contest rhetoric in Turkey did occasionally equate beauty, health, and race “improve ment,” as we have already seen. Yet the beauty contests in Turkey differed substantially from those in Japan in this regard. In Turkey, as in Japan, the contestants were to be young, unmarried, and respectable, but racial purity was never a criterion. While Miss Nippon was to be of “pure blood,” any Turkish citizen regardless of religion or “race” was welcomed into the contest, and the third-place winner in 1929, Mlle. Araksi Çetiniyan, was probably from the Armenian community. There were no set standards of judgment, such as height-head-body beauty, and no physical measurements—Miss Turkey was to represent the nation, but she was not a type. Nor were there any physical examinations or, especially, gynecological examinations in the Turkish case. The photographs submitted for the Turkish contest, as we have seen, were professional, consisted of a single three-button portrait, and were published in the paper. The contestants were judged in person, and the winners often appeared at large public events and gatherings.

In other words, though the young women were supposed to be marriageable, they were not primarily understood as future wives and mothers. Indeed, *Cumhuriyet* satirized the assumption that beauty amounted to measuring a woman’s potential as a future wife, while at the same time making a point of the country’s religious and ethnic diversity. In February 1930, responding to a reader’s criticism that the paper had not consulted the “common man” when judging the women’s beauty, *Cumhuriyet* published a full-page spoof accompanied by humorous drawings. In it, one of *Cumhuriyet*’s reporters purportedly interviews men and women of a variety of class, religious, and ethnic backgrounds on the topic of female beauty. Notable is the fact that the interviewer always asks, “What do you think a beautiful woman is?” and the interviewees almost always respond with what they think the characteristics of a good wife are.³³ This contrasts sharply with the post-victory interviews of the successive Miss Turkeys, who all say that they are not thinking of marriage in the near future, but are thinking of various career paths. Moreover, the notion that the women’s marriageability would be compromised by their physical presence before the public was rejected by the Turkish organizers, as can be seen from the very structure of the competition, which emphasized their appearance in person before the public and in attire that from a traditional point of view was revealing.

Indeed, *Cumhuriyet* actively sought to normalize im-

ages of women in Western, open, or non-traditional attire (that is, with hair and face uncovered, and even showing some neck, shoulder, or ankle). Coverage specifically portrayed women in more physically revealing ways: visiting female dignitaries (whether traveling in their own right or as wives), women in various sporting or entertainment contexts, or women engaged in non-traditional activities like piloting airplanes or driving.³⁴ We have already mentioned that in the run-up to the first *Türkiye Güzeli* contest the newspaper printed photographs of American beauty queens in bathing suits wearing their sashes, and also more formal portraits of European beauty queens. In addition to these, throughout the period of the contests *Cumhuriyet* also printed many seductive images of movie stars in its “What’s Happening in the World” column and on its “Cinema” page. Extensive space was also devoted to women in sport both at home and abroad, with many photographs of women in relatively skimpy bathing costumes or other athletic clothing. These included women doing group calisthenics (Germany and Turkey), competing in swimming, rowing, and foot races (Turkey), fencing heats (Britain, U. S.), and diving championships (Netherlands) to name a few.

One very popular theme was the portrayal of visiting royal women, occasionally unaccompanied by husbands or fathers. Queen Soraya of Afghanistan was featured particularly frequently, and this was no coincidence since her husband’s attempts at reform in Afghanistan, including reforms in the status of women, were widely seen as having provoked the domestic opposition that had ultimately forced Amanullah Khan to abdicate in 1929.³⁵ Notable are the stories carried on the front pages of the 17 and 18 January 1929 editions. The first story is headed “Why Was the Afghan King Forced to Abdicate?” and is accompanied by two images of the queen, one on the left wearing a heavy coat, a hat, and veil covering her whole face including her eyes, the other on the right showing her in a sleeveless summer dress, with hair, face, shoulders, and arms uncovered. The caption reads, in part, “On the right in civilized attire, on the left in Afghan attire.” The article continues on page two, noting that a proclamation has been read in Afghanistan rolling back the king’s proposed reforms: Afghan girls sent to Turkey for education are recalled, the requirement for women to have a cloth covering their faces is restored, military service is abolished, women’s societies are closed, and soldiers are permitted to become the disciples of sheikhs.³⁶ The front-page article the following day is also accompanied by a photograph of the queen with her face uncovered. The paper makes note of the very complex and fractious political situation in Afghanistan, with its turbulent history, powerful tribes, and religious mixture, and points out that even Amanullah Khan’s grandfather never achieved

the status of a monarch in the fullest sense of the word. *Cumhuriyet* then goes on to ridicule European coverage of the Afghan turmoil. By this European account, the king fell under the spell of his beautiful wife and promoted reforms that allowed her to display her charms by wearing the Western fashions she loved. These policies cost the king prestige with tribal leaders and weakened his throne, ultimately leading to his forced abdication:

Despite [Afghanistan's complex background], the European newspapers constantly report recent Afghan events as if they were a novel, as if the whole cause of the rebellion were Soraya Hanım... [According to them,] once Queen Soraya discovered that Western fashions enhanced her already shining beauty, she used her personal influence with her husband the king to force the acceptance of these fashions on the women of her country.³⁷

That all the above was part of a desire to give women a new and different freedom of the streets can be seen in a front-page story of 10 September 1929. The first Miss Turkey had been chosen just one week earlier, and the paper had been full of reports on this topic in the subsequent days—including several photographs of garden parties attended by the contestants that were framed in a keyhole shape. Then on the tenth the paper carried a story entitled “Those Who Make Comments to Women Will Be Detained at Once.” This story carried a statement by the Minister of Justice, Mahmud Esat Bey, saying that a rise in inappropriate comments directed at women had forced him to remind government officials that the Turkish constitution guarantees citizens’ good name/honor (*namus*), esteem (*sheref*), and dignity (*haysiyet*), and that article 421 of the criminal code punishes those who make offensive comments to women with from one to three months of prison. He characterizes those who make such comments as giving aid and comfort to antirevolutionary reactionaries and as trifling with the high principle of human freedom.³⁸

