14

A World of Difference: Women's Rites[1]

Julie Marcus

The literature on Turkish woman, like the feminist literature on Western women, is quite unequivocal about gender inequalities. Turkish women have less education, make fewer and less important decisions, have more constraints placed upon their behaviour and movements, and they are socialised into submission to men (Cosar 1978; Kandiyoti 1977). Men are better educated at every level, better dressed, make most of the important decisions, occupy most of the better jobs, move freely and travel more widely than women.[2] Men have sexual freedom and know that they are superior to, and in control of, women. In addition, the punishment for adultery falls more heavily on women; brothers occasionally kill their sisters for real or imagined crimes of honour; and kidnapped women may be obliged to marry their abductors once virginity can no longer be assured (Starr and Pool 1974).[3] In other words, women are embedded in a gender hierarchy.

There have been, however, a few bright spots in the generally gloomy picture. There are, for example, suggestions that despite the structural inequalities suffered by Turkish and other Muslim women, they are nevertheless psychologically independent and assertive in a way that their

American sisters are not; that Turkish women are not emotionally dependent on men (Fallers and Fallers 1976); that seclusion might offer some benefits to women as well as disadvantages. These observations should not be dismissed as apologies for an otherwise unsavoury system of exploitation; they reflect a real uneasiness with existing ways of looking at Muslim women and a realisation that the comparisons being made might be far from appropriate.

It is clear that Turkish women are by no means confined to the house and in fact they travel widely and safely when means permit and, most importantly, move through the streets unharassed. Indeed, the combination of gender segregation and the allocation of groundspace to women is sometimes thought to lead to the development of a separate "women's world", a world sometimes referred to as a "sub-society" (Tapper 1978) with its own "subculture" (Sutton *et al.* 1975:598).[4] It has been the perception of a women's world and its structures that has led to the reassessments of the situation of Muslim women referred to above.

Yet the sense of shock which the encounter with the "oppressed" Muslim women of Turkey and other places produced in women observers from Europe and America provides the basis for one of the major structuring tropes of Western women's texts on the Orient. The shock of discovery relates to the discovery of the "truth", in both the popular and scholarly literature, and is thus a new technique which legitimates the text. The discovery that the formerly unknown person, group or culture has strengths not explicitly recognised within dominant narrative schema is part of the process by which anthropology claims to arrive at an understanding of people or cultures that stands outside the existing parameters of knowledge and grows specifically out of relations of power. Yet this structuring of the other as unknown and different is in itself an expression of the power of knowledges which produce both the unknown and its difference. For if they were like "us", they would be, like the map so detailed that it covered the whole world, "us" – not different but the same. Yet they are not us, so they must be different. There could be no surprise at, for example, women's strength, if the observer came in order to study a group of women perceived as powerful. The location of strength among the dispossessed or deprived therefore grows out of that dispossession and powerlessness and the specific, Western knowledges through which those peoples are represented. The perception of a women's world or subsociety flows directly from structuralist theories which ignore both the ways in which relations of power are deployed within gendered space, and the effects of adding context to analyses which are inherently directed away from the broader narrative structures of race, gender and history that are at work.

Women observers cannot be immune to these powers or their positions of privilege within them. Indeed, their crucial position as observers of the world hidden from foreign men makes their role in the production of knowledge a particularly important one. The sense of shock at the autonomy and independence of Muslim women recorded by women observers as being part of their initiation into the world of women must therefore be recognised as a legitimating trope which in itself demands investigation. To recognise the experience as a trope is not to deny the experience. In my own research, this feeling was very strong and it posed many problems for me, particularly those of how to determine the extent, nature and deployment of gendered relations of power without converting the difference into a homogenising similarity that blocked explanation. Pervasive, crucial but indeterminate, neither the empirical nor the interpretive literature seemed to provide a useful understanding of either the subordination or power of women. Indeed, removed from their identifying and locating details, many of the descriptions of women's lives that I read could have applied equally well to women in many parts of the world, particularly to those of Australia, Europe and America. It seemed as if it were the location of Turkish women within a world of Islam or in a Middle East that in itself provided the parameters of difference which I was seeking to explain. Once those geographical markers were removed from the text, little remained to identify women's oppression as differing distinctively from that which I experienced myself within the Australian family, workforce and educational systems.

This sense of the familiarity of subordination in turn raised the question of the universalising tendencies of some areas of American feminist politics of the late 1970s, a question made particularly potent by the mobilisation of Iranian women in support of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Claims of universal sisterhood made at this time sometimes obliterated the important political and economic differences between women, ignored the role of Western women in the economies and politics of domination and again imposed Western knowledges of gender, sexuality and political priorities upon women who were embedded in very different cultural economies.

