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Hygienic beauty: discussing Ottoman-Muslim female beauty, health and hygiene in the Hamidian Era

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In 1901, Vicdan Fahire Hanım composed a letter to the editorial office of the *Ladies Gazette* (*Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete*, henceforth *HMG*),¹ the longest published magazine in Ottoman-Turkish addressed to an elite Muslim audience in the Hamidian Era.² Vicdan Fahire's letter, couched in the form of a dialogue between herself and an unnamed female companion, was a response to the renowned man of letters Mustafa Asım [Filibelizade]'s (1856–1904) article 'Preserving Youthfulness.'³ Asım had written many pieces for a series 'Beauty, Toilette and Health' addressing female beauty, fashion, cosmetics (or rather the dangers of), skin-care, female health and hygiene.⁴ In this particular article, Asım underlined the importance of having a fresh appearance and urged his readers to preserve their youthful complexions from becoming old before their time. Asım also included such advice as rubbing the face to provide a kind of massage that would facilitate the flow of blood as well as washing the face with cold water every day to prevent the early onset of wrinkles.⁵

Vicdan Fahire's letter informs us that her unnamed female companion had taken issue with Asım's article because, while the article underscored such notions as youth (*şebâbet*), prime of life (*bahar-ı ömr*) and freshness (*tarâvet*), it did not contain any advice for elderly female readers such as Vicdan Fahire and herself! This female companion, we are told, urged Vicdan Fahire, much to the latter's dismay, to question Asım on how to deal with the ravages of time on one's complexion in general and whether it was possible to remove wrinkles in particular.⁶

Asım's reply, written a week later and a long time before botox injections, collagen fills and plastic surgery, began by warning his readers not to mistake youth for rejuvenation. 'It is one thing to preserve youthfulness' he wrote, 'another to look younger'. It was futile to look for advice on how to remove wrinkles in an article that was mainly addressed to younger readers, Asım contended, nevertheless adding, albeit in a remorseful tone, that a smooth complexion belonged to youth and youth alone and that there was really not much to do once the bloom of youth had left the female body. Although Asım did include some items of advice on how to eliminate wrinkles, such as rubbing the face morning and night with sweet almond oil, even going so far as to include a kind of face-lift operation carried out in France, which he obviously deemed ludicrous, the main thrust of Asım's argument was that facial rejuvenation was not possible. Those elderly ladies who wished for younger looking complexions should try to keep up their spirits rather than seek

material remedies. Asım noted that just as hygiene was a set of measures aimed at preserving health, his mission to his readers was to teach them the various means to preserve the freshness of their complexions as long as possible.⁷

The above correspondence captures, in a nutshell, both the standards by which female beauty was judged in the Hamidian Era and the growing emphasis on Ottoman-Muslim female beauty in the late Ottoman period. Asım's central argument that beauty manifests itself during a certain, albeit short-lived, stage in a woman's life, called attention to the centrality of the state of one's facial skin in terms of beauty and the importance of proper skincare for beautification. Beauty care became a contested matter in the Hamidian popular press marking the distinction between beauty aids that protected and preserved the skin and unsafe products that spoiled health and beauty. What might seem a trivial subject matter to a modern reader poses an interesting question for late Ottoman history: why did Ottoman-Muslim female beauty and health, which had traditionally been left to the private domain, acquire such public importance in the Hamidian Era?

This article, which examines the popular press targeted at an Ottoman-Muslim audience, argues that imperial anxieties concerning the future of the Ottoman Empire in general and the state of its Muslim population in particular shifted female beauty from a private matter into a matter of public concern. The period witnessed the emergence of a Hamidian version of what Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, in her work on interwar Britain, has called the 'duty-to-beauty discourse'.⁸ Hamidian print culture provided a viable channel to propagate novel concerns about beauty care. In their 'duty-to-beauty discourse', Hamidian reformers established a new standard of achieving healthy beauty which they defined as a civic and moral virtue aimed to serve, along with a wider set of other female duties and responsibilities, the salvation of the Ottoman Empire. The emergence of the idea of a modern Ottoman-Muslim family as the microcosm of a healthy, strong and prosperous empire positioned the housewife as its fundamental pillar and beauty as its major building block. Beauty was also now discussed within a Western hygienic-medical discourse establishing a firm connection between beauty and health with special emphasis on maintaining a 'good complexion'. In the eyes of the reforming Hamidian elite, the new standard of beauty could not be reached by a series of material interventions from the outside, such as applying makeup for example, but should rather reflect the proper functioning of the inside of the body. Both sides of the health-beauty equation were underlined: just as beauty was a sign of good health and its proper maintenance, incorrect beautification practices could both spoil the skin and endanger health, and even lead to death. Ottoman-Muslim beauty became a vulnerable sphere in need of protection from a myriad of external and internal dangers ranging from unfavorable weather conditions to dirt and dust, from harmful cosmetics, impure soap and hard water to improper clothing, from irritating fabrics and ill-fitting shoes, clogged pores, bad teeth to indigestion and constipation, along with lack of hygiene, rest and exercise. The introduction of Western hygiene and European toilette turned the new standard of beauty into a balancing act for Ottoman-Muslim women. On the one hand, healthy beauty meant maintaining an equilibrium between the outside and the inside of the body by paying attention to protecting the skin versus harming it, and, on the other, it meant sustaining a balance between the requirements of a traditional Ottoman-Muslim way of life and those pertaining to a modern lifestyle. Although the new discourse on beauty emphasized the importance of maintaining a modern hygienic lifestyle without overtly religious overtones, it nevertheless

