

Femaleness, Femininity and Feminotopia: The Female Hamam as a Homosocial Space

Kadınlık, Dişilik ve Feminotopya: Homososyal Bir Mekan Olarak Kadın Hamamı

Burkay Pasin*

İzmir University of Economics

Abstract

Spaces are gendered in a myriad of different ways in accordance with not only various user identities, but also social, cultural and political domains, within which these identities are constructed. Although this multi-faceted gendering potential of spaces inevitably challenge the global binary constructs (male/female; public/private) of the patriarchal system in which the male is associated with the public and the female with the private sphere; this twofold gendering of spaces may well be subverted by means of the lived experiences in various cultural geographies. The Turkish neighborhood bath (mahalle hamamı) is one such gendered space in which the public norms of its environmental setting have been subverted by means of privatized spatial practices of its female users. In an alternative critical approach to male-dominated constructions of the hamam, this paper focuses on the women's section of the neighborhood hamam as 'a homosocial space'. In the first part, I consider whether the sexual division of the hamam reflects any difference in daily spatial practices. In the following parts, based on an in-depth reading and interpretation of the literary works by critical female scholars, ethnographers and travelers, I make a threefold analysis of various genderings that occur in the females' hamam: (1) a cultural space of femaleness, (2) a representational space of femininity, (3) a feminotopia of female autonomy, empowerment and pleasure. In light of the analyses, I conclude that the homosociability in the females' hamam is a unique kind of homogenous sociability derived from heterogeneous forms of genderings in the Ottoman-Turkish society.

Keywords: neighborhood hamam, homosocial space, femaleness, femininity, feminotopia.

*Burkay Pasin, MSc., (Instructor), Department of Architecture, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, İzmir University of Economics, İzmir – Turkey. E-mail: burkay.pasin@ieu.edu.tr.

Introduction

Gendering of a space is a multi-faceted problem. The architectural historian and critic Jane Rendell approaches this problem from a functional point of view by distinguishing between the 'sexing' and 'gendering' of spaces; the former addresses "the biological sex of the people who occupy them", while the latter is associated with "the different kinds of activities which occur in them" (Rendell, 2000: 101). Spaces are also gendered through their 'representations' in various social and cultural geographies. Accordingly, the work of the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991) provides a tripartite theoretical framework to explain how representation works in the production of space: 'spatial practice' (material or functional space), 'representations of space' (space as codified language), and 'representational space' (the lived everyday experience of space).

The heteropatriarchal systems have created global binary constructs in which the male is associated with the public sphere (spaces of production) and the female with the private sphere (spaces of reproduction). However, depending on how a space is gendered in a cultural geography, these constructs have historically been subverted by means of the lived spatial experiences in that particular geography¹. In spite of their rare treatment or neglect in written histories of architecture, such public spaces as men's coffeehouses and tearooms, women's hairdressers, queer bathhouses, public toilets, etc. have also functioned as private venues where individuals freely express their gender identities and share common desire.

The Turkish bath (*hamam*) is one such gendered space in which the gender norms in Ottoman-Turkish society have been subverted by means of privatized spatial practices of female users. Before the 18th century, *hamams* had mostly been constructed as revenue-generating foundation properties (*vakıf*) either as part of a religious complex (*külliye*) including with a mosque or a madrasa², or within a framework of the *imaret* system having an organic relationship with other commercial structures³. After this time, the construction of *külliyes* slowed down and most of the *imaret hamams* passed into personal ownership. As a result, individual *hamam* buildings smaller in scale and located in urban neighborhoods, gained popularity among the Ottoman-Turkish society, especially women. In comparison to *külliye hamams* and *imaret hamams*, both of which functioned primarily as a public bathing venue for males, neighborhood *hamams* acquired a secondary function, becoming "a virtual public forum" for females and "a democratic environment created by people from diverse cultural strata of the Turkish society" (Işın, 1990: 268).

I argue that this function of the neighborhood *hamam* as a multi-cultural socializing space became significant for female users due to two main factors. First, as within many cities in the Islamic world, Ottoman urban space was organized as a gender-segregated space. In accordance with the Islamic moral legal codes ruled not only by the religious law schools but also the *hadith* collections, men and women were required to spend their daily lives in relatively separate spheres. The British professor of literature, Mary Jo Kietzman describes this segregation as “a genuine alternative to the West’s strictly hierarchical organisation of social space” (Kietzman, 1998: 542). She argues that “the male reigns supreme over both public and private space. There is no female space, but only a female space allowed within the privatized domestic domain over and in which the men exercise effective control of their women” (Kietzman, 1998: 545-546). However, this gendered organization does not simply rest on the complete distinction of private and public spheres of the two sexes, but can further be understood in the following passage by Ludwig Ammann, a scholar in Islamic Studies:

This organisation of urban space [in Islamic countries] reflects, and in fact strengthens, solidarity groups by controlling the movement of bodies. Enclosed, secluded spaces ranging from family home to gated quarter create more private, semi-private and semi-public space – space not freely accessible to everybody in a concentric system of relative privacy – than exists in occidental cities (Ammann, 2006: 102).