But there was another point growing out of this, one not concerning the well-documented power relations which lay behind the feminising of the Orient, but one involved in creating the object of scrutiny and constructing the problem which it comes to represent. This is the notion that a particular behaviour is a cultural characteristic rather than a personal one, particularly those activities which Europeans might wish to define as criminal or unnatural. The killing of sisters by brothers, for

example, is widely regarded within the ethnographic literature as a geographically and religiously specified cultural response to social structures within the family which focus on the brother-sister relationship in a way that is not found outside that culture area. The definition of these murders as cultural rather than personal would insist, if applied more widely, that the regular bashings and killings of wives by husbands must be treated as an analogous cultural event, and one which is similarly approved and understood within, say, Australian culture. The processes of creating the distinction between culture and person and then of defining particular events or behaviour as cultural practices rather than as personal aberrations, is one of the ways in which difference is constructed and manipulated to produce comparisons which state not simply difference but inferiority. The concept of culture is itself embedded in the hierarchical structuring of difference and the politics of knowledge and because of it, the search for what is sometimes called a more "scientific" analysis of the differences between women is the more difficult, and the "truth" of difference ever more elusive.

Partly in response to the perception that Muslim Middle Eastern and Mediterranean women were far from the abject slaves of their men (Ardener 1972), and partly in response to Western feminist criticism of anthropological methodology (Rogers 1978; Tiffany 1978; Tilly and Scott 1978; Quinn 1977), students of Middle Eastern societies began to point to the possibility that separate women's worlds might generate separate models of the world. The determination of previously neglected women's world-views of the nature of the moral community might help to overcome the male bias in the literature, provide alternative ways of interpreting existing data, and also explain how women perceive their subordinated position in society as a whole. If Turkish women, for example, could be shown to hold models of either their world or of the universal Muslim world that differed substantially from those of Turkish men, then a more complete ethnography would come into being. In addition, with the discovery of competing world-views of the moral community, it would be possible to see whether the implications of male ideologies of female inferiority might to some extent be ameliorated through the allocation of separate space. My initial encounters with Turkish women were of a kind which immediately raised the questions concerning women's power that were engaging other scholars, and for precisely the same reasons. As well as growing out of a common literary background, my own work in Turkey was therefore set against this common intellectual background and experience. I, too, set out on the search for a female model of society in the hope that such a project would provide the nec-

essary explanations of the unexpected forcefulness of Turkish women noted by scholars like the Fallers (1976) and Nancy Tapper (1978).

If it could be shown to exist, a female world-view, however, could never be the precise equivalent of the male world-view, simply because the male world-view is dominant, supported and legitimated in myriad structural ways, and because women practise the purity law from which it is derived throughout their daily lives. I believed that a female world-view could be derived from an analysis of Turkish women's rites, but that it was a subordinated one, held in addition to the male one. The women's model of the moral community for which I provide evidence presents an alternative construction precisely at those points at which the hierarchy of the engendered male model is established. The female world-view puts birth at a central position, but the symbolism associated with it is not that of uncleanliness or pollution, but of purity; it places motherhood at the centre of being female and of femaleness.

In addition to presenting a view of birth that is non-polluting, the female world-view also challenges the canonical laws of the mosque regarding death. In the canonical law of Islam, the corpse is regarded as extremely polluting. Turkish funeral practice is very much in accordance with canon law. The corpse is excluded from the sacred space of the mosque itself and lies instead in the courtyard. Prayers for the dead are held beside the coffin and are brief; the body is then carried to the graveyard at the brisk pace required by the law for a rapid burial without further lamentation. While women generally lay out the polluting corpse and shroud it, they are excluded from the funeral prayers at the mosque and all displays of emotion are discouraged.[5] Islamic doctrine in Turkey is very firm on death, and the funeral rites become a very controlled and male-dominated event. Bloch and Parry (1982) consider a female association with death rites to be nigh on universal, but Ottoman canon law as practised in Turkey seeks to break that nexus. The law is only partly successful on this point, for although the funeral rites are effectively allocated to the male domain, the very important major commemoration of each death takes place within the household, at the centre of what I have called the female domain. At the point of death, as with birth, there is a confrontation between the female and male domains and between the world-views associated with them. During this confrontation, the connection between birth and death and birth and resurrection is reasserted by women. Given the significance of redemption, of life after death, within both Christian and Islamic doctrines, a female challenge to male control of death is important.

Women and the Dead

It was the use of a poem celebrating birth as a death rite that first drew my attention to the *mevlüt*. A *mevlüt* is a formal performance of the medieval Turkish poem, the *Mevlidi Şerif*, describing the birth and life of Muhammed.[6] For women, the complex relationship between concepts of death, fertility and redemption set out in the poem offer a way of integrating their lives and concerns into both the Islam of the mosque and the series of shrine and household rites which form an important part of daily life.