Here we see two important themes introduced into the context of the beauty contests. One is the question of respectability or honor, *namus*. The other is the close association of the question of the position of women with the regime and its revolutionary agenda. *Namus* first appears in the published parameters for participation in the contest, which stated that any “honorable” (*namuslu*) Turkish woman could enter the contest, and that “bar women” were excluded. Nevertheless, *Cumhuriyet* had to deal from the beginning with the problem of the exposure of women’s bodies in public spaces, and what the willingness to do this implied about the women involved. This problem was addressed both directly and indirectly by the editors of *Cumhuriyet*, and it is clear that there were great tensions around the matter. As early as 26 February 1929, very soon after the com-

petition had been formally announced by the paper, the front page carried a story entitled “Beauty Is Something to Be Proud Of.” It was reported that the paper had received a letter from a young woman who wished to remain anonymous, to the effect that she had several friends, more beautiful than herself, who were reluctant to enter the contest, “as if beauty were a fault and something blameworthy.” The author of the letter concludes by asking the paper to encourage her friends. The columnist picks up the theme, adding that indeed “beauty is not a fault to be hidden” and that in order for the contest to be valid, all Turkey’s beautiful women should participate in it. The article also includes a photograph and discussion of Spain’s newly chosen young beauty queen.³⁹ Yet despite these assurances, questions about showing one’s body and having one’s name published persisted and, as a result, *Cumhuriyet* at various times made it possible for women to participate using initials or false names, and even without having their photographs appear in the paper at all; rather they could enroll in a separate book leaving their names and photographs, and they would then be allowed to turn up in person on the day of the contest to participate in the live part of the competition.⁴⁰

The tensions could also be clearly seen when in 1931 a teacher at the Büyükdere Primary School, Nâzide Saffet Hanım won first place. The Ministry of Education called her out on the carpet for participating in a beauty contest, and there was some talk of her being let go from her job and barred from the profession, though this threat was never carried out. Still, the young woman in her victory interview commented, “I am very pleased and happy. However, if there is something that pains me, it is that I have become obligated to leave my beloved profession of teaching.”⁴¹ *Cumhuriyet* of course responded to these aspersions on the character of its contest and contestants. “The Ministry of Education is reported to see the entrance of one of its teachers in the contest, and her having been selected as queen, as a cause for grief. If this is true, does it mean that beauty is a base thing and that participation in a beauty contest is shameful?” it demanded. The commentary goes on to point out that hundreds of Turkish girls had participated over a three-year period and that such contests were conducted all over the world. It further adds that physical education, physical education fairs or holidays, and athletic expositions were a regular part of the curriculum at the women’s normal school that fell under the ministry’s own administrative purview.⁴²

The following year, when Keriman Halis Hanım won the title of Miss World in Belgium to everyone’s astonishment, more scandal erupted around questions of this kind. Other newspapers reported that her family wanted to marry her off as quickly as possible now that the whole world “knew her,” and that she herself had raised

the issue saying that although she had previously been quite “covered,” the contest had exposed her to everyone’s view. The girl’s uncle (since she and her father were still in Europe) both denied the story and lamented the violation of the family’s privacy that the printing of such a story represented, as did her mother. *Cumhuriyet* also characterized the violation of the family’s privacy (*barim*) as shameful (*ayyp*).⁴³ Shortly after these unpleasant developments, *Cumhuriyet* published a story about the visit of the young woman and her father to the well-known French beach resort of Deauville.⁴⁴ At the same time, the paper was sponsoring a swimming contest with heats for both men and women (the contest actually took place on the same day Keriman Halis was pictured on the beach at Deauville), and many photographs of women in swimsuits were featured on its pages.⁴⁵ All this seems to have led to the impression that Keriman Halis Hanım had herself donned a swimsuit and gone for a public dip. The young woman felt this was so damaging that she had a correction published on the front page of *Cumhuriyet* clarifying emphatically that she had done no such thing.⁴⁶ Some days later, in the context of lauding the young woman’s great victory, an editorial appeared affirming that of all the Turkish revolutions, the greatest was the freedom achieved by women. The editorial specifically mentions women’s freedom to study and to enter all the professions, and also to *wear bathing suits and spend time on the beach* taking advantage of the healthful benefits of sea and sun.⁴⁷ Although the editorial does not specifically mention Keriman Halis or the contest, it is obviously responding to this “scandal” even as Keriman Halis is denying that she swam in public.

The question of how the public would view the *namus* of the contestants and of whether or not they would be marriageable after exposing themselves to the eyes of the judges and the world must have been a pressing one, as *Cumhuriyet* felt compelled to publish a short notice on the front page of its 16 May 1932 edition announcing the marriage of the 1930 winner, Mübeccel Hanım, to a merchant. The notice further commented, “Thus the meaninglessness of gossip to the effect that the beauty queens would never get married because no one would want them is demonstrated; because, of the three queens, two—Feriha Hanım and Mübeccel Hanım—have married.”⁴⁸ While this might seem to confirm old gender prejudices and stereotypes, the whole point of the contest was to bring women’s open physical presence in the public realm and in non-domestic activities *within* the social pale. There should be no doubt that this was supposed to be part of a profound change in the understanding of women’s roles in society — not just the assimilation of a few new behaviors to an old model. As *Cumhuriyet*’s advice columnist commented in April 1930, when women were first

accorded the vote:

The insides of our [people’s] heads are encircled by limits called fixed ideas or prejudices. We take on ideas and imprison them within the limits in our heads, and we make ourselves slaves of these ideas. For example, to a redneck it is a scandal [*namussuzluk*] for a woman to show her hair or [leave] her face uncovered. [No doubt] you are laughing at me because as far as you are concerned, the fact of today’s woman going to a ball in an off-the-shoulder dress is not a matter that has any bearing on her good name [*namus*]. But you would get mad at a woman’s living with the man she loved out of wedlock, because the limits in your head still haven’t given you the freedom to tolerate this idea. Tomorrow’s youth will laugh at you [in your turn]. *Namus* is a [matter of] interpretation that changes according to time, place, and period. To imprison our heads inside such limits ... means to close off our minds’ open horizons. *Namus* doesn’t have a meaning, it has limits, and it is necessary to broaden those limits.⁴⁹