While the coffeehouses, Friday mosques and trade markets were the primary public spaces for male sociability, *hamams* were the most significant venues of female sociability outside the domestic sphere. The Turkish historian Cengiz Kırılı states that “public baths played the same role for women as coffeehouses did for men” (Kırılı, 2000: 5). However, compared to venues of male sociability, baths have been considered as less public or semi-public, “a label that makes the recognizability of female communication in public quite difficult” (Akşit, 2009: 155).

Second, the neighborhood *hamam* was the only public space in which a woman could visit and socialize with other women in various bodily and sensual dimensions in her neighborhood. In virtue of its long term and constant heat, a woman could spend very long hours, even a full day in the *hamam*. Moreover, women were permitted the right to visit the *hamam* at least once every two weeks prior to their marriage. Although this right was mainly provided for bathing activities⁴, the *hamams* in time had become a ‘homosocial space of pleasure and entertainment peculiar to woman culture’.

However, the gendering of the *hamam* is a more complicated issue than being simply treated as 'a female space'. An extensive literature survey shows that most studies on the *hamam* are conducted from a patriarchal point of view, in which the aspects of sexuality and gender are either neglected or over-emphasized. On one hand, the historiography of *hamam* architecture from the early 20th century to the present has been constructed mainly by means of formal, functional and structural analyses, in which the sexual division of the *hamam* building into male and female sections has been ignored. On the other hand, in the narratives of male European travelers, the *hamam* is abstracted from its environmental, social and cultural contexts and depicted as 'a stage of representation for the imaginary Oriental female', rather than a space in itself.

In an alternative critical approach to these male-dominated constructions of the *hamam*, this paper focuses on the women's section of the neighborhood *hamam* as 'a homosocial space'. In the first part, I introduce the sexually-divided single and double *hamam* archetypes in order to understand the typological origins of homosociability particularly in Ottoman-Turkish *hamam* architecture and question if these divisions reflect any difference on the daily spatial practices. As a further method of inquiry, I refer to the literary works by the female historians, the female travelers, as well as the female social historians, all of whom have had first-hand knowledge and/or experience on the women's section of the neighborhood *hamams* since the early 18th century. My initial readings of their texts have shown that each scholar approaches the homosocial gendering of the *hamam* space from a different point of view in accordance with not only their disciplinary attitudes, but also their context-conscious socio-cultural positions as critical female writers/scholars. An in-depth comparative analysis of these texts brings forward a threefold conceptualization of female homosociability in the *hamam* space: (1) a cultural space of female reproductivity and domesticity, (2) a representational space of femininity, (3) a feminotopia of female autonomy, empowerment and pleasure

Sexual Division of the *Hamam*

The first scholarly studies on 'the *hamam* archetype' were conducted by male scholars from the early to the mid-20th century. The Viennese art historian Heinrich Glück (1921), the German art historian Karl Klinghardt (1927), the Turkish architecture historian Kemal Ahmet Aru (1949) and the Turkish art historian Semavi Eyice (1960) provide formal categorizations of the *hamam* archetype in accordance with the disposition of the hot section (*sıcaklık*) in the *hamam*'s spatial layout. These scholars further classified neighborhood *hamams*

according to their forms of usage by the opposite sexes: (1) single (*tek*) *hamam* used by male and female on alternate days, or at different times of the day, (2) double (*çifte*) *hamam* used simultaneously by each sex. In this classification, the double *hamam* consisted of two adjacent and generally symmetrical sections for women and men allowing simultaneous use, whereas the single *hamam* offers alternate bathing times for men and women in the same space⁵. However, none of these historians make any consideration of whether these two sections were used in the same manner by the two sexes, and if the particular practices of men and women affected size and arrangement of, access to and circulation in the *hamam* space.

The art historian Nina Ergin (2009: no page) highlights that while many of the double *hamams* “offered equal facilities for men and women”; there were also double *hamams* “where the women’s section was smaller, probably based on the demographics of the neighborhood”. She argues that social and sexual interaction between the sexes in a double *hamam* was “furthermore prevented by placing the entrance to the women’s section away from that of the men’s section”. The entrance of the men’s section (exterior focus of the building) opens out to a main road or an arena, while the entrance of the women’s section (much simpler and smaller) opens out to a side road allowing discrete and unobserved access to the *hamam* (Figure 1).