underscored that modern ways did not conflict with Islam and should be practiced along with and within the proper rules of conduct fit for a Muslim way of life. In a patriarchal setting where male reformers discussed important issues pertaining to female bodies, Ottoman-Muslim women's bodies meant more than their literal representations. As Leslie Peirce states, 'It is a truism in studies of Middle Eastern societies, both premodern and contemporary, that women's bodies are critical markers of political, social and moral boundaries'.⁹ Numerous studies have demonstrated the use of women's bodies as symbols of the state, the patria, and the nation as well as actual sites of intervention/manifestation of state power and/or nationalist ideologies in Middle Eastern history.¹⁰ In the final analysis, it can be said that Ottoman-Muslim female beauty can be interpreted as a metaphor for the Ottoman lands where its protection and maintenance would mean all the difference to the empire's survival.

Ottoman modernization constituted a wide set of reforms in various areas that targeted recentralization in order to respond to the onslaught of 'modernity'.¹¹ An important aspect of nineteenth-century Ottoman modernization was the state's increasing role in redefining various socio-political and economic concepts and managing areas that it had previously relegated to the private domain. One such attempt was a new approach towards the people of the Ottoman Empire, transforming their status from 'subjects' into 'population' and associating the Empire's well-being with that of its population.¹² This approach introduced what Selçuk Dursun has termed Ottoman 'population policies': 'As the state identified the "population" as a source of income after the Tanzimat, it tried to protect and procreate it through certain institutional arrangements and regulations.'¹³

It is well known that the Ottoman state, from the time of Selim III (1789–1807), had undertaken various institutional, medical and educational measures targeting public health. These measures included building state hospitals, opening modern medical schools, implementing quarantine regulations, as well as transforming various medical professionals such as doctors and midwives in tandem with developments in modern Western medicine.¹⁴ Pronatalist policies were also introduced: 'Ottoman pronatalism was formulated through three registers: the medicalization of childbirth and the professionalization of midwifery; bans on abortion; and the medicalization of pregnancy and the discipline of the female body.'¹⁵

The reign of Abdülhamid II was both a continuation of earlier Ottoman attempts at reform in general and a new era in terms of Ottoman 'population policies' in particular. Hamidian central administration placed 'a strong political emphasis on the Muslim population as the main demographic pillar of the empire'¹⁶ as a result of worries caused by extensive territorial and demographic changes after the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878. Massive immigration movements and demographic shifts coupled with various diseases such as the plague, syphilis, tuberculosis, typhus, typhoid, scarlet fever, diphtheria, leprosy, rabies and smallpox in general, and the cholera outbreak of 1893 in particular, urged the Hamidian regime to launch extensive public health and hygiene policies that ranged from reforming the medical educational system, to establishing new institutions such as the Institute of Bacteriology for example, and the launching of new regulations and health organizations to vaccination campaigns that targeted the sanitation of both urban and domestic space as well as the health of population.¹⁷ As Kalkan notes, 'Through archival documents, it is understood that the 1890s can be taken as a turning point in

terms of the control of the social environment in the name of hygiene'.¹⁸ American professor Mary Mills Patrick (1850–1940), the first president of the American College for Girls in Constantinople, praised the Hamidian public health regulations:

During Sultan Hamid's reign there was improvement in one direction at least, when measures were taken for the protection of public health. A sanitary board was appointed, and quarantine regulations prescribed. The plague and cholera, which had previously ravaged the city with more or less regularity, nearly disappeared. Also it was during the reign of Hamid that the medical school in Haidar Pasha was opened. The instruction of the midwives, or women doctors, generally employed in the harems, was somewhat improved, and regular lectures were given for them in the medical school.¹⁹