The Contests and the Regime

Broadening the limits was part of the agenda at *Cumhuriyet*, and also part of the agenda of the governing regime and of the state’s single and newly formed party, the Republican People’s Party (RPP). *Cumhuriyet* was founded in 1924 by Yunus Nadi, an intellectual, journalist, and politician who had been active in the Young Turk period. In 1918 he had founded and edited the newspaper *Yeni Gün* in Istanbul, but moved the paper and its press to Ankara in the face of Istanbul’s occupation by the French and British. He and his paper supported the nationalist cause throughout the war. Then, in 1924, after the abolition of the caliphate—an act that had been greeted with some hostility by the existing Istanbul press—he returned to Istanbul to publish *Cumhuriyet*. *Cumhuriyet* proved to be a paper that was extremely sympathetic to the new regime. It could be highly critical of what it saw as corruption or inefficiency and at times espoused views more radical than those openly adopted by the government or party, but it could generally be relied upon to support the government’s social initiatives.

The 1920s and early 1930s were a time of radical change in Turkey. While the early twenties were dominated by the bitter struggle to expel foreign armies and secure unrestricted national sovereignty, the rest of this period was characterized by the elimination of possible competitors to Atatürk’s position and the implementation of a radical program of social and political engineering. These efforts at social transformation may be grouped roughly into three phases: a first phase in 1924 aimed at bringing all formal institutions of religion under the authority of the new state; a second phase con-

centrated in the years 1925-26 designed to disrupt the hold of popular religious custom and enforce secular habits on the population; and a third phase in the early 1930s devoted to fostering an intense Turkish nationalism and the creation of a clearly non-Ottoman, non-Islamic national identity.

In this context, *Cumhuriyet*'s coverage routinely juxtaposed its beauty contest with government initiatives that either had direct bearing on women, such as female suffrage, or that the regime chose to illustrate through women, such as the development of the new Turkish History Society or the national language reforms.⁵⁰ Thus, for example, on 20 July 1930 *Cumhuriyet*'s front page carried Mübcecel Hanım setting off for Paris while on page four Ali İbrahim published an article on "Simplicity in Language." On 3 July 1932 *Cumhuriyet* placed a heavily illustrated story about the selection of Miss Turkey for that year next to coverage of an address by Afetinan, Atatürk's adoptive daughter, to the first congress of the History Society. The front page of 4 July 1932 places a report on a debate between the eminent Turkist politician and historian Zeki Veldi Togan and Reshit Galip at the History Society's first congress next to a story on a cocktail party in honor of Turkey's new beauty queen, while on page five another article on Afetinan at the History Society congress finds itself next to a discussion of backless evening gown styles for women. Similarly, the story "20,000 People Applauded the [Beauty] Queen Yesterday Evening" shared the front page with a cartoon of the contestants before the judges and an article entitled "Regarding the History Congress," on 8 July 1932.⁵¹ Even more simply and directly, throughout 1930 *Cumhuriyet* published frequent stories and photographs, most often on the front page, reporting on the beauty contest, the extension of suffrage to women, the introduction of women judges in courts of law, and the activities of the Women's Union (*Kadın Birliği*)—an interest association dedicated to improving the position of women.⁵²

Sometimes *Cumhuriyet* itself decided to illustrate government initiatives through women, as in the case of literacy campaigns and the alphabet revolution. The alphabet revolution had been legislated in 1928, and in 1929 the government made great efforts to promote national schools, *millet mektepleri*, whose purpose was to teach everyone how to read and write in the new Latin alphabet. Not surprisingly, then, in 1929 *Cumhuriyet* carried numerous stories concerning the government's efforts to promote literacy, a theme that continued into 1930 and 1931. Quite often the images supplied with these stories depicted women learning to read. For example, the first issue of 1929 featured front-page stories about the drive for everyone to attend the new *millet mektepleri* and learn the new alphabet. The year was dubbed the "year of enlightenment" and proclaimed the

cradle of a revolution that was not merely a salvation, but would also be a creative force. These articles were accompanied on one side by a drawing that showed masses of people piling into the door of the new schools with a Lady Liberty-like figure pointing the way, and on the other side by a photograph of two women, one with covered head and the other completely veiled, standing outside a school waiting to enroll.⁵³ A few days later a similar story included a photograph of a woman in traditional dress but with uncovered face sitting in class writing, with her baby on her knee.⁵⁴

Later, as 1929 wore on and the *Türkiye Güzeli* contest was announced, stories about the beauty contest overlapped with significant coverage of the opening and achievements of the *millet mektepleri*. Photographs illustrating *millet mektepleri* stories often shared the front page of *Cumhuriyet* with discussion of the beauty contest, as was the case on 3 March 1929 when the paper published a story, embellished with pictures of foreign beauty queens, announcing that it would soon begin the publication of the Turkish contestants' photographs. On the same page was an article reporting the start of examinations at the national schools, illustrated with a photograph of a roomful of women actually taking the examination. In similar fashion, a front-page article of 6 January 1930 announcing an *okuma seferberliği* or "reading mobilization" sits directly atop a picture of several beauty queens. Sometimes such juxtapositions occurred in the same edition, but not on the same page, as on 24 February 1929, with coverage of the contest on the front page and a photograph of the female teachers and students at a school in Kandıra on a later page.