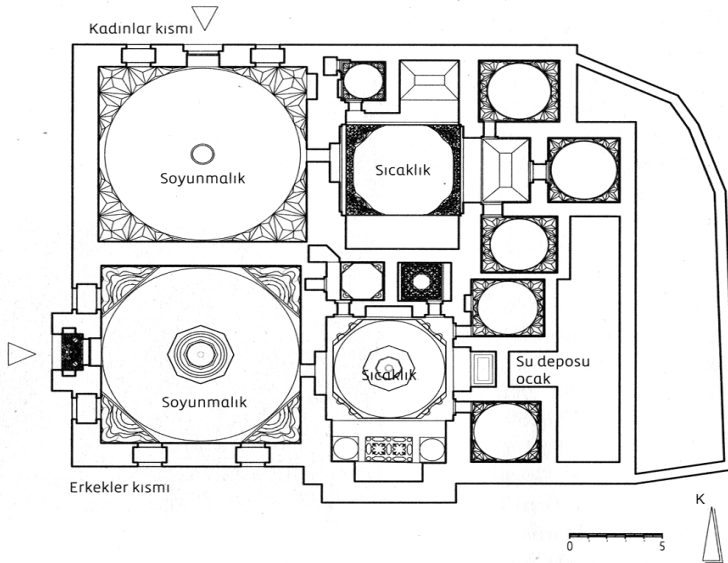


Figure 1. Plan of a double neighborhood hammam, Mahkeme Hamamı in Bursa (Şehitoğlu, 2008 86)

In a single neighborhood *hamam*, men and women would either bathe on alternate days, or the *hamam* would be open to men in the morning (*kuşluk hamamı*) and to women between the noon and the evening prayer. There also existed single neighborhood *hamams* called 'avret hamamı', reserved for women, while *hamams* located in the market area and reserved for men are called 'rical hamamı' (Ergin, 2009: no page). The emergence of these sex-specific *hamams* have not only enriched distinct forms of sociability – the women are associated with networks of reproductivity and domesticity, while the men are associated with networks or production – but also created sex-specific circulation patterns in urban neighborhoods.

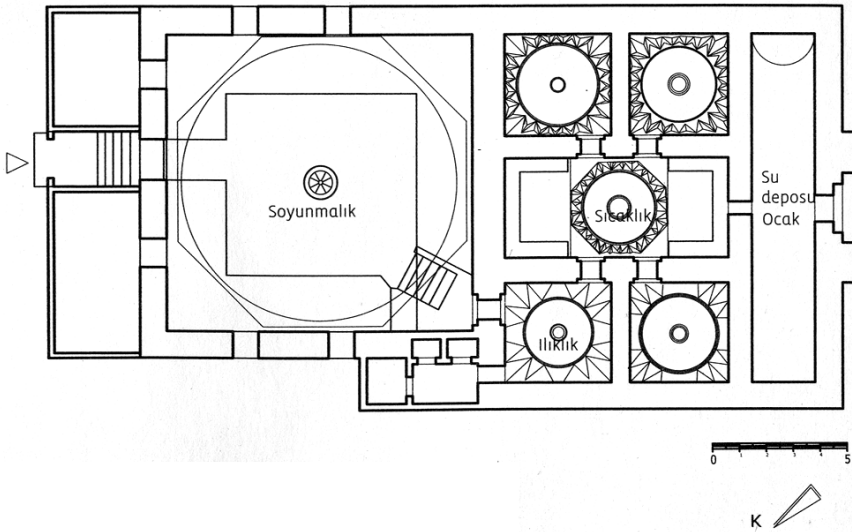


Figure 2. Plan of a single neighborhood hammam, Umurbey Hamamı in Bursa, (Şehitoğlu, 2008 93)

It is debatable whether the symmetrical layout of a double *hamam* leads to an equal use of the two sections, or whether the time-dependent sexual division of a single *hamam* reflects any difference on the daily practices of each sex. Accordingly, I argue that this sexual division has not actually strengthened but subverted heteronormativity by creating a homosocial environment for both sexes. However, due to their privileged and frequent use of the *hamam*, this homosociability is more visible in women's *hamam*, as reflected in cultural rituals of female reproductivity, women's self-representation and female autonomy; each of which are discussed consecutively in the following parts.

Hamam as a Cultural Space of Femaleness

In mainstream Ottoman-Turkish ethnographic literature, the women's section of the *hamam* is depicted as a beauty parlour where a great amount of time is allocated for body treatment and the consumption of beauty and wellness products⁶. This allocation cannot be simply ignored considering that the *hamam* culture has, over time, created a large market with a range of products including wrapped bundles (*bohça*), *peştemal*, underwear, towels, copper or silver *hamam* bowls (*hamam tası*), clogs (*nalın*), soaps, scrubbing mitts (*kese*), smut (*rastık*), henna (*kına*), combs, mirrors, etc. However, I argue that this understanding reduces women's sociability into a kind of consumption culture and legitimizes the invisibility of women in public networks of production. As explained by critical female historians Nina Ergin, Ebru Boyar, Kate Fleet and Tülay Taşçıoğlu, the *hamam* is not simply a consumption space for female beauty, but a cultural space based on 'a network of domesticity and reproduction'.

Ergin considers the weekly *hamam* visit of the women not as "a simply walk into the *hamam* building, as it would have been for men" but contends that "the women's *hamam* visit did not start at the door of the *hamam* but extended backwards in time and space and included other sets of activities". For Ergin, female *hamam* sociability was "an affair that began, sometimes several days earlier, with women contacting each other to determine the day of the visit, sitting down in groups within the household to make *dolma* and *köfte*, and packing up their bundles" (Ergin, 2009). While the women's section of a *hamam* was usually out of sight, the centralized location was accessible from many urban neighborhoods. Thus, visits to the *hamam* became a ceremonial act, as groups of women from diverse backgrounds proceeded to the *hamam*, creating, "one materialized form of understanding women's direct involvement in the city" (Akşit, 2011: 279) as seen in Figure 3. Hence, the women's section of a *hamam* can be considered as an extension of their domestic environments (*haremlik* section and kitchen) to the outside world, namely the shared public zone of that neighborhood.