The institutional, legal, administrative and educational measures targeting public health in the Hamidian Era were accompanied by an effort to instruct the people in terms of public health. This endeavor, maintained through the Hamidian popular press, paved the way for the existence of an effective Ottoman public sphere in that era.²⁰ An important topic covered in the Hamidian popular press was the importance of maintaining good health for patriotic reasons: 'In summary, it can be said that a person who is not in good health cannot properly fulfill the duties and services that he owes to himself, his family, his state and people, to humanity, in brief to his country.'²¹ Such emphasis was part and parcel of Hamidian discourse on patriotism because it was maintained that only healthy persons could channel all their strength and energy to save the Ottoman state and maintain the integrity of its lands. A medico-hygienic discourse emerged, targeting the domestic space of the household and its respective inhabitants in general and its womenfolk in particular.

A specific area of nineteenth-century Ottoman reforms constituted what Tuba Demirci termed 'familial reform', paving the way for the emergence of a new discourse on the family.²² The question of Ottoman-Muslim beauty came to the forefront of Ottoman concerns in the Hamidian Era because beauty became a nexus of various issues including the making of 'familial reform', particularly with respect to Ottoman-Muslim marriage and female fertility. Beauty was placed within a matrimonial-familial and procreational framework. Hester Donaldson Jenkins (1869–1941), who taught at the American College for Girls in Constantinople in the Hamidian Era, observed: 'What are a Turkish lady's duties? She has but two: to be attractive to her husband and to bear him children.'²³

Discussions on marriage in the Hamidian Era proceeded in two ways. First, the importance of marriage was underscored not only in terms of returns to the individuals involved, but also in terms of its social and communal benefits, and people were encouraged to get married. Second, there was a serious effort to modernize late Ottoman marriage practices by questioning what was seen as the obsolete practice of arranged marriages.²⁴ An article in the newspaper *Sabah*, entitled 'Information for Women: Marriage', encapsulated both of these approaches. The article opened by stating that 'marriage constitutes, without a doubt, the most important of all human activities',²⁵ then proceeded to describe the dual purposes of marriage: '(1) child-rearing and social reproduction and (2) setting up a family and a household so as to increase one's well-being'.²⁶ Furthermore, the article underlined that 'the social functions of marriage rest, in the first instance, on companionship (*muhabbet*)'.²⁷ This activity became especially important for women because: 'In the late-Ottoman sociopolitical dialect as elsewhere, the household

was the building block of the nation and women bore the ultimate responsibility for the soundness of the household.²⁸ Such female responsibility necessitated further emphasis on and a redefinition of the reproductive and domestic roles and capacities of Ottoman-Muslim women.

The novel understanding of 'housewifery',²⁹ for example, positioned the wife as the fundamental pillar of modern Ottoman family life. The renowned man of letters Şemseddin Sami [Fraşeri] (1850–1904) stated: 'Woman is the manager, owner, protector, guardian, and the commander of a family; the family is in the possession of the woman.'³⁰ Furthermore, he introduced a vast array of new duties and responsibilities for the modern housewife.³¹

The concept of motherhood was also readjusted to respond to the needs of the nineteenth-century Ottoman state and society. The importance of mothers for the welfare of the Empire became a much celebrated theme in the Hamidian popular press, literature in general and advice literature in particular.³² Mothers were assigned the special task of securing the future demographic, military and economic basis of the Ottoman Empire: 'Strength and health are, primarily needed in women, because it is they who infuse the generation with greatness; it is they who create and provide education and morality.'³³ Mothers were also placed on a pedestal. A maxim in *HMG* ran as follows, 'Mothers are the most acceptable and worthy of appreciation among women.'³⁴

The idea that beauty would help a woman and her family to find a husband was nothing new in late Ottoman society. Beauty was traditionally an important asset for any young maiden if she wanted to strike the eye of the match-maker (*görücü*),³⁵ the main protagonist in Ottoman arranged marriage practices, in order to attract a first-rate husband. It was not good enough, however, to find a husband and to get married as far as the Hamidian understanding of beauty was concerned. Associating beauty with fertility and motherhood, the period's reformers placed beauty within a patriotic framework and shaped a new attitude towards how to achieve and maintain healthy beauty. Beauty was constructed as a central virtue that every married woman needed to cultivate in order to secure the love and affection of her husband.³⁶ Pleasing one's husband would establish the desired companionship within the household and hopefully secure the most desired outcome: marital bliss and healthy children. Talat Ali underscored the importance of looking after one's self to please the husband:

Is not [a woman] who pays attention to her beauty going to do it for her husband, in order to look good for her husband? It is essential [for a woman] during her married life to pay attention to her beauty not only for the sake of her health, but also to always look good to fulfill the expectations of her husband and to confirm and increase his love and his desire.³⁷

In her introduction to writer, bureaucrat and diplomat Sezaizade Ahmed Hikmet [Müftüoğlu]'s (1870–1927) translation-adaptation of Baroness Staffe's *Cabinet de Toilette*³⁸ to an Ottoman-Muslim readership, the Russian Orientalist Countess Olga de Lebedev (1856–1909), known to her Ottoman readers as Gülnar Hanım, pointed to the close relationship between the well-being of the housewife and that of the family. She underscored that beauty and cheerfulness were necessary to keep the husband happy with marriage and to keep him attached to his home.³⁹ The book also explained how beautification needed to be a composite activity: 'All over the world women have the goal of obtaining the affection of their husbands; familial happiness depends on companionship. [...]

Therefore it is among the religious obligations of a Muslim woman to obey the prerequisites of the toilette.⁴⁰ Mustafa Asım, however, went one step further, and warned his readers about the dangers lurking behind neglect in matters of beautification:

A woman who was experienced in matters of beauty told her daughter one day, who was beautiful, but who nevertheless assumed that her pale complexion was a sign of beauty, the following: 'my dear child, take good care of yourself because young women who never use make-up get discarded for old women who use too much make-up.' Her words came out to be true. This young, beautiful woman of morals but of a pale complexion got cheated on by her husband with a defiled older woman of vague age and low morals, but who nevertheless was always well-cared for. This is proof that an ordinary woman who has beautified herself meticulously is preferred over a beautiful woman who does not deign to learn and execute the rules of beautification. Therefore, the first and foremost duty of a woman nowadays consists of learning how to bring forth that strong force of attraction, called elegance in order to gratify the eyes and attract the heart, so as to make herself beautiful and succeed in being loved.⁴¹

Ahmed Hikmet also emphasized the exalted status of beauty as well as the importance of beautification for Ottoman-Muslim women: 'In summary, it is the sacred duty of a woman to turn to any measure that renders her to be loved and appreciated by her husband.'⁴²

Although beauty became the central tenet that could make or break the Ottoman-Muslim family, with the housewife bearing ultimate responsibility for it, both what beauty meant and how to maintain beauty were also undergoing an interesting transformation in the Hamidian Era.

If companionship rested upon pleasing the husband and pleasing the husband rested upon beauty, what did beauty rest upon in the Hamidian Era? This fundamental question which occupied the minds of the period's reformers necessitated a detailed exposition of all those new measures required to maintain the new ideal of healthy beauty.

Beauty was defined above all as a 'gift' (*ihsan*),⁴³ a 'valuable resource in great demand' (*kıymetdar ve mergub*) and a 'treasure' (*servet-i letafet*) in need of being 'protected and preserved' (*himaye, muhafaza*),⁴⁴ but not spoiled or altered. Frowning upon cosmetic beauty, 'Women should not paint their faces with any other color than that granted to them by God'⁴⁵ and pointing to the harmful consequences of artificial beauty,⁴⁶ the period's writings maintained that ideal beauty was neither a matter of cosmetics, of money, nor of spending too much time on primping, but was rather a state of good health contingent upon cultivating a healthy lifestyle in tandem with modern Western hygienic practices.⁴⁷

Hamidian 'duty-to-beauty discourse' placed beauty within a medical-hygienic framework and established a circular understanding of beauty.⁴⁸ According to this understanding, beauty rested upon maintaining good health and mirrored overall well-being. One should make sure that the process of beautification did not include anything that could endanger health and spoil beauty, such as harmful cosmetics that contained chemical substances.⁴⁹ As good health meant maintaining the balance of the interior workings of the body, this necessitated paying attention to what went into the body, applied to its exterior as well as to what was expelled from the body.⁵⁰ Therefore, ideal beauty could not exist independently of the general state of one's body:

Yes, beauty is contingent upon a healthy body. Beauty is the proper functioning of those bodily organs that provide softness and refinement. The color of the countenance, the

softness of the skin is produced by alimentation that is in perfect condition. A healthy stomach provides for the refinement of the mouth and also for the teeth to shine like mother-of-pearl.⁵¹