Occasionally, the juxtapositions went beyond images of women and girls in school to actual discussions of women's education, as on 20 June 1932 when the front page carried both an article reminding young women that only ten days remained to enter the contest, and an opinion piece by the paper's editor-in-chief commenting on the third year in operation of the İsmet Paşa Girls Institute in Ankara. In the editorial, Yunus Nadi comments that some women will complete only a middle-school education there and then go on to adorn their own homes. Others will stay on a bit longer and become schoolteachers, and still others will complete the institute's whole program. These he terms "women of life" in contrast to "women of the house." "Women of life," he says, will be in control of their lives and their hearths, and will be in control of matters of importance to them such as the guiding principles governing their homes and personalities. But over and above this, some of these women, having completed their education and acquired advanced abilities, will be inclined to earn their living through the labor of their own hands. The implication is that these last are the highest manifestation of "women of life."⁵⁵ In line with this sort of commentary

are the numerous articles about young women studying at European universities or art conservatories, or having notable success on the international lecture circuit.⁵⁶

But literacy campaigns and “book learning” were not the only arenas where new roles and activities for women received emphasis. Alongside the photographs of women at school for literacy were lots of photographs of women in trade schools specializing in such things as secretarial skills or the making of hats and artificial flowers.⁵⁷ There were also photographs of women working in various kinds of manufacturing settings, such as carpet workshops and cigarette factories. Sometimes these were associated with overt coverage of opportunities for women, as when the paper covered a model tobacco plant that provided daycare for female workers who lacked relatives to look after their children. This article emphasized the good care and nourishment the children received while in the daycare center.⁵⁸ Other pictures of women in paid work environments accompanied stories that discussed economic issues related to a particular industrial sector or the introduction of new machines. In either case the pictures often appeared alongside or within a few days of stories about the beauty pageant.⁵⁹

To some extent, the Turkish government’s measures and initiatives of the late twenties and early thirties, with their emphasis on building national feeling, national ideology, and party cadres, can be understood as a response to political unrest attributed to lingering forces of “reaction” (*irtica*) and to the discontents arising from the worldwide depression of the thirties with its decline in exports and agricultural prices. They are also a response to the threat from within revolutionary circles themselves, as revealed by the unexpected success of the Free Party in Turkey’s brief multiparty experiment of 1930. Thus, the policies of the period were aimed both at attacking “reactionary” attitudes and at securing the hearts and minds of “progressives.” A particular focus was religious life, with much government effort aimed at modernizing the practice of religion on the one hand, while vilifying and persecuting a religious establishment labeled reactionary on the other.

Here again, *Cumhuriyet* quite often placed stories about modern women and/or beauty contest participants next to stories about progressive religion or about religious reaction. This served either to soften the moral questions around new roles for women by showing no shame in displaying them next to religious themes, or else highlighted the “backwardness” of religious reactionaries. While these two topics are never put into direct contact or discussion in *Cumhuriyet*, indirectly they are made to comment on one another. For example, the *Türkiye Güzeli* contest was first announced just before Ramadan. This resulted in the somewhat odd effect of having articles entitled “Who Is Turkey’s Most Beautiful

Woman?” or “Why Isn’t Turkey Represented among the International Beauties?” side by side with articles like “Ramadan Is Coming” (and this article in fact contains information about nighttime entertainment, like theatre, that has been planned for the month of Ramadan) or an announcement that the start of Ramadan will be heralded on Monday, 11 February. Line drawings of pretty flapper-style young women sit next to line drawings of mosques. On the first day of Ramadan itself, headshots of three European beauty queens under the headline “Every Young Woman Can Participate in Our Contest” shared the prime spot on the front page with another mosque drawing, the headline “Today: Ramadan,” and a story explaining where to go to hear recitations of the Koran.⁶⁰ Here the effect is to deny there is anything shameful in the presence of women’s physical image by allowing it to share the page with one of the holiest events in the Muslim calendar. Similarly, in 1932 stories about the introduction of mosque prayers in Turkish shared space in the newspaper with discussion of the beauty contest.⁶¹

In 1931, the process was reversed through the frequent placement of stories and photographs covering the contest alongside pieces covering the trial of religious figures associated with the infamous outburst at Menemen.⁶² The graphic contrasts are very striking, with studio portraits of attractive young women dressed in Western fashion placed next to harsh and unflattering pictures of traditionally dressed, bearded and turbaned *sheyhs* and *hocas* (usually kneeling) under armed guard. Variations of this image appear many times on the front page of *Cumhuriyet* in early 1931, and even when such photographs are not present, coverage of these two events is very often placed together.⁶³ Whereas in 1929 the emphasis was on showing a “tame” Islam next to “respectable” beauty queens in an effort both to secularize Islam and to normalize the female body, in 1931 images of “civilized” beauty are placed next to those of “barbarous” zealotry in a clear attempt to discredit forces of religious “reaction.” In the first case the right sort of religion helps redefine women’s *namus*, in the second case the “new woman” helps condemn the wrong kind of religious sentiment.

Thus, for *Cumhuriyet*, the position of women in society was intricately tied up with the whole project of nation formation and social transformation being undertaken by the government and by the Republican People’s Party. While recent literature on the nation, modernity, and women in the Middle East is replete with accounts of how the modernizing state in many countries was more interested in “mothers of the nation” than, to paraphrase Robertson, in women who were full citizens and political agents, this was far from the case in Turkey at this time. In the attempt to expand the boundaries of *namus*, the paper, indeed, made the

argument that women who appeared in public and who took up public roles were nevertheless eligible as wives and mothers, and on its "Woman" (*kadın*) pages it carried stories on fashion, cosmetics, child rearing, and cookery. Nevertheless, the wider print and photographic context within which the beauty contest was set reveals that the project emphasized choice and agency for women, and that the editors of *Cumhuriyet* saw the expansion of the physical boundaries of women's lives as a crucial element of this. As the paper's editorial staff often insisted in one way or another, "beauty is nothing to be ashamed of."⁶⁴

A Janus-faced Revolution: Editorial Ambivalence

Of course, many tensions surrounded such a project, and the reporting in *Cumhuriyet* reflected these tensions and was not without ambivalence. On the one hand, some of the most radical statements of the social revolution as it might affect men and women can found in "If You Ask Me" (*Bana sorarsanız*). This was the advice column of "Cici Anne," a kind of "Dear Abby" figure who was in reality the well-known leftist journalist Sabiha Sertel.⁶⁵ Cici Anne frequently and virulently denounces the inequality between the sexes and insists upon the moral personhood of women; at the same time, however, she recognizes the great constraints that social norms and mores place upon people's behavior regardless of right, wrong, or a person's own preferences or moral views. Some of her columns seem to address male readers primarily and to appeal to them to see women as people rather than as sexual toys, mothers, or workhorses. Beyond these general appeals for companionate marriage, however, Cici Anne's message is much more radical. She directly addresses the question of individual freedom and social constraint in relationships, and also the matter of women's agency, submission to male authority, and the roots of the same.