The series of household visits, prayers, readings and *mevlüts* which commemorate the dead are quite different from the funeral prayers of the mosque.[7] They allow women access to an important rite of passage and are part of the intricate network of visits and reciprocity by which the structures of the female domain are negotiated. In addition, cemeteries in Izmir are often pleasant, shady places where women like to visit, to picnic, to sit and reflect, and to pray for the souls of the dead.[8] In the past this activity may have been more frequent, as a visit to a cemetery was a legitimate reason for leaving the household. Women rarely attend the mosque prayers for the dead and the burial, but they are neither excluded from tending the dead nor from the cemetery itself; and they are not prevented from performing household death rites.

A *mevlüt* is generally held at seven and forty (or possibly fifty-two) days after death, and then annually. Wealthy families will often give a *mevlüt* in the mosque, in which case the audience is mainly male, the singers professional, and the performance less participatory. But the majority of *mevlüt* ceremonies are given by women in the household. To give a *mevlüt* is a meritorious act, and while the hospitality offered during the performance varies according to means, the performance itself, whether in the mosque or in the household, is explicitly open to all. It is nevertheless a rite which is of particular importance to women, and one that is prominent for them, both in death rites and through the symbolism of the poem and its performance. A *mevlüt* is not a body of ritual symbolism known to and accepted *only* by women, but one shared with men. Rather than two discrete, bounded, sets of gender-segregated rites, the *mevlüt* offers a range of beliefs and practices which receive varying emphases according to gender and location. Just as purity law is shared by women and men, so also is the *mevlüt*. While any exclusively female rite risks being declared superstitious, the *mevlüt* is not, being widely accepted as a legitimate act of worship by both women and men alike. While occasionally men express reservations as to the legality of its performance on particular occasions, it is rarely dismissed as superstitious, even when aspects of its non-Islamic nature are noted.

The *mevlüt*, however, is central to women's household rites. It offers an alternative world-view, one which is distinctively, although not exclusively, female. The ceremony begins with the arrival of women guests. They are welcomed by the hostess, but, as is the custom with formal visiting, each guest must then greet all women already present, so that after finding a seat, a guest is greeted in turn by all subsequent new arrivals. In Izmir, *lokma* (small doughnuts in syrup) are often served to the guests, each usually receiving three. Smoking is forbidden, as it is in the mosque and during the Fast of Ramazan. When the singing is about to begin, women put on their special white (occasionally pastel-coloured) *mevlüt* scarves. *Mevlüt* scarves differ from those for prayer in that they are longer than they are wide and are worn loosely thrown over the hair, rather than tightly tied. This means that the hair remains partly exposed rather than fully restrained, as would be the case for formal prayer. This difference nicely illustrates the contrast between the two sets of religious occasions. When all are settled and the children quiet, the performance begins.

The singers are generally women and they alternate, the lead singer taking the more important verses, pausing now and then to ask if extra verses are required. Each singer keeps a collection of her own verses, some printed, some handwritten, and there is considerable variation in each performance. The guests form a chorus to the professional singers and sing the refrains; the chorus also sings the *Merhaba* which welcomes the birth of the baby Muhammed, and it provides the intermittent *amins* which build up to the final crescendo. In this way, even though the atmosphere of the *mevlüt* is generally rather sedate, the women provide a framework upon which the professional singers hang the narrative. It is the women's role as chorus which helps to give the performance its unity and dramatic quality; everyone present shares not only in the recounting of the events but also in the drama of the miraculous events themselves.

One of the major sections of the poem deals with the Annunciation and Nativity of Muhammed, events in which women have the major roles. Part of this section of the poem is actually spoken by Emine, the mother of Muhammed; her direct speech gives the account of her vision an immediacy that heightens its emotional appeal.[9] In Kuranic accounts of Muhammed's birth, there is no claim for a virgin birth; his father is referred to, though briefly, and it is only as the hour of birth approaches that Emine learns of her special blessing. Three women, one of them Mary (the Mother of Jesus), announce that Emine's son is destined to be a prophet. They give her a miraculous cold white drink to ease her birth pains and a white bird flies down and strokes her back. At that point in the narrative, Emine loses consciousness until the birth is over.

This most important section of the poem is broken by several choruses in which everyone joins. As the singers tell of the white bird stroking Emine's back, everyone stands and moves around the room touching the shoulder of everyone present. They are careful not to omit anyone and are particularly concerned to include any strangers. The room is transformed by the turning of the women as they move about, smiling and stroking the shoulders of everyone there, white scarves fluttering gently. The famous *Merhaba* follows, the chorus of welcome and greeting that greets Muhammed's birth, the chorus in which everyone joins. This part of the performance, its central focus, is both enjoyable and moving. I am certain that it has far greater meaning for women than for men. It is not only that in the narrative sequence of the text Muhammed's progenitor is replaced by women, but that the ritual action of the performance of the text brings birth into focus as an entirely female event.