The period's writings drew their readers' attention to the close link between health and beauty. For example, an advertisement for a health syrup (*sihhat şurubu*) in *HMG* maintained that, 'beauty cannot be achieved by make-up [...] Beauty is health [...] There is no paint that can provide any color, no pomade any radiance, no perfume any elegance to those skins that have either puckered and wrinkled due to thinness or have turned pale and sallow due to anemia. Beauty's surest antidote is health.'⁵² The futility of espousing artificial means of beautification was frequently addressed. For example, while the Circassian writer and sportsman Mehmet Fetgeray Şoenu (1890–1931) indicated the correct means of acquiring ideal beauty – 'The most certain and the most accepted path to beauty is that granted by health'⁵³ – Mustafa Asım firmly warned his readership about the perils of disturbing the delicate beauty–health equation: 'There is such a strong bond between health and beauty that, in the case of poor health, it would prove futile to even apply not only milk but even clotted cream onto the surface of the body!'⁵⁴

Although the whole body mattered in terms of the health–beauty equation, two components came to the fore within the Hamidian discourse on beauty: skin and face. As the skin connected the inside of the body with the outside world, epidermal function became vital for the maintenance of the health–beauty balance. Therefore, skin shifted from a cover of the human body⁵⁵ to a central feature of Hamidian 'duty-to-beauty discourse'. The face was also vital to this equation not only because facial appearance was a primary indicator of one's overall bodily health,⁵⁶ but also because female beauty was defined in terms of a beautiful face:

Beauty in a face rests upon the stability of health and wellbeing in that face. There are many women (!) whose pale complexions merit poetic expression. True beauty, however, rests upon healthiness and strength. To attract pity is one thing; to be appreciated for beauty is another thing. It is much better and more respectable to try to strengthen the body through the rules of hygiene in order to reverse the paleness of the complexion and to try to bring natural beauty to the face rather than to expect help from make-up, that is to say, it is better to bring color to the face by providing color through the proper flow of blood rather than by applying rouge from the outside.⁵⁷

Hamidian discourse on beauty equated good looks with a fresh, soft, well-toned and smooth skin, that is to say, a 'good complexion' that could only thrive in a properly functioning human body. Furthermore, beauty should also reflect the level of healthiness of that person. Constructing an ideal of beauty that rested on a 'good complexion' shaped a highly circumscribed arena, however. The nineteenth-century British folklorist and traveler, Lucy M. J. Garnett commented on the beauty of Ottoman-Muslim women as follows:

But the beauty of an Osmanli woman, especially if it consists more in freshness of complexion than in regularity of feature, fades perhaps even more quickly than that of Southern women generally; and though a well-preserved woman of middle age may occasionally be met with, they are usually at thirty, and often at twenty-five, quite *passées*.⁵⁸

An ideal of beauty, which placed the acceptable limit of good looks at around the age of twenty-five to thirty, established a close connection between beauty and age. Women were constantly reminded about the passage of time and the ephemeral nature of their

beauty. For example, under the guise of gentle warning, a maxim in *HMG* stressed the evanescent quality of good looks: 'Just as beauty is the primary gift that is granted to women, it, nevertheless, is also the first thing that is taken away from them.'⁵⁹ Mustafa Asım's counsel on the ravages of time on female complexions was much more severe in tone, however: 'Wrinkles that pester the visage from thirty years onwards constitute a merciless enemy for beauties.'⁶⁰ In Asım's world, wrinkles and beauty clearly did not go together; therefore, damage to female complexions should be avoided at all cost for as long as possible.

Setting up a youthful standard of beauty, however, sent perplexing messages to Ottoman-Muslim women. On the one hand, they were instructed to protect what nature had provided them with in order to remain beautiful, but, on the other hand, they were told that there was not much one could do once nature had taken its course. Beautification became an exclusive matter for those 'older' and/or unmarried women whose 'prime of life' had passed.⁶¹ Elderly ladies who resorted to such artificial means as putting on makeup were denigrated; it was only old coquettes and rich widows who paid extreme attention to their makeup.⁶² Returning to Mustafa Asım's article 'Preserving Youthfulness', he called attention to the irony that spring was a season that only revisited the natural world and not the human body. And as we can recall, Asım had rebutted Vicdan Fahire's objections to a youthful standardization of beauty by advising elderly ladies not to seek solace in material means but rather in spiritual aspects of life!⁶³

For those 'young' Ottoman-Muslim ladies, however, living in an age that equated womanhood with beauty and constantly reminded them of an ideal of beauty that could wither rather quickly, it became crucial to maintain the freshness of their complexion as long as possible. But was such a thing possible? It was indeed quite possible, the period's writings maintained, but necessitated constant supervision of a serious battle against an army of factors that could easily put the fragile health-beauty balance at risk.