Far more than being merely a space of female beauty and cleanliness, the *hamam* provided the women with a cultural space where rituals celebrating female sexuality and reproductivity take place, such as The Fortieth Day Bath (*kırk hamamı* or *lohusa hamamı*), The Bride's Bath (*gelin hamamı*), The Bath of Oblation (*adak hamamı*)⁷. All these rituals regarding female reproductivity are given more emphasis than the actual acts of reproduction (getting married, having sex, giving birth) themselves. Most ethnographers have taken these rituals for granted as part of a cultural heritage from an unspecified time in the

Ottoman past and have rarely focused on how these female-only rituals affect the spatial use in the women's section of the *hamam*.



Figure 3. A 16th century illustration showing women walking to the hamam (And, 1991 13, retrieved from Kassel, Landes Bibliothek)

The Fortieth Day Bath is traditionally the first outing of a baby, who is washed at the same time as his mother forty days after the birth. The ritual follows a certain spatial order from home to street, the women's entrance, the cold room and finally the warm room. The baby is washed by the midwife (*ebe hanım*), the mother is seated by a marble sink (*kurna*) in a warm *halvet*, and washed by the wise lady (*usta hanım*), accompanied by special prayers. The ritual is then reversed on the way out.

The *hamam* is also visited by some women in order to find suitable brides for their sons or brothers, both judging the possible candidates physically and checking out their manners and behavior. Matchmakers sit on the *divan* of the bath-keeper under their veils and carefully watch them entering and exiting the *sıcaklık*. Those washing in the *hamam* are aware of who they are. The matchmakers learn from the bath-keeper whether the girls they like are married or single, and then get addresses of the unmarried girls from her in order to pay them a visit later (Boyar & Fleet, 2010: 257).

The Bride's Bath (*gelin hamamı*) is held a few days before the wedding. The *hamam* is by reserving the *hamam* for the female members of both families, together with their relatives and neighbors. The bride is washed and accompanied by singing hymns, traditional folksongs and dancing. For such a ritual, the entire day might be spent in the *hamam* in a repetitive process of washing, eating, drinking and talking informally in various chambers. Another ritual, is the bath of oblation (*adak hamamı*), particularly where thermal water was available, mainly performed for those who were infertile. These women sit

in the hottest chamber, taking frequent health cures, praying for a period of 15-20 days. In the case of those who were able to give birth, the *hamam* would be reserved 24 hours during which time food is provided to women in need, as an act of thanksgiving (Taşcıoğlu, 1998: 126).

Two researchers on the Ottoman social life, Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet (2010: 249) discuss the 'culture of femaleness' existing in the *hamam*, stating that "It [the *hamam*] was where neighbors and friends could meet and socialize, enabling women,... to mix with women not from their immediate family circle". Accordingly, they interpret the women's *hamam* as "a multi-ethnic and multi-religious space" (Boyar & Fleet, 2010: 249). In this perspective, female homosociability is based on gender, rather than on family, kinship, ethnicity or religion. So, while the cultural rituals on the special occasions mentioned above may have involved only those from a particular group or family, the remaining time allowed for the mixing of women from various ethnic and religious groups.

In a contrasting view, Ergin argues that while the shared activities of female cleanliness and beauty inside the *hamam* strengthened "the bond within any specific group of women" (from a similar income level, religious or social status), it also set "boundaries towards those not included" (Ergin, 2009: no page). This has been well reflected on spatial practices and positionings in the *hamam*. For instance, the restoration specialist Tülay Taşcıoğlu highlights that "inside the *camekan*, the coldest entrance section of the *hamam* for clothing and resting before and after the bathing ritual, the women were separately seated by corners in accordance with their intimacy and social status" (Taşcıoğlu, 1998: 118).

Strategies were developed to ensure the separation of various groups, not only the poor and the rich but also the Muslim and non-Muslim. One strategy of creating a religion-based homosocial space was to build special *hamams* for their communities operating within their neighborhoods; e.g. *Fenerkapısı Hamam* in İstanbul by the Greeks and the *Cuhudkapısı Hamam* in İstanbul by the Jews (Işın, 1990: 270). Another strategy was to assign separate days for the weekly *hamam* visits for Muslims and non-Muslims, taking into account the need to avoid the holy day of each group. Therefore Wednesdays or Thursdays were allocated for Muslims, and any day except Saturday and Sunday for Jews and Christians respectively (Taşcıoğlu, 1998: 117).