During the final verses of the poem, the participation of the audience increases steadily. Women interpolate *amin* more frequently and emphatically, until at the end of the poem the performance achieves a dramatic and moving intensity. When the lead singer calls the final *Fatiha,* the prayer for the dead, the sudden peace as each woman prays silently is all the more striking.[10] Women pass their hands over their faces, then sit back and pause for a moment before beginning to speak to their friends. The hostess offers her guests rosewater for their hands and hair, then serves rosewater *s[h]erbet* (cordial) topped with slivers of roasted almonds, and offers cigarettes.

As with all texts, there are a number of possible readings. The one I present is a women's reading, one in which the action highlights those events of greatest concern to women, the events they say they like and enjoy, and which are linked into the themes found in women's other household rites.

The possibility of varying readings of the poem can be illustrated briefly by considering its opening moments. It begins with the statement that Adam was the first person granted the Light of God; it passed from him to his wife Eve, then on to their son Seth and from there on to Abraham, Ishmael and Muhammed. Each of the prophets listed is of fundamental importance to Muslims (except perhaps for Seth), particularly in the Meccan pilgrimage rites. It is possible to emphasise the role of Adam in Muhammed's spiritual lineage and thus his role in establishing and legitimating Islam. Or it is possible to emphasise the role of Eve as Adam's wife and as mother of the prophets. Eve is a popular and revered figure, often referred to as the Mother of Humanity; until the 1920s her grave near Jeddah was visited by pilgrims on their way to

Mecca.[11] The Christian connection between women, sexuality, sin and the Fall of Mankind is absent from the Islamic Eve, for in the Kuran it is Satan, not Eve, who causes the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise (*Sure* 2). In both the Kuran and in the extra-Kuranic traditions which amplify this story, Eve is a very positive mother-figure.

In fact, her place in the prophetic succession is significant to women; it is her role of mother which fits in with other aspects of women's ritual symbolism. The narrative places woman clearly and unambiguously at the beginning of the world; it emphasises Eve's role as mother rather than her role as wife (although she is often seen as very helpful to Adam); and it does not connect her with sin. This is, I think, how many Turkish women perceive Eve. Men would certainly not deny Eve's role; it is a matter of emphasis rather than of absolute contrast and it seems quite clear from observation and conversation that women respond to the female imagery and symbolism of the Eve narrative in a way that men do not.

A number of points emerging from an analysis of the household *mevlüt* suggest it presents a reasonably clear female world-view, one that contrasts with the male world-view at its most critical point, that at which a gender hierarchy is established. The first point is that these events are essentially egalitarian and open to all, and that the openness is also, as will shortly become apparent, characteristic of women's symbolism. The second point is that the turning and touching of the women at the moment of Muhammed's birth seems to replicate the circling movement found at tombs and shrines, and is perhaps related to the circling of the Mevlevi *dervis*-es, although this has yet to be established.[12] More importantly, it is an inclusive rite, an act of mingling; there is no separation of social or cultural categories here – quite the reverse.

And thirdly, there is the use of the colour white, a colour which in other contexts is widely associated with purity, in the white of the Meccan pilgrim's robe, for example. The bird which eases Emine's birth pains is white, and although the white bird carries no explicit gender loading, the reenactment of the bird's arrival indicates its close connection with women. The miraculous drink given to ease the birth pains is also white; in other contexts this white, life-giving drink is located in one of the fountains of Paradise. The close association of women, birth and whiteness in this context stands in direct opposition to the association of birth with the polluting blackness and loss of control which results from the categories of purity law. The *mevlüt* therefore falls into a class of well-known rites which combine fertility symbolism with death and which, like them, have implications for gender relations (Bloch and Parry 1982; Bloch 1982).

Women and the Flow of Life

In the central life-giving episodes of the *mevlüt* and their reenactment is to be found the ritual symbolism of a distinct world-view, a universalistic one that is woman-centred, in which women are construed as mothers rather than as wives, and one which specifically marks death by referring to its transcendence by birth, a transcendence which is, in this context, purely and exclusively female. The term I use to describe the transcendent life process is *flow*. Flow highlights the distinction between the male and female world-views that I am proposing. In the male world-view, the flow of substances across conceptual or physical boundaries results in impurity; the flow of semen, menstrual blood or tears leads inevitably to ritual pollution. This type of flow can only be prevented through control of body and mind, a control only partially accessible to women. But transcendent flow, the flow of life that comes into view in the *mevlüt* rites, is also important in defining water and blood, substances critical to notions of purity, sacrifice and hygiene. For flowing water is pure and purifying, but standing water is impure and unable to purify. This is set out in purity law as well as being carried out in daily practices of hygiene. And flowing blood is pure, while stagnant blood is impure and renders a carcass unfit for human consumption.[13] Naturally, animal blood is forbidden as food and in practice is never eaten. These are life-flow concepts, concepts concerned with a set of symbolic structures and beliefs about purity that do not focus on boundaries and control, and are diametrically opposed to those expressed through the purifying ritual practices of the mosque.