The emphasis on healthy beauty with special reference to a 'good-complexion' as a blueprint for Ottoman-Muslim women positioned female beauty not only as a vulnerability in need of constant supervision, maintenance and protection at the individual level, but also as a site of patriarchal and patriotic apprehensions on the part of male Ottoman reformers of the era. The famous obstetrician Dr Besim Ömer [Akalın] (1861–1940), one of the founding fathers of Ottoman-Turkish gynecology, praised Şekib Akif's *Hygienic Conversations: Between Woman and the Physician*: 'I have also prepared, in those times that I could spare from my daily employment, a "special" and a detailed work of hygiene. To write for our women, to labor for their material and spiritual perfection, constitutes true patriotism nowadays. [...] I would, therefore, like to congratulate Şekib Bey for this valuable effort and wish for his future success.'⁶⁴ Moreover, *Hygienic Conversations* was advertised in the journal *Wealth of Sciences*: 'We would like to introduce this work composed in a lucid and concise style, to all those upright and enlightened ladies who are to supplement the patria with a strong and an active generation. As the study of this book is also essential for all members of the family because of the homeland's health issues, we consider it a duty to further recommend this work to heads of the family.'⁶⁵

Hamidian 'duty-to-beauty discourse' underscored that personal well-being lay in one's own hands so long as it rested upon modern knowledge. Şemseddin Sami noted: 'Health is often regarded as one of those blessings that is out of our control; yet there exists no

other blessing than health that is within one's control; there is a science, however, that needs to be learned for this purpose.⁶⁶ That science, the Ottoman Turkish educationalist and politician Dr Edhem [Nejat] (1883–1921) explained, was none other than modern Western hygiene:

Hygiene shows the rules pertaining to not becoming ill and to living one's life in health. The joy and taste of life, the strength to fulfill one's duties toward humanity are contingent upon health. Unless there is health one can neither perform one's religious duties, nor those pertaining either to the family or the patria and one lives perpetually in pain. There can be no joy in life without health. Therefore, we must always strive for health and strength in ourselves and our children and it is the science of hygiene that shows us the means of achieving this.⁶⁷

Cultivating a hygienic lifestyle was primarily a woman's prerogative: 'It is the first and the foremost duty of each and every woman to follow the rules of hygiene to preserve that valuable and desirable asset of beauty.'⁶⁸ Beauty, however, was never a simple affair that could easily be administered from the outside but necessitated serious individual effort on the part of Ottoman-Muslim women:

Beauty rests upon the healthiness of the body along with that of the soul. Since what enables the health and tranquility of the soul is good alimentation, and good hygiene along with bodily discipline; the basis of all beauty and the remedy for good looks rest in regular bodily exercise, in spending a fair amount of time outdoors, and particularly in paying attention to maintaining a youthful complexion.⁶⁹

Beauty became a value that was to be cherished, secured and maintained through a vast array of modern practices, habits and routines. The emphasis upon achieving healthy beauty necessitated new habits, practices and measures, as well as 'physical culture'⁷⁰ so that Ottoman-Muslim women could care for their bodies. This introduced, among other things, a new notion of cleanliness and modern washing practices, the so-called 'toilette', hot and cold water baths, a comprehensive regimen of healthy eating and resting practices as well as advice on choosing correct clothing for the proper functioning of the body. This effort, to be practiced as part and parcel of modern Western hygiene, was to supplement the traditional Muslim practices of ritual washing and cleanliness, such as taking ablutions for the daily five times prayer (*abdest*) and the complete washing of the body (*gusul*) as well as the traditional Turkish bath (*hamam*). As such, achieving beauty became a highly circumscribed arena that combined the tenets of modern Western hygiene with that of those obligations pertaining to Islam, with such beauty to be maintained within acceptable limits of Muslim modesty and chastity: (*'harim-i iffet ve ismeti dahilinde güzel olmak*').⁷¹

While beauty mirrored good health, anything that could hinder the proper functioning of the body and endanger health threatened beauty as well. Perilous factors included external factors that ranged from weather conditions to articles of clothing, from unsafe cosmetics and hard water to impure soap, from germs to lack of hygiene, rest and exercise. There were also a number of internal conditions ranging from improper digestion and constipation, to anemia, as well as the obstruction of bodily fluids, constrained organs and bad teeth.