Hamam as a Representational Space of Femininity

Since the early 18th century, the narratives of European travelers have constituted a significant part of the literary media on *hamams*. Especially, the male travelers who were forbidden to enter the female section of a *hamam*, have mostly

depicted what they had imagined of this space rather than what they had observed⁸. In many of their travel books, a visit to the *hamam* forms a literary set-piece, “a representation of canonical material, which by the middle years of the nineteenth century often takes on a self-conscious, tongue-in-cheek tone” (Conner, 1987: 42). In their narratives, the *hamam* space is abstracted from its environmental, social and cultural contexts, and constructed as ‘a stereotypical venue’ offering “a vision of synaesthetic and sensual indulgence” (Conner, 1987: 34) for the so-called ‘Oriental feminine figure’. Even though these narratives provide user-focused interpretations, they are as reductionist as the formalist approach in archetypal sexual division of the *hamam* explained in the first section.

However, the testimonial narratives of European female travel writers are quite explanatory in terms of understanding how representation works in the constructions of female homosociability in a neighborhood *hamam*. The women’s section is also a representational space that rests on the dualities of clothedness/nakedness and seeing/being seen. Accordingly, there is no single view of homosociability that can be observed in the *hamam* since each female travel writer represents (and interprets) this female-only environment throughout her own perspective and social status. For instance, although the whole atmosphere may have been unattractive or even repulsive for the travelers, some seem to have been especially affronted by the *hamams’* lack of racial segregation rather than its other features. One such female travel writer is Sofia Lane Poole, a British woman who described the *hamams* in Cairo in the 1840s as “disgusting”. Obviously, she was offended not only by the over-exposure of female flesh, but also the mingling of different ethnicities and social classes:

On entering the chamber a scene presented itself with beggar’s description. My companion had prepared me for seeing many persons undressed; but imagine my astonishment on finding at least thirty women of all ages and many young girls and children perfectly unclothed. You will scarcely think it possible that no one but ourselves had a vestige of clothing. Persons of all colors, from the black and glossy shade of the negro to the fairest possible hue of complexion, were formed in groups, conversing as though fully dressed, with perfect nonchalance (Poole, 1844: 173).

For a Victorian lady, the impact of seeing such a relaxing attitude of Eastern women to frank nudity must have been, as Vanzan (2010: 4) describes, “not only outrageous, but also promiscuous and uncontrollably licentious”. Analogously, Harriet Martineau, a British feminist who traveled in the Middle

East in the same period, described her experience in a *hamam* as if it was a descent to the hell:

Through the dense stream, I saw a reservoir where the water stands to cool for some time before it can be entered: several women were standing in it; and those who had come out were sitting on a high shelf in a row, to steam themselves thoroughly... The crowd and the steam were oppressive, that I wondered how they could stay; but the noise was not to be endured for a moment. Everyone seemed to be gabbling at the top of her voice, and we rushed out after a mere glance, stunned and breathless. To this moment, I find it difficult to think of these creatures as human beings and certainly I never saw anything which so impressed me with a sense of the impassable differences of race (Martineau, 1848: 544).

The best-known *hamam* narratives are those of Lady Mary Wortley Montague, the wife of Edward Wortley Montagu, British ambassador in Istanbul from 1716 to 1718. In her famous account of a visit to a pre-marriage ceremony in Istanbul, it is possible to see “an experimental approach to ethnography” with “her attentiveness to the dialogical and temporal character of her encounter” with the Turkish women bathing there. Here, the significance of representation in creating a homosociable space is more evident. Montague does not “other the women by making them stand for generalized Oriental humanity or the disjunction between the Eastern and Western cultures. Instead she represents an encounter in which all participants [the observer and the observants] collaborate to construct their subjectivities in relation to the Other not by denying difference but by articulating and exploring it” (Kietzman, 1998: 538), as follows:

I was in my travelling habit, which is a riding dress, and certainly appeared very extraordinary to them. Yet there was not one of them that showed the least surprise or impertinent curiosity, but received me with all the obliging civility possible. I know no European court where the ladies would have behaved themselves in so polite a manner to a stranger... The lady that seemed the most considerable among them entreated me to sit by her, and would fain have undressed me for the bath. I excused myself with some difficulty, they being however all so earnest in persuading me,... I was at last forced to open my stays, which satisfied them very well,... they believed I was so locked up in that machine, that it was not in my own power to open it, which contrivance they attributed to my husband (Montagu, 1994: 58-59).

Homosociability in the *hamam* incorporates contrasting features of representation. In the same passage, Montague articulates that bathing women

in *hamams* are fully naked but not immodest, free but not licentious, languid but not unproductive, while the space is levantine but masquerade. Montagu's delight in seeing those naked women is, as the scholar of English literature, John C. Beynon argues, "... characterized by self-conscious reflection about her own status as an observer and interest in her own acts of looking". Beynon proposes that such sapphic models of visual pleasure between women (that is to be seen by her own sex) is an appropriate model for understanding Lady Mary's erotic delight in looking at women (Beynon, 2003: 34-36). It is not the sexual possession of women that interests her (as it invariably interests male observers) but something we might call 'the representation of women's sexual self-expression'.