To a young woman who writes in to ask why she can't propose marriage to a man she has fallen for, the answer comes, in our society the norm is "women desire, men propose." Though the choice of a spouse is vitally important to a woman, Cici Anne continues, though she feels the same sexual attraction that he does, though the pretense of demurely waiting to be asked breeds hypocrisy and manipulateness among women, nevertheless men don't like to be pursued. Women are not free, as men are, to seek the spouse they want, and "The right to act that society gives to men reduces women to objects whose feelings can be repressed, ... [objects] that are for sale."⁶⁶ In response to an earlier column in which Cici Anne had warned women against the evils of henpecking, noting that even the most self-sacrificing man is not happy to give up his independence, Cici Anne received a letter from a group of men in Tarsus thanking her for her defense of men. These gentlemen lamented that

though they worked day and night to meet a woman's every want or need, still the women just sat lazing around the stove at home, complaining and making demands. To this Cici Anne replies:

What good actors men are! Like Solomon they both hold the seal of authority and with it seal the hearts and freedom of women.

Men are the judges, the owners, the founders, the lawgivers, the commanders. They are the ones who hold in their hands the tiller of their lives, and like a cyclone change the direction of a woman's life as they wish.

... [The master] can take the slave from the ship and be partners with her till he drives her to the fields. Abdurahman Celebi said to the goat, follow me until we cross the bridge. However, after crossing the bridge, the most important responsibility of the manly role is to stretch the slave on the cross, to close the goat in the pen.

... Poor men!!! They know well how to play the role of the oppressed while [they are actually] in the role of the oppressor. But in truth the pitiable one in the play is the woman, who plays the role of the [sacrificial] goat.⁶⁷

A further letter on the topic of henpecking asks why men and women shouldn't interfere in each other's lives, and why it is called henpecking when a woman seeks to bind her husband to her and prevent infidelity. The answer comes that being a father or husband, a wife or mother, does not give one the right to interfere with one's spouse or to command him or her. However, Cici Anne adds, a man's economic power gives him the right to interfere with his wife and order her about. And whereas in law a woman has the right to divorce her husband for infidelity, most women simply shut up and take whatever comes their way because they say to themselves, "If my nest is destroyed, if I am left without a man, I will go hungry." And so ... [this powerlessness] grasps the woman by the hair and with her hair ties her tongue."⁶⁸

On the other end of the spectrum from Sertel's advice column, *Cumhuriyet* regularly ran cartoons that poked a bit of (occasionally ribald) fun at the proposed changes in gender roles and family and social life. In some ways these were all in good fun and served to lighten both the seriousness and the tensions surrounding the project, but at the same time they reveal a profound unease and discomfort. The cartoons addressed all aspects of change in norms of women's behavior. One area of concern was certainly physical appearance, as in the cartoon depicting two women, one older, one younger, seated in an outdoor cafe. The younger woman addresses a man saying, "What do think, doctor? Does this new fashion for nudity have anything to it?" To which the doctor replies, "It may be indicated for you,

but under no circumstances is it recommended for your mother.” When voting rights for women were being enacted, the front pages also carried cartoons. One was of a woman threatening her cringing husband with a club and saying, “Are you listening to me? I’m going to a rally for women’s legal equality with men. If you even think of stepping out the door before I get back, I’ll knock your eyes right out of your head.” This made an interesting play on women’s traditional seclusion in the home. In connection with all the new professions women were taking up, a cartoon appeared in 1932 depicting a chic and sexy woman at the table with her elderly parents. She says, “All my friends have become doctors, lawyers, [and] athletes. There are even some who want to be pilots. I want to become something that they aren’t going to do.” Her father replies, “In that case, become a housewife!”⁶⁹

Similarly, during these years when the beauty contest was given so much prominence and when so many projects for changing the roles of women were in the works, the paper was full of notorious and scandalous stories involving women. These stories included young girls from good families who ran off with movie stars, good women who were wooed and bilked by a conman or gigolo, suicides of unhappy young girls forced into unwanted marriages or forcibly separated from their beloved, suicides of unhappy middle-aged women trapped in the role of domestic servants and without marriage prospects, non-Turkish female journalists on trial for anti-Turkish remarks, women pimps and women murderers, and—over and over again—women murdered or gravely injured by jealous husbands or beaux, occasionally even by avaricious sons.⁷⁰ These stories convey a mixed message: on the one hand they seem to condemn the (psychical or physical violence) perpetrated against women by men who seek to control their bodies and who view them as vessels of their *namus*, but at the same time, they seem to serve as warnings regarding the breakdown of the social order, and must have had a kind of threatening tone for the women who read them.

One interesting example is the case of Mehvesh Hanım, the new woman *par excellence*. She had been stepping out for some time with Zihni Bey, but when he proposed marriage, Mehvesh refused him; nor did he get his wish by approaching her parents. Thereupon, he appeared at her house and after being asked in, drew a pistol from his coat pocket and tried to shoot her. Fortunately, she escaped into the street with only a minor wound. At the trial, Zihni denied that he had shot her and said he was trying to protect her from burglars. Ignoring this claim, the judge asked Mehvesh why she had refused an honorable proposal of marriage. She replied this was a question of inclination or desire. The judge then asked why she had allowed a man she had rejected

into her home, and received no answer. He pursued this line of questioning, asking Mehvesh whether she didn’t have a family and why she lived alone, to which she replied that her doctor had recommended that she live alone. The paper then clarified that Mehvesh was a teacher at a French school and paid her own rent. In the end Zihni was sentenced to one month of prison. That the case went to trial at all and that the man was convicted of anything, despite Mehvesh Hanım’s unconventional “lifestyle,” as we might call it now, are both remarkable.⁷¹ Yet the questions asked by the judge, the fact that the paper printed them, and Zihni’s light sentence might also have had a “chilling effect” on the women reading about the case.

Conclusions

In her book *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, Sarah Banet-Weiser argues with respect to the Miss America pageant that what makes it different from other kinds of beauty contests is the pageant’s insistence that its contestants are a “certain class of girl,” that is, respectable young women who represent the “best America has to offer” in the category of young womanhood. The presentation of the women as femininity and sexuality commodified is hidden by the scholarship programs, talent competitions, and contestants’ statements about their social agendas. However, the contradiction is brought alive in the swimsuit competition. One woman who had competed successfully in junior pageants throughout her teenage years felt the contradiction so acutely that she decided to drop out of the pageant scene rather than “parade around in a bathing suit.”