In the female world-view that I am proposing, one that is found at the centre of the female domain and which stands in direct contrast to that of the mosque, the flow of life, expressed in a massive body of folk ritual and symbolism, is both life giving and pure and, for women, female. This is the opposite of the hierarchical world-view of purity law. Whereas in the male world-view the mingling of categories leads to pollution, in the female view of the world it does not. Rather than hierarchical, the female world-view, like so many of those formed in opposition and within dominating relations of power, is egalitarian.

Emine's loss of consciousness and reawakening after birth is also very significant. Within this imagery of death and resurrection through birth lies the notion of the continuing flow of life despite death itself. It seems plausible to interpret this dramatic and dramatised moment of the text as offering the opportunity for both a transcendent and compassionate reading of childbirth. Within local narratives, the same event and imagery also surrounds the birth of Isa (Jesus) to Mary the Virgin.

There is also the absence from the poem of Hatice, Muhammed's first wife and first convert, a woman greatly esteemed and revered in other contexts. She bore him no children, as she was "old" when she took him as a young husband. But also, I think her absence strengthens the presentation of women as mothers, for it is Muhammed's mother, Emine, who has the central role. At the same time, the focus on women as mothers leaves aside the politics of sexuality which conceives of young women as wives, as bearers of a dangerous sexuality, and as subordinate to males and to mothers-in-law as mothers of sons. It is along the lines of sexuality that conflicts between women for the favours of men flow, and this divisive aspect of masculinist power relations on subordinated women's worlds and lives is left submerged and deflected. As a result, the *mevlüt*'s world-view is egalitarian and unified; it focuses on women as mothers and the opportunity motherhood provides for both power and respect; and it expresses an important series of concepts concerning the flow of life through women's redemptive procreative powers.

Within engendered cosmologies which focus on women's procreative role and powers, there is often a significant iconology representing the appropriation of those female powers by men. In the *Mevlidi Şerif*, for example, during the Annunciation scene, Muhammed himself is described as God's Mercy, a term which is closely connected to the symbolism of rain. Muhammed is often said to have one hundred names. Of the many names available, it is interesting that it should be this one which is used just at the moment of birth, for analysis of women's shrine rites and of folklore suggests that rain, transcendental flow and fertility are very closely connected. Rain, defined as flowing water, is considered to be particularly pure, purifying and fertile.

Women and Pilgrimage

Perhaps it was no accident that early on my own journey out to the "Orient" I should gravitate to Izmir's most important shrine, and that from within my own journey to the margin of my culture, I should seek to know the Turkish women who regularly journeyed out of their own mundane constraints.

The most conspicuous of their journeys was the regular Friday climb up the small hill surrounded by high-rise buildings to visit the tomb of Susuz Dede.[14] If the weather was fine, each Friday two or three hundred women made the journey out from their homes, climbing past the foodstalls and the line of gypsy fortune-tellers to reach the tomb on top of the hill. At the top, the hill was covered by groups of women praying, carrying out the ritual of the shrine and eating the midday meal. Women

talked freely among themselves and listened to each other's problems. The sacredness and power of the place was acknowledged not with awe or quiet respect, but by active participation in ritual: the noise of prayers being recited, the bustle of the crowd at the tomb, the slaughter of cocks, children playing, the shouting of drinksellers and the constant reading, singing and conversation produced a noisy, friendly, pious and supportive atmosphere that was both relaxing and enjoyable.

Since my first visit to Susuz Dede in 1978, the crowd of women at the tomb has grown steadily larger and continues to do so. It is now much better organised: there are more food vendors, more watersellers, more gypsies and more beggars. The slopes of the hill have been terraced and planted with trees and shrubs and the municipality has taken on the responsibility for watering them. This important aspect of the religious lives of Turkish women has sometimes been ignored while the women who go to shrines like Susuz Dede are regarded as ignorant, superstitious and probably heretical. Yet every small town has a shrine like Susuz Dede and the larger shrines have national reputations. Men are often very disparaging of women's religious practices and clerics particularly so, for they are often regarded as un-Islamic. Yet there are clear and obvious continuities between shrine rites and those of the mosque that indicate the need to consider the shrines more carefully. They are clearly important to many women, and if these women consider themselves Muslims, it is difficult to declare that their ritual life lies outside the bounds of Islam.