The first sofas were covered with cushions and rich carpets, on which sat the ladies, and on the second their slaves behind them, but without any distinction of rank by their dress, all being in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed. Yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst them... I was here convinced of the truth of a reflection I had often made, that it was the fashion to go naked, the face would be hardly observed. I perceived that the ladies with finest skins and most delicate shapes had the greatest share of my admiration, though their faces were sometimes less beautiful than those of their companions... so many fine women naked, in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their cushions... I have now entertained you with an account of such a sight... no book of travels could inform you of as 'tis no less than death for a man to be found in one of these places' (Montagu, 1994: 59-60).

Another female traveler, British poet Julia Pardoe, arrived in Istanbul with her father in 1836. She characterizes the *hamam* depictions of the precedent European travelers as "imaginary tales that can be considered almost real". For instance, she questions Montague's narratives by announcing that "I had witnessed none of that unnecessary and wanton exposure described by Montague" (Pardoe, 1836: 130). This is mainly due to how different the two female travelers perceive the *hamam* space. In contrast to Montague's accounts based on ways of seeing and being seen, Pardoe's *hamam* depictions are focused on the multi-sensual atmosphere of the space, being "surrounded by not only the visual but also the tangible nudity of usually covered bodies, including her own" (Vanzan, 2010: 6).



Figure 4. The book cover image by Daniel Chodowiecki, showing Lady Montagu in the hamam (Tez, Zeki; 2009 195)

For the first few minutes I was bewildered; the heavy, dense, sulphureous vapour that filled the place, and almost suffocated me - the wild shrill cries of the slaves pealing through the reverberating domes of the bathing-halls, enough to awaken the very marble with which they were lined - the subdued laughter and whispered conversations of their mistresses, murmuring along in an under current of sound - the sight of nearly three hundred women, only partially dressed, and that in fine linen so perfectly saturated with vapour that it revealed the whole outline of the figure - the busy slaves passing and repassing, naked from the waist upwards, and with their arms folded upon their bosoms, balancing on their heads poles of fringed or embroidered napkins - groups of lovely girls, laughing, chatting, and refreshing themselves with sweetmeats, sherbet, and lemonade - parties of playful children (Pardoe, 1839: 15).

Hamam as a Feminotopia

Considering that such female-specific rituals may take place with the same amount of comfort and security in private houses, with an equal degree of sexual self-expression, I further discuss the issue of why the *hamam* was chosen as the most appropriate place for such gatherings. Here, I introduce a third aspect of homosociability in the women's section of the *hamam*, 'feminotopia', a term that originates from the Orientalist travel writing literature of the eighteenth century, as "an intimate utopia that celebrates pleasure and homoeroticism among [Oriental] women" (Pohl & Tooley, 2007: 2). The American critical theorist Mary Louise Pratt re-conceptualizes the term as to "represent idealized worlds of female autonomy, empowerment and pleasure", creating "an alternative social order" to the male-dominated public domain (Pratt, 1992: 166-167).

I argue that it is not only the reproductive femaleness and sexual self-expression that bond the women to each other in the *hamam*, but also a shared reaction against heteronormative power relations and oppression in public space. Unlike in other spaces, where women's privacy may be controlled and intruded into by men, the women's section of a *hamam* remains a female domain at all times, completely inaccessible to males. For instance, during women's bathing periods, a cloth was draped over the entrance to protect the bathers from illicit male observation (Ergin, 2009; no page). There were some minor attempts to transgress these boundaries, such as "men climbing onto the roof of the *hamam* to sneak a peek through the little glass-covered openings in the dome" (2009, no page) or male adolescents accompanying their mothers to the baths (it was impossible for daughters to accompany their fathers to the male section). However, in spite of these minor disruptions, the *hamam* staff were able to create an autonomous environment to regulate not only the relations among the bathers inside but also the degrees of closure to the outside.

The bathers always had an affiliation with the *hamam* staff. An archival survey by the Islamic art historian Esra Baş shows that in the eighteenth century Ottoman business life, a great number of women took active roles both in *hamam* rental and management (Baş, 2006: 89). Female managers and workers of the *hamams* not only regulated the reproductive and domestic family networks by means of cultural rituals, but also acted as a "judge that many women in a neighborhood appeal to" (Mustafa Ali, 1978: 169). In an ethnographic study she conducted with the women in Şengül *Hamam* Neighborhood in Ankara, Elif Ekin Akşit has observed that "the *hamam* workers' continuing good relations with the neighborhood... expanded horizons for women's urban interaction" (Akşit, 2011: 289).

Akşit re-visits the *hamam* in the context of the cognitive urban maps of women, in which they negotiate status, social position and safety in an urban environment. She argues that "... although women's quarters of the historical *hamam* run contrary to the [Habermasian] definition of public spheres that are associated with men and rational dialogue, these quarters are spaces where public discussions about urban contexts and history are being formulated by women" (Akşit, 2011: 277). For Akşit, the routine of the *hamam* visit for women is largely based on the affect of communicative freedom on urban matters.