But why the dilemma...? After all isn’t the Miss America Pageant a beauty pageant? It is, but the disjuncture between beauty and scholarship or body and brain, and the apparent incompatibility between these two subject positions, destabilizes one of the stories that beauty pageants tell: the transformation of women into objects for viewing. ... Unlike the talent portion of the pageant, which is a performance of personality, artistry, and female subjectivity, the contestants’ participation in the swimsuit competition is almost totally devoid of subjectivity except in the sense that the body is read as a marker for a particular kind of feminine subject.⁷²

In Turkey, as I have tried to show, the body of the women contestants was indeed read as a marker of a particular kind of, not feminine, but female, subject: the kind whose physical presence in a public space did not exclude her from the social contract, and who thus took an important first step towards becoming a citizen and a public actor. While there may have been undertones of race hygiene, or the use of women’s bodies to sell commodities, or rhetoric about women as mothers of the nation, in essence the *Türkiye Güzeli* contest insisted

upon the possibility of the public physicality of “nice” women, that is, women who could expect the protection of society. In getting on the beauty contest bandwagon of the late twenties and early thirties, *Cumhuriyet* was projecting the young Turkish republic as a modern and civilized country on the world stage, and this was clearly of great importance to the organizers. At the same time, however, the contest served as a powerful symbolic tool that came to hand in a conjunctural manner for promoting an agenda at home. The fact that contests were widespread among other nations, and indeed had international as well as national expression, invested them with a cultural capital that made them especially effective tools.

The tension was not essentially between woman as available object/commodity and woman as subject—that is, the contest did not focus on trying to sell women while cloaking this intent with scholarships and talent contests. Rather the intent was to assert that physical display did not imply availability or going “beyond the pale.” There were no talking sections of the contest, no talent shows, no social statements to mask or mitigate the “truth” of the event. In fact Turkish beauty queens really did embody a social agenda just by existing, and that agenda was to secure greater status for women as “liberal subjects.” And it was precisely because this was the case that the newspaper and those involved with the contest were concerned to show that the contestants were *namuslu*. The public physicality of *respectable* women was the point; the attempt to redefine *namus* was an attempt to redefine and expand the boundaries of the social contract for women. It was the answer to the case of the woman who committed suicide by jumping (or was she thrown?) from her apartment window after her husband discovered to his rage that she could be seen through it from the street. Sertel expressed it best when she said, “before all other things, a woman is a person.”⁷³

NOTES

¹A note on the spelling of Turkish words: The Garamond font employed by *CSSAAME* is unable to properly represent the Turkish characters ‘soft g,’ ‘s cedilla,’ and uppercase ‘dotted I.’ Faced with this technical limitation and in order to comply with the requirements of the journal, the author has adopted the following expedient. Standard modern Turkish orthography has been employed where possible, but the character ‘soft g’ is represented as ‘gh’ and the character ‘s cedilla’ as ‘sh.’ Uppercase ‘dotted I’ appears simply as a standard English uppercase ‘I.’

²Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (New York: Linden, 1984), 24, as quoted in Angela J. Latham, “Packaging Women: The Concurrent Rise of Beauty Pageants, Public Bathing, and Other Performances of Female ‘Nudity,’” *Journal of Popular Culture* 29 (Winter 1995), 160.

³For detailed histories of the Miss America pageant, see

Frank Deford, *There She Is: The Life and Times of Miss America* (New York: Viking, 1971), and Armando Riverol, *Live from Atlantic City* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1992). For background on beauty contests in the United States more generally, and on their social context, see Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Latham, “Packaging Women”; and “Revue and Other Vanities: The Commodification of Fantasy in the 1920s,” <<http://www.assumption.edu/ahc/Vanities/default.html>> (22 June 2004).

⁴There were earlier attempts in the 1880s, at Rehoboth Beach in the United States and at Spa in Belgium, but neither attempt took hold or was followed up on until the 1920s. See Hermann Schäfer and Rainer Eckert, *Miss Germany*, <<http://www.hdg.de/Final/eng/page2850.htm>> (22 June 2004).

⁵In Galveston, Texas, the first International Pulchritude Contest took place in 1926, awarding its winner the title “Miss Universe.” “Revue and Other Vanities: The Commodification of Fantasy in the 1920s,” <<http://www.assumption.edu/ahc/Vanities/default.html>> (22 June 2004).

⁶This trend was so controversial that in some places, like Chicago, it led to modesty monitors patrolling the beaches, and to arrests of those perceived as breaking the boundaries of decorum. See Latham, “Packaging Women,” 150ff.

⁷My account of the Miss Nippon contest and its social context is based entirely on Jennifer Robertson, “Japan’s First Cyborg? Miss Nippon, Eugenics and Wartime Technologies of Beauty, Body and Blood,” *Body and Society* 7:1 (March 2001): 1–34.

⁸Robertson, “Japan’s First Cyborg,” 3.

⁹Robertson, “Japan’s First Cyborg,” 1 and 11–24.

¹⁰Robertson, “Japan’s First Cyborg,” 20.

¹¹Robertson, “Japan’s First Cyborg,” 9.

¹²“Ayni şeyi biz niçin yapmıyalım?” *Cumhuriyet* (4 February 1929), 1.

¹³“Türkiye güzeline beynelmilel müsabakaya iştirakini temine *Cumhuriyet* önayak olacak,” *Cumhuriyet* (5 February 1929), 1.

¹⁴“Türkiyanın [sic] en güzel kadını kimdir?” *Cumhuriyet* (6 February 1929), 1.

¹⁵“Her genç kız müsabakamıza iştirak edebilir,” *Cumhuriyet* (11 February 1929), 1.

¹⁶“Yarımdan itibaren resimleri neşhredeceğhiz,” *Cumhuriyet* (6 March 1929), 1.

¹⁷“Bugün itibaren resimleri neşhre bashliyoruz,” *Cumhuriyet* (7 March 1929), 1.