I visited a great number of women's shrines in Turkey. They ranged from very small local shrines known and used by the women of one neighbourhood only, to well-established city shrines like Susuz Dede and the shrines of the great Turkish saints, Mevlana Celal ad-Din Rumi (Konya), Haci Bayram (Ankara) and Eyüp Sultan (Istanbul), which women and men all over Turkey knew of and visited. Even when these shrines are attached to a mosque, women remain an overwhelming presence at them, and their rites overwhelmingly women's rites, aimed at women's concerns even though men may participate in them. At Susuz Dede three or four men sell their services as *hoca* (religious teacher) – they sell religious tracts, sacrifice the cocks brought to the shrine by women, and for a fee recite sections from the Kuran. But men rarely visit this shrine as pilgrims as Susuz Dede is not one of the recognised Turkish "saints" of Islam.[15] So the space at the top of the hill becomes a women's space within which men have only a very limited place. Within that space, women act independently of their men; through the ritual of the site, they act to take control of important aspects of their lives. They are concerned with difficult health and financial problems, with hous-

ing, fertility and education. At the tomb of Susuz Dede they seek contact with the power of God and through ritual, to bring that power directly to bear on their lives. There are several women *hocas* there, too, who advise newcomers of the procedures, act as consultants to those in distress and pray with those who need it. They also sell the candles and reels of cotton that are used in the rites there.[16]

Women visiting the shrine in search of help usually make a conditional vow – in return for divine intervention they vow to make a sacrifice of some kind. It may be the sacrifice of a cock or a sheep, with the meat going either to the poor or to one of the *hocas*; it may be the donation of some other gift to the poor, but frequently it takes the form of a distribution of sweets, sugar cubes, rosewater or bread among the women pilgrims present at the shrine. The poor among the crowd may be able to accumulate significant quantities of sugar and bread from these distributions, but for the majority of the women the sugar collected in this way has a purely sacred value which can be carried from the shrine and utilised in other environments.

The distributions weld the crowd together into a community of women. It is essential that a distribution be made to as many of the women present as possible, and every effort is made to include everyone. Like the touching of women during the singing of the *Mevlidi Şerif*, it is a rite of inclusion which generates contacts between women who are otherwise strangers. It establishes unity on the basis of a shared gender and common gender politics, and it helps to create the open, friendly, welcoming atmosphere that characterises these occasions, despite the incredible bustle. The distributions among women also make manifest the effectiveness of prayer and ritual at Susuz Dede, for they are made only when a request has been granted. To a newcomer to the shrine it is therefore immediately clear that this is a powerful, as well as a congenial, place.

At first sight, the rites carried out at Susuz Dede are very simple, a first impression which is quite misleading. It is important to recognise that the classifying of women's rites as "simple", "crude" or "primitive" is essential to being able to define them as superstitious and un-Islamic. The easy dismissal of women's rites as superstition is crucial to maintaining a set of gender relations in which women are subordinate, and denies that women's rites are, in reality, deeply integrated within Turkish culture and Islam.

On arrival at the tomb, most women consult and pray with a female *hoca*, buying the necessary cotton from her. The cotton is unwound from the wooden spool as women walk clockwise around the tomb, praying as they go. The prayers are often intensely personal. As the unwinding

is completed, the empty spool is thrown down the side of the hill.[17] It is then usual to sprinkle a bottle of water onto the top of the tomb, together with the reiteration of the appropriate prayers. Some women light a candle or two at the fire which burns at the head of the grave, and those seeking fertility for themselves or another may make and hang a small cradle of rag and string on the branches of a small tree. At the end of these rites, a personal prayer (*dua*) is spoken aloud and the vow made.[18] The first pilgrimage is usually followed by two more. While some women are making their supplications at the tomb in this way, the others are carrying out their vows. In addition to the distributions being made, there are cocks being sacrificed, recitals from the Kuran and singings of the *Mevlidi Şerif*.

Many aspects of the ritual and supplications at Susuz Dede are regarded by Turkish men as superstitious and non-Islamic. The making of cloth cradles, the building of stone houses, the use of stones and trees in divination and the use of reels of cotton, for example, are held to be totally pagan and well outside the realm of acceptable Islam. They are nevertheless remarkably widespread among the range of pilgrims (both women and men) at Turkish shrines. Furthermore, the sacrificing of cocks at graves is forbidden in the Kuran, even though it is lawful on other occasions. The making of vows at graves is condoned in the Kuran but the use of candles and the other aspects of women's rites found at tombs is condemned. Candles nevertheless have an established ritual usage in Turkish mosques; Ramazan and the five annual (lunar) Festivals of Light, the Kandils, utilise precisely this imagery. Even at shrines at which men are present, and even when a variety of practices defined as superstition are very much in evidence, men will still sacrifice sheep on sites associated with particularly important holy men. This is the case at the graveside of the Imam Mehmed Birgevi (in Birgi), for instance, where the shrine is much better organised and large parties of women and men regularly sacrifice sheep as the result of a vow, and where women carry out a variety of other rites.[19] In this case, men pray formally in the small mosque in the graveyard, and women sing the *Mevlidi Şerif* in a separate cottage built especially for the purpose. At Birgi, the sacrifices are often those of men giving thanks for divine intervention. It is important to note the ways in which, despite their disapproval of women's rites, men are familiar with and active participants in a set of ritual performances that they might want, on some occasions, to classify as pagan or sinful. The break between mosque law and pilgrim practice is far less abrupt than might at first be apparent.