The fact that the women's section is more multi-functional than the men's section in the Şengül Hamamı is also a result of the workers' efforts. The eating, drinking, talking, dressing, hair-drying activities around the large table at the entrance unite bodies and words after bathing in the different sections of the *hamam*. The subjects of discussion are the very processes that brought the customers and workers there: surviving in dangerous places and the pros and cons of municipal services. Around this table women perceive themselves as natural parts of daily life of the city where they can easily slip into invisibility (Akşit, 2011: 288).

The *hamam* has not only helped women "to vindicate their right to walk around the city" (Akşit; 2011: 279) but also "to claim their historical existence in the city... continuing the Ottoman, Byzantine and Roman traditions" (Akşit, 2011: 288). In this regards, the *hamam* as a feminotopia reflects a heterotopic spatiality that rests on the idea of 'timelessness', in Foucault's words, "the idea of creating a sort of universal archive, the desire to enclose all times, all eras, forms and styles within a single place, the concept of making all times into one place... a place that is outside time and inaccessible to the wear and tear of the years" (Foucault, 1997: 355). The perception of timelessness in the *hamam* is twofold. First, the *hamam* provides an abstract space for women in which they are remodelled, re-imagined and even queered beyond the male-dominated daily public routine. Second, the sustainability of the *hamam* in the urban life of the 700-year sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire enables the female bathers to weave the cultural remnants of the past and the present in a single space⁹.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have re-visited the women's section of the Ottoman neighborhood *hamam* as a homosocial space. Based on participant observations by female scholars and testimonial narratives of female travelers, I have analyzed various gendering forms of this section: 'reproductive femaleness', 'representational

femininity' and 'feminotopia'. In a context-conscious critical approach, which provides an alternative to the conventional archetypal and ethnographic literature on *hamams*, I have argued that these gendering forms affect the daily use and appropriation of the *hamam* space by female bathers, which are only visible in textual materials, and not in plan layouts and illustrations.

The analyses of the texts can be interpreted from two different perspectives. First, they indicate that economic, religious and ethnic differences among women are significant factors which affect the power relations and spatial use in the *hamam*. However, it can also be concluded from the texts that such differences do not necessarily lead to conflict and loss of reputation among women. Considering the *hamam* as the most significant venue of female sociability outside the domestic sphere, the bathers have developed various strategies to prevent the emergence of any struggle in the *hamam*, and to enable the association of various gender identities by means of commonalities. Though the way they are enacted may differ in accordance with the tendencies of various families, ethnic or religious minority groups; the celebration of female reproductivity, the representation of femininity and the reaction against invisibility and unrecognizability in public are shared forms of genderings that have enabled the *hamam* culture in Ottoman-Turkish daily life to survive for centuries. In other words, the homosociability in the *hamam* is a unique kind of homogenous sociability derived from heterogeneous forms of genderings in Ottoman-Turkish society.

Second, each text, whether a socio-historical interpretation, a travel narrative or an ethnographic study, may be read as subjective oral histories of a spatial experience constructed in accordance with the writer's attitude towards and positioning against the *hamam* users, the location of the neighborhood *hamam* as well as the date and frequency of the *hamam* visit. For instance, the European female travel writer Montagu, based on a single visit in the early 18th century, depicts the *hamam* as a representational space highlighting her socio-cultural position as a foreigner among the Eastern women bathing there. In spite of her willingness to empathise with them by following an experimental approach as described in the third part, a single occasion does not allow the full understanding of the complexities of the spatial power relations existing in the women's section of a neighborhood *hamam*, as experienced by the Turkish social historian Akşit in her regular and frequent visits as a participant observer. This is critical to understand how gender relations are multiply constructed in space.

Although the *hamam* culture in urban neighborhoods was at its most colourful state in the early 19th century, the transition into a Western modernity, following the 'Tanzimat Rescript' in 1839, provided for women's active

participation in public domain; thus the social and cultural vitality of the neighborhood *hamams* as homosocial spaces decreased over time. In the early 20th century, rather than any new construction, as Işın underlines, “the *hamams* with declining incomes were demolished to make ways for tram lines” (Işın, 1990: 269-70). The emergence of Western type bathrooms in the apartment buildings after the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 has also accelerated the decline of the *hamam* culture, particularly among female bathers. Today, remaining neighborhood *hamams* have either been renovated for different public functions, or as tourist attraction, or they function as a meeting venue for the Turkish queer culture¹⁰.

Even though the *hamam* still offers an alternative social environment for women in rural regions of Turkey, or in low-income neighborhoods of the cities (as in the case of *Şengül Hamamı*); it cannot be considered a homosocial space as it used to be before the Turkish modernization process started, for two main reasons. First of all, the total division of private and public spheres along, the lines of sex/gender which existed in Ottoman-Turkish urban space has been replaced by the free association of male and female in the modern public sphere. This can be seen as a twofold transition: (1) from public/private into male/female dichotomy; (2) from homosociability into heterosociability. Second, there are no longer any valid reasons for most women either to celebrate their reproductivity, or to self-express their femininity to other women or to claim existence and visibility in public sphere. All these gendering forms have become either redundant or commodified through heteronormative literal, visual and audio-visual media. On one hand, the orientalist travel writing literature, paintings and films have represented the *hamam* space and female culture as a marketable stereotype of lust, beauty, exoticism and eroticism. On the other hand, the archetypal categorizations based on the sexual division of the *hamam* by the 20th century historians have disabled an in-depth understanding of the *hamam* space as a socially, culturally and politically constructed gendered environment.