¹⁸See coverage in *Cumhuriyet*: “Resimler deghil, kuponlar saklanacktır,” (29 March 1929), 1; “Güzeller hazırladığhımız supriz, onlarınsinemalarını çektirerek bir film yaptırılmaktadır,” (9 April 1929), 1–2; “Tlakem heyeti hakkında bir mektup,” (3 June 1929), 1.

¹⁹“Türkiye güzellik kraliçesi intihap edildi,” *Cumhuriyet*, (3 September 1929), 1–2.

²⁰“Güzellik balomuz dün aksham verildi ve 20 güzel intihap olundu,” *Cumhuriyet*, (10 January 1930), 1 and 4.

²¹See coverage in *Cumhuriyet*: “Kraliçe bugün intihap ediliyor” (12 January 1930), 1; “Güzellik Kraliçesi nasıl intihap

edildi,” (13 January 1930), 1.

²²“Kraliçe hareket ederken...,” *Cumhuriyet* (30 January 1930), 1.

²³See coverage in *Cumhuriyet*: “Avrupa güzelli kiralicesiği [sic] tacını kim giyecek?” (5 February 1930), 1 and 6; “Yunan güzeli nasıl kazandı” (10 February 1930), 1 and 4; “Miss Avrupa intihabının iç yüzünü naklediyoruz” (15 February 1930), 1-2; “Yunan güzeli hakkında rakibeleri olan diğer güzellerin söyledikleri” (6 March 1930), 1 and 6.

²⁴“Kraliçe bugün intihap edilecek,” *Cumhuriyet* (5 February 1930), 1 and 4 and “Mübeyyel Hanım Amerika’da yapılacak güzellik müsabakasına iştirake davet edildi,” *Cumhuriyet*, (2 July 1930), 1.

²⁵See coverage in *Cumhuriyet*: “Müsamere pek parlak oldu, güzeller alkışlandı,” (16 January 1931), 1; “Nâşide Saffet H. 931 kraliçesi oldu,” (19 January 1931), 1-2; “Kraliçe bu sabah İstanbula geliyor,” (7 April 1931), 1.

²⁶See coverage in *Cumhuriyet*: “Güzellik müsabakası tehir edildi,” (18 January 1932), 1-2; “Bu sene Avrupa güzelli müsabakasına iştirak etmiyoruz” (22 January 1932), 1; “Dünya güzeli kim olacak?” (27 March 1932), 1; “Kraliçe geçerken...” (14 July 1932), 1; “Türkiye güzeli Keriman Halis H. dünya kraliçesi intihap edildi” (1 August 1932), 1 and 6.

²⁷In 1932, when the newspaper was encountering great difficulties in getting women to enter the contest, a five hundred lira prize, a large sum at the time, was offered for the first time, and lists of gifts promised by various commercial establishments were also listed as enticements. See “Kraliçe 2 temmuzda intihap edilecek,” *Cumhuriyet* (26 June 1932), 1.

²⁸The female form does not figure prominently in advertising in *Cumhuriyet* at this time; one sees the occasional line drawing of a pretty young woman promoting vacuum cleaners from time to time on the advertising pages, but not much more. This began to change gradually in 1932 as one or two foreign firms began to use rather seductive drawings of women to advertise women’s undergarments and formal dresses.

²⁹“Türk güzelinin zaferi,” *Cumhuriyet* (8 April 1931), 1 and 3.

³⁰“Güzellik müsabakamız,” *Cumhuriyet* (3 September 1929), 1-2.

³¹“Nüfus işimiz,” *Ülkü*, May 1936, 205-9, and “Bekarlık vergisi için meclise bir lâyiha verildi,” *Cumhuriyet* (19 March 1929), 1.

³²“Türk kadını,” *Cumhuriyet* (4 February 1929), 3. This is the same issue that opens the question of holding a beauty contest in Turkey for the first time.

³³“Güzellik müsabakası: revü-15-tablo,” *Cumhuriyet* (20 February 1930), 2.

³⁴“Kadın tayyareci,” *Cumhuriyet* (5 February 1929), 1 and “İlk şoförün anlatıkları,” *Cumhuriyet* (17 January 1930), 1.

³⁵See, for example, coverage of the royal couple’s visit to Turkey, with pictures of the queen in chic European-style clothing; photographs of six beauty queens appeared on the same page: “Kral ve Kraliçe yarın şehrimize geliyor,” *Cumhuriyet* (7 September 1929), 1.

³⁶“Efgan krali istifaya niçin mecbur kaldı?” *Cumhuriyet* (17 January 1929), 1-2.

³⁷“Kral tayyare ile kande hare gitti, orada teşkilat yapacak,” *Cumhuriyet* (18 January 1929), 1-2.

³⁸“Kadınlara laf atanlar derhal tevkif edilecek,” *Cumhuriyet* (10 September 1929), 1.

³⁹“Güzellik itihap edilecek şeydir,” *Cumhuriyet* (26 February

1929), 1 and 3.

⁴⁰See, for example, “Resim neshrettirmede girebilirsiniz,” *Cumhuriyet* (12 January 1931), 1 and 4.

⁴¹“Kraliçe çok mes’udum, çok memnunum diyor,” *Cumhuriyet* (19 January 1931), 1-2.

⁴²“Güzellik müsabekası etrafında dedikodu,” *Cumhuriyet* (21 January 1931), 1-2. See also “1931 senesi Türk güzeli,” *Cumhuriyet* (21 January 1931), 1 and 3 and “Maarif vekili Esat B.f. beyanatını tanzih etti,” *Cumhuriyet* (27 January 1931), 1 and 3.

⁴³“Ayıptır efendiler: bir ailenin harimine kalem uzatılmaz,” *Cumhuriyet*, (6 August 1932), 1; and “Son dedikodular ve Keriman Hanımın annesi,” *Cumhuriyet* (7 August 1932), 1 and 4.

⁴⁴“Deniz bile onları görmek için yakınlaşıyordu,” *Cumhuriyet* (12 August 1932), 1 and 4.

⁴⁵See articles in *Cumhuriyet* on 4, 12, 14, 18, and especially 20 August 1932.