Nutrition and digestion became important factors in terms of maintaining the delicate health and beauty balance. Since healthy beauty meant a rose-colored complexion, skin tone acquired central importance. Women were reminded to safeguard their complexions from becoming pale because sallow skin was regarded as the primary sign of an unhealthy person.⁷² As such, what one ate, when one ate,⁷³ the quality of the food that

was chosen and how it was prepared gained prominence for maintaining healthy beauty: 'Always try to eat at regular times' advised a health column in *HMG*.⁷⁴ Mustafa Asım also wrote about the powerful effects of maintaining a healthy eating regimen on the complexion. He explained how blood vessels situated under the thin and sensitive epidermis of the face needed to function properly and how a change in either the quality of one's blood and/or the flow of blood brought about changes to one's complexion. If one paid attention to hygiene, he maintained, the mirror would always reflect a rose-colored and a fresh complexion and one would thus not have to appeal to boxes, bottles or paints. Asım also explained how the difficulty in digesting certain foods, either caused by spices or the oil they had been fried in, could disrupt the proper functioning of the stomach and affect blood flow, which in turn changed the natural color of the complexion and caused red streaks and dark spots on the face. Furthermore, Asım also advised that in order to maintain facial beauty, one needed to choose a variety of foods and not to eat the same things all the time, such as meat or fish, so as not to tire the stomach. He also advised to refrain from abusing such drinks as coffee and tea.⁷⁵

Teeth and dental hygiene also gained eminence in terms of maintaining healthy beauty. Teeth were vital not only for chewing food properly so as to ensure a sound digestion, and overall well-being, but they also constituted a central feature of facial beauty.⁷⁶ It became extremely important to maintain good teeth, which required not only modern dental hygienic practices but also proper medical care for patriotic purposes. The anonymous author of the article 'Teeth' in the journal *Treasure of the Sciences* complained about the poor state of his dental health due to ignorance and lack of proper training and took upon the duty of warning fellow compatriots (*ebna-yı vatan*) to teach their children about proper dental hygiene, so as to save them from terrible toothache that would also spoil their health.⁷⁷ *HMG* contained numerous advertisements for tooth powder, and mouthwash, as well as European-style educated dentists and dentures.⁷⁸

Besides nutrition and digestion, rest became an important issue in terms of maintaining healthy beauty. A close connection between sleep and maintaining a youthful complexion was established.⁷⁹

The healthy and youthful standard of beauty promoted a fresh, soft and smooth complexion devoid of freckles, pimples, dark spots, boils, lines and wrinkles.⁸⁰ The use of cosmetics became a central concern for the period's reformers: it became imperative to mark the distinction between beauty aids that protected the skin and preserved healthy beauty as opposed to face paint that spoiled both health and beauty. Educating the public about the detrimental effects of beauty aids in general and ready-made Western cosmetics sold on the market in particular became crucial in terms of achieving healthy beauty. Anti-face-paint discussions, carried out within a medical discourse, became the order of the day.

Face paint posed a danger to women because they threatened not only dental health, white lead in *düzgün* for example, caused the teeth to decay,⁸¹ and proper epidermal function, but it also contained high levels of chemical substances such as arsenic, lead and bismuth, extremely dangerous to one's health once they entered the blood stream.⁸² Face paint also clogged skin pores, which prevented the epidermis from carrying out its main duties of respiration and transpiration. This situation endangered the maintenance of a healthy complexion and threatened one's general well-being.⁸³ Younger women were specifically discouraged from face-paint described as, 'that combatant fighting against the allure of youth'.⁸⁴ Dr Edhem warned his female readers to refrain from such

practices: 'All face-paints contain ingredients that poison the body. All face-paint is harmful. All face-paint; fard, rouge and kohl ruin our skin. They spoil beauty. Those cosmetics that come from Europe in fancy bottles are equally dangerous as those ordinary cosmetics. Skins of those who use face-paint become very easily damaged and assume the look of an old woman. If you desire facial beauty, healthy teeth and a healthy body, absolutely do not use face-paint.'⁸⁵ The use of beauty aids was sanctioned only if it served to hide flaws, protect and bolster natural beauty: 'Genuine make-up, which aims to beautify by concealing flaws, showing off one's natural color, removing dark spots, keeping the complexion soft and radiant, is regarded as one of the most auspicious means of serving beauty and is advised.'⁸⁶

Readers were encouraged to use natural products that would protect and preserve their skin. There was a wide variety of homemade beauty recipes in the popular press. A recipe for home-made lip pomade in *HMG* went as follows: 'Melt 12 grams of white beeswax, 4 grams of blubber (*blanc de baleine*), 30 grams of sweet almond oil, 4 grams of cocoa butter, and 8 grams of *alkanna macrosiphon* root in a bain-marie over a low heat fire. Make sure to mix well, and drain the mixture with the help of a muslin cloth. You may use rose essence to add a bit of fragrance. Put this pomade into small containers making sure it is well sealed and then store it.'⁸⁷