The presence of men at pilgrimage shrines ranges along a continuum which in Turkey is aligned to the degree of acceptance of the shrine within

the ambit of mosque Islam. At Eyüp Sultan in Istanbul, where men visit the saint's tomb, the mausoleum stands adjacent to the mosque and is surrounded by a suburb of linked religious buildings. Large numbers of women regularly attend the formal mosque prayers, particularly on Fridays. At Birgi, a much less developed site, but one which nevertheless boasts established terraced picnic facilities, a teahouse, a small mosque, a women's room and a slaughter house, the family groups break up into women and men and ritual is carried out accordingly. Yet whether men are a noticeable presence or not, and whether men approve of women's presence and activities, women maintain their place, their access and their separate rites at all Turkish shrines.

The shrines therefore provide islands of women's space within the landscape. Men are largely absent from them and within them the universalistic doctrines of Islam provide the opportunity for women to construct a women's world. They also allow women the pilgrimage, a journey out from the household centre and its social structures into the liminal world of the shrines in which a set of universal, unifying and transcendental values are reaffirmed as emphatically those of women.

Nostalgia, Superstition and Women's Rites

There is no doubt that the first encounter with women's rites at pilgrimage shrines can create the illusion of the universality of ritual experience, a feeling of the eternal value of women's primal concerns. At these shrines women are praying for help with life, birth and death, with the primordial female functions of the body and culture. The immediacy of their pleas and the direct action taken in connection with them seems primitive and unfamiliar to Muslims and Christians alike who have been reared within a different, more constrained, religious commitment. Women's "paganism", too, fits into Western views of Islam itself as a dangerously "primitive" (barbaric, bloodthirsty) religion, so that no matter which path you take, you risk slipping away into un-civilisation. The sense of difference and its relations to familiar tropes of a "primitive" world is, of course, an illusion, as is the sense of continuity and timelessness that underpins it. The different religious register of women's shrine rites, its movements and aims, also runs along a continuum, one which stretches across the variety of women's religious practices and into those of men.

The shrine of Hizr, set sternly on the beach near Antakya, provides a good example of the ways in which women's beliefs can be denigrated as unorthodox while simultaneously being locked into a set of symbolic concerns that, although subterranean, are nevertheless of national sig-

nificance. Hizr's shrine centres on a massive rock in the centre of a sandy beach. A cupola has been built over the rock and around it there are two circular walls separated by a short passageway of perhaps six metres. Beggars sit along both walls of this corridor, so that all entering have to run the gauntlet of outstretched hands, entreaties and pleas of the dispossessed. Inside, between the rock and its walls, is about six metres or so. It is a small shrine which on the days I was there was relatively congested. Into the side of the rock were cut some small niches while others occurred quite naturally. In the niches were sometimes candles, sometimes trays of burning aromatic gums and seeds. Close to the wall of the shrine stood the remains of an old tree. Bark and most branches had long since gone and the remaining wood had the patina and polish of what must surely have been millions of hands. The remaining twigs or stumps of branches were used as hooks, so that bags containing Kurans or other books could be hung there. One of the bags contained dozens of matted balls of human hair. Outside the shrine were feathers and feet, showing that sacrifices had been made there.

When I first visited the shrine of Hizr, the sense of straying into another world was very strong; and in one sense I had. Like all pilgrimage shrines, this was a place apart, set outside of social space, somewhere beyond social structure. But what it was not, was a monument to the past. The noisy presence of the margins of society, the beggars, the focus of the shrine on a rock, the burnished tree trunk, the burning aromatics and lumps of hair hung carefully on the tree – each of these elements conjured up memories from two important narrative worlds. The first was of the ancient rites of primordial tribal Greeks, their tree worship, sacred groves, sacrifices and libations, nymphs and naiads. The other image was of the unplaced and unspecifed *primitif*, the feeling that in the bodily exuviae, muttered prayers and circumambulations of the rock, one was looking at what must have been the earliest of human behaviour, an element which had survived here, down on the beach at Antakya, far from the control of state or clergy.