⁴⁶“Dünya güzeli mayo ile gezmiş deghildir,” *Cumhuriyet* (18 August 1932), 1.

⁴⁷“En büyük Türk inkılabı kadının serbestidir,” *Cumhuriyet* (29 August 1932), 2.

⁴⁸“Mübeyyel H. evlendi,” *Cumhuriyet* (16 May 1932), 1.

⁴⁹“Bana sorarsanız: namusun manası nedir?” *Cumhuriyet* (11 April 1930), 2.

⁵⁰In 1931 and 1932 respectively the Turkish History Society and the Turkish Language Society were founded with the aim of a promoting a nationalist ideology and cultural cohesion.

⁵¹“20 bin kişi dün gece karlıcıyı alkışladı” and “Tarih kongresi münasebetile,” *Cumhuriyet* (8 July 1932), 1 and 5.

⁵²See for example, *Cumhuriyet*: “Kadınların mitingi,” (12 April 1930), 1 and 5 and “Beyhan Hanım dün ilk defa mahkemeye çıktı,” (3 May 1930), 1.

⁵³“Millet mektepleri bugün merasimle açılacak,” *Cumhuriyet* (1 January 1929), 1.

⁵⁴“Bu Sene 250 bin kişi okuma öğhrenecek,” *Cumhuriyet* (10 January 1929), 1.

⁵⁵Yunus Nadi, “Ev kadını, hayat kadını?” *Cumhuriyet* (20 June 1932), 1-2.

⁵⁶For example, see *Cumhuriyet*: “Münevver bir kızımız,” (2 June 1930), 1; “Paris’te bir Türk Hanımı,” (2 March 1932), 1; “Bir Türk kızın muvafakıyeti,” (9 March 1932), 1.

⁵⁷See, for example, *Cumhuriyet*: “Sepet, çiçek ve şap-kacılık,” (22 July 1929), 1; “İstikbal dikish mektebinden mezun olanlar,” (8 February 1929), 3; “Ankara’da icra edilen Ticaret Mektebi stenograf talebesi ve muallimleri,” (2 March 1929), 1; “Berberler mektebi açıldı,” (16 November 1929), 1.

⁵⁸“Bir şahkatyuvast,” *Cumhuriyet*, (5 January 1931), 3.

⁵⁹See *Cumhuriyet*: “Günde 18,000,000 sigara” (8 July 1930), 3; “Bu Muhim ticaret şubesi ehemiyeti bir durgunluk içindedir” (11 March 1930) 3; “Memlekette ispirto ve içki sanayii tecessüs etti” (29 June 1931), 4.

⁶⁰See coverage in *Cumhuriyet* on 6, 7, 8, and 11 February 1929; 16 January 1932.

⁶¹See, for example, the front page of *Cumhuriyet* on 21 January 1932.

⁶²In Menemen, a town near İzmir, a dervish led a demonstration demanding the return of the caliphate. When a local policeman showed up, the enraged crowd beheaded him, then

paraded the severed head around on a pike.

⁶³See, for example, coverage in *Cumhuriyet* on 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 15, 20 January and 1, 2, 12 February 1931. Other days the photographic contrasts were not as drastic, but the same content appeared in close proximity. See, for example, front-page stories of 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 16-18, 21, 22, and 30 January 1931.

⁶⁴"Güzellik ayıp bir şey deghil," *Cumhuriyet* (13 January 1930), 1 and 4.

⁶⁵Sabiha Sertel was a distinguished leftist journalist and the wife of another well-known leftist journalist, Zekeriya Sertel. See "Bana sorarsanız: eve erkeghi olmak istiyen 1000 delikanlıya, ve rehberleri Va. Nu. Beye," *Cumhuriyet* (2 June 1930), 2. A column with this same byline (i.e., Cici Anne) written by Sabiha Sertel was also published in this period in the Istanbul monthly *Resimli Ay*, which the Sertels founded and edited. See Cemile Kahraman, "Resimli Ay'ın hikayesi," <http://www.tarihvakfi.org.tr/toplumsaltarih/genctarih/2000/katilanlar/cemile_kahraman.asp> (August 2003).

⁶⁶"Bana sorarsanız: genç bir kız neden izdivaç teklif edemez," *Cumhuriyet* (11 March 1930), 2.

⁶⁷"Bana sorarsanız: kadın mı zavallı [sic] erkek mi?" *Cumhuriyet* (4 March 1930), 2.

⁶⁸"Bana sorarsanız: kadın erkeghin hayatına niçin müdahale edemez?" *Cumhuriyet* (13 February 1930), 2.

⁶⁹See cartoons in *Cumhuriyet* on 18 March 1930, 11 April 1930, and 22 January 1932, respectively.

⁷⁰For a modest sample of the frequency and variety of these stories see the following in *Cumhuriyet*: "Madam Elena dün muhakeme edildi," (6 March 1929), 1; "Bir genç kız intihar etti," (4 November 1929), 1 and 4; "Ahmet Tevfik Ef.'nin zevcesi tevkif edildi," (15 November 1929), 1; "Aliye Hanım aghırcezada," (22 September 1929), 1 and 4; "Metresini bogan inekcinin muhakemesi," (24 January 1930), 1; "Maznun ve yalancı şahit hanımlar mahkemede," (3 April 1930), 3; "Zevcesini öldüren Hakkı B. tevkif edildi," (13 January 1931), 1; "İzmir'de kalbi üzerine ateşh ederek intihar eden genç kız kimdir?" (8 March 1931), 1 and 4; "Fuhsha teshvik," (9 June 1931), 1; "Shevket B.'in idami istendi," (4 January 1932), 1 and 7.

⁷¹"Shishli'de geçen aşhk macerasının muhakemesi," *Cumhuriyet* (3 May 1930), 1 and 6. It is interesting to note that the paper carries a story on the same page about the first appearance in court of the Republic's first female judge.

⁷²Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 60-62. See Chapter One more generally for a discussion of "respectability" in the Miss America Pageant.

⁷³"Bana sorarsanız: kadın dişhi ve iptidaî bir mahlûk mudur?" *Cumhuriyet* (9 April 1930), 2.