The use of powder was sanctioned, because powder protected, softened and cooled the face. However, one needed to make sure that the powder used was nothing but pure rice powder devoid of chemical substances such as zinc oxide, or bismuth that spoiled health. The correct use of powder necessitated powder to be felt on the skin, but not be visible on the face.⁸⁸

Cleanliness also mattered a great deal.⁸⁹ How one washed one's body and face, the quality of water and the type of soap used became extremely important.⁹⁰ The 'toilette' became the new means of achieving the ideal of healthy beauty. For example, one should wash one's face morning and night, but make sure to refrain from using acrid water such as water from wells incapable of dissolving soap but try instead to use the 'good water' of such districts of Istanbul as Kayışdağı or Göztepe. If this proved not possible, one could always add a few drops of ammonia to the water to improve its cleansing qualities. The use of natural substances was also recommended, such as strawberry and lemon juice and fava bean extract which would all benefit the face. For effective cleansing, soap should be used, making sure that it was natural soap devoid of fragrance and harmful chemical ingredients.⁹¹ Pure Ottoman soap was recommended: 'The best soap is white and lime-free.'⁹² However, one should refrain from using those washing fluids containing methyl alcohol. It was advised that women should refrain from going out soon after they had washed their faces. Freshly washed skin should not be in contact with the air because pores which had expanded due to washing would be clogged by dirt and dust. Women were therefore recommended to wash their faces before they went to bed.⁹³

Weather conditions such as strong winds, cold and hot weather and sun rays could also easily affect the complexion and spoil one's beauty. Women needed to protect their faces from such weather conditions. Mustafa Asım indicated that those ladies who put their veil on would remain safe. He also noted that an umbrella could also perform the same function for protecting the face.⁹⁴

Articles of clothing also became significant for achieving healthy beauty. Fabrics that could irritate the skin and prevent it from breathing,⁹⁵ ill-fitting shoes that pinched one's

feet,⁹⁶ tight clothes and undergarments that constrained the body and obstructed the flow of blood were all deemed unhealthy and dangerous.

The period's reformers placed special emphasis upon the detrimental effects of the corset especially on young women's health.⁹⁷ It was maintained that the use of the corset by women and young girls constituted an open invitation to tuberculosis, because as the corset put pressure on the stomach, it caused the lungs to have difficulty in terms of breathing, which in turn constrained other organs and rendered the body vulnerable to all sorts of illnesses.⁹⁸

In his 1924 novel *Sözde Kızlar* (So-called Girls), the renowned man of letters Peyami Safa (1899–1961), who witnessed the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the Turkish Republic, narrates the story of young Mebrure who comes to Istanbul looking for her missing father. She takes refuge in her relatives' mansion, a house of ill repute owing to the deceptive nature of its female residents and their decadent lifestyle, hence the expression 'so-called girls'. Against the backdrop of an Istanbul under allied occupation, Mebrure is confronted with the dangers of the city in general and the moral hazards of her immediate surroundings. Comparing the chaste and patriotic Mebrure with her immoral and decadent relative Nevin, who is more interested in her life of leisure than the fate of the Ottoman Empire, Safa portrays the difference between the two young women through their choice of toilette. While Mebrure chooses a simple hand-me-down dress and a natural face, Nevin opts for an elaborate gown and heavy makeup. After minutely describing Nevin 'putting on a face' to 'emulate the complexion of European actresses',⁹⁹ Safa comments on her look:

It was to such extent that no natural spot, no dermal pinpoint on this young woman's body remained exempt from the attack and invasion of artificial means; nature retreated through and through; her own radiance, smell and color evanesced under paints and fragrances.¹⁰⁰

Besides the obvious association of heavy make-up with loose morals, Safa sees broader implications in this. Nevin's own natural body, offering no resistance, has yielded completely to the modern toilette. Not only has Nevin lost her morals, but also her body; the last bastion against foreign invasion has been conquered by Western fashion and cosmetics. Nevin's surrender mirrors an Istanbul under allied occupation. It is the proper conduct of women like Mebrure that will bring about the salvation and independence of the homeland. In the final analysis, the symbolic representation of Ottoman-Muslim women's bodies representing the Ottoman lands evolves into the trope of 'woman-as-nation': 'Here, the nation's men are Brave Warriors, the defenders and the protectors; and its women are virtuous, the Beautiful souls, the protected ones. [...] But only the national women are the Beautiful ones.'¹⁰¹

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Notes

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