It is easy to assimilate the women at the shrine to these past worlds, to see them as exemplars of the lost *primitif*, as outside of culture perhaps, and as tied into their eternal bodily concerns. In a sense, these women become exemplars of the ruins of the past that Western travellers put so much time into locating and mapping, in proving that the ruins of the past were indeed superimposed upon a much less friendly present. They also become part of the present wave of nostalgia for those pasts and their ruins. The line between past and present can then become continuous, eternal, and it is not far from this point to the eternal maternal of the would-be matriarchs. It is important to specify the West-

ern narrative discourses into which the women and the shrine of Hizr can so readily fit, for only then can first impressions of a journey into those pasts be scrutinised and clarified. In this sense, nostalgia, the desire for depoliticised pasts, is a male discourse on the ruins of the eternal feminine.

Yet it would be wrong to consider these women and their ritual symbolism as being exemplary in this way. Like everyone else, they live in a present that is part and parcel of today's world, and their lives and beliefs are embedded in relations of power with the state, a global economy and men, just as are those of all other women. Their precise relationship to these powers and discourse is, of course, specific and personal as well as structured and general. But it is nevertheless there and because of that fact, their actions and beliefs must be set in the present world, not in that of a past.

Notes

1 *Editors' note:* This paper is a lightly edited version of Chapter 7 of Julie Marcus' monograph *A World of Difference: Islam and Gender Hierarchy in Turkey* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, Women in Asia Publication Series, 1992). We thank Allen & Unwin and The Editorial Committee (Asian Studies Association of Australia) for permission to reprint this chapter.

2 See, however, Graham-Brown (1988:82) for the suggestion that the introduction of rail networks offered women greater opportunities for travel.

3 Themes often treated in Turkish films, e.g., *Yol*.

4 Adrienne Rich (1977:16) has pointed to problems with this style of conceptualisation: "I soon began to sense a fundamental perceptual difficulty among male scholars (and some female ones) for which 'sexism' is too facile a term. It is really an intellectual defect, which might be named 'patrivincialism' or 'patriochialism': the assumption that women are a subgroup, that 'man's world' is the 'real' world, that patriarchy is equivalent to culture and culture to patriarchy.... History as written and perceived up to now, is the history of a minority, who may well turn out to be the 'sub-group'". It is not necessary to accept Rich's notion and use of patriarchy or the linkage of patriarchy to concepts of "sub-society" to accept the validity of her point that there are problems in conceptualising women's society as "sub-" anything.

5 The absence of women and of funeral laments at the graveside contrasts with funerary practice in Iran and with that of Alevi Turks and Anatolian Greeks.

6 The *Mevlidi Şerif* is by Suleyman Çelebi. An English translation is provided by MacCallum (1973[1943]). While verses describing the death of the Prophet are said to exist (MacCallum 1973), I have never heard them.

7 The *mevlüt* is also used to commemorate other rites of passage and is not restricted to death. Yet its role in death rites signals its importance for the models I developed here. Its use on other occasions supports rather than invalidates its significance.

8 Village cemeteries may sometimes be much bleaker places with the dead seemingly forgotten and neglected; the range of practice is great.

9 "Emine" is the Turkish rendering of the Arabic "Aminah".

10 The *Fatiha*: "Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures; The most merciful, the King of the day of judgement. Thee do we worship, and of thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way, in the way of those to whom thou has been gracious; not of these against whom thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray" (Sale translation).

11 *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd edition): Kaaba.

12 I use the Turkish spelling with an English plural separated by the hyphen. The more familiar English spelling is "dervish" and "dervishes". The circling *zikr* (ritual) of the Mevlevi order, an order which is entirely Anatolian in origin and support, is intimately connected with death and transcendence.

13 The method of slaughtering animals for food allows all the blood to drain from the carcass, as is also the case in Judaic law. Animals which are defined as having blood but which cannot be dealt with in such a way as to drain the blood out are anomalous. Thus the mixed feelings and practice over crustacea. These definitions stand in stark contrast to those of some central Asian cultures in which a beast must be killed in such a way as to keep the blood within the body.

14 "Thirsty Grandfather", *dede* being used to indicate a male forebear and often being applied to a saintly or pious character.

15 I rely largely on the work of Turner and Turner (1978) for definitions of pilgrimage and pilgrim sites.

16 There are many women at the shrine who regard all the *hocas* as ignorant charlatans and frauds and therefore avoid their services. The *hocas* at Susuz Dede are very poor and not well-schooled. The male *hocas* actually regard the women pilgrims as superstitious and ignorant and the female *hocas* as a legal impossibility and total aberration. However, both groups provide necessary functions and at times of extremity, their services can be useful. They are the precise structural equivalents of the quick-fix therapists used by so many desperate and deluded Australians and Americans and their methods have about the same degree of success.

17 The women *hocas*, being very poor, often collect the spools and rewind as much of the cotton as possible.

18 *Dua* is free prayer. It stands in contrast to formal prayers of obligation.

19 Mehmed Birgevi, "a subtle theologian who had carried on controversies with Ebu-s-sü'üd" (Hodgson 1974:(3)123).

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