Recent years have seen the emergence of kitsch and orientalized *hamam* types in spa and wellness centers of contemporary hotels. However, far from functioning as a space for communal bathing and social interaction for either sex, they simply appear as real-life scale displays of the *sıcaklık* section, the doors of which are labeled as ‘Turkish *Hamam*’¹¹. In contemporary Turkish cities, lower- or middle-income Turkish women have appropriated other public spaces such as hairdressers, beauty saloons and women-only coffeehouses; yet none of these provide an environment as homosocial as the women’s section of a neighborhood *hamam*.

Glossary

avert	: the part of the body that modesty required to be concealed
boğça	: wrapped bundle to keep personal belongings
divan	: low couch for reclining and resting in the hamam
dolma	: traditional Turkish food made by stuffing grape leaves with a mixture of rice, meat, spice and salad leaves.
hadith	: pertinent sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad
hamam tası	: bowls made of silver or copper and used for pouring water onto the body
haremlik	: the section of a traditional Turkish house used by the females
imaret	: soup kitchen where food was distributed to the populace
kese	: glove made of rough, coarse cloth used for scrubbing the body
kına	: a traditional mixture, also known as henna applied to hands, feet and hair
köfte	: traditional Turkish food made by forming a mixture of meat, rice, onion and vegetables into round shapes
kurna	: marble water basins which are filled with bathing water
külliyе	: an Islamic religious complex consisting of mosque, madrasa and hamam
nalin	: wooden clogs worn to prevent the bather from falling on the slippery marble floor of a hamam
peştemal	: a thin cloth wrapped around the waist both to absorb the wetness of the body and to prevent the exposure of genital parts in the common spaces of the hamam
rastık	: smut used for painting the eye contours
sıcaklık	: the hottest main chamber of the hamam
vakıf	: perpetual endowment or pious foundation

Notes

¹In a post-structuralist perspective, public and private cannot be considered as fixed categories but instable signifiers that can be interrelated freely from their normative signifieds. This means that a public space may be 'privatized' in certain degrees depending on daily spatial practices, sense of morality as well as the matter of time.

²*Külliyе hamams* primarily served for the bodily cleanliness of the *cemaat* in accordance with Islamic regimes of morality.

³*İmaret hamams* were constructed both for the hygiene of the workers in the *imarets* and to supply the *imaret* with an income.

⁴Accordingly, the German cultural historian Hans Peter Duerr shares the following *hadiths* of the Prophet Mohammad who initially commanded: "Avoid visiting those spaces called *hamam*". As he was later convinced that these spaces are "not sinful places but cleaning and purification venues", he changed his mind stating that "Anyone visiting a *hamam* should get clothed" (Duerr, 1999: 76). This right was confirmed by Ebusuud Efendi, the chief jurisprudent of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (r. 1520-66)" (Ergin, 2009).

⁵Recent studies that have recorded the existing *hamams* in a particular settlement as single cases by the restoration specialists Elif Şehitoğlu (*Bursa Hamamları*, 2008) and Canan Çakmak (*Tire Hamamları*, 2002) as well as the art historian Harun Ürer (*İzmir Hamamları*, 2002) also refer to this sex-based classification developed by Glück, Klinghardt and Eyice.

⁶See '*Osmanlı'da Hamam Geleneği*' by Feza Çakmut (2006: 29-41), '*Tarihten Günümüze Hamamlar ve Hamam Kültürümüz*' by Yurdağül Akyar (2003: 5-19), '*Eski İstanbul Hamamları ve Gezmeleri*' by İ. Gündoğ Kayaoğlu, & Ersu Pekin (1992: 48-56), '*Hamamlarımız ve Hamam*

Kültürümüz' by Abdullah Kılıç (2008: 130-146), *'Türk Hamamı*' by Sabiha Tansuğ (1984: 5-13), and *'Binbir Gün Binbir Gece: Osmanlı'dan Günümüze İstanbul'da Eğlence Yaşamı*' by Necdet Sakaoğlu & Nuri Akbayar (1999: 165-169).

⁷Though being less regular and widespread, similar rituals – the circumcision bath (*sünnet hamamı*), the soldier's bath (*asker hamamı*), the groom's bath (*damat hamamı*), *bayram hamamı* – celebrating the transformation periods of male sexuality also seem to have occurred in the male section of the *hamam*.

⁸See the book *'Constantinople'* by the Italian author Edmondo de Amicis, who depicts the *hamam* as "a theatre scene comprised of women of various races and classes", and portrays the female bathers as "ebony-like black odalisques, slim, curly-haired and boy-like Greek girls, golden-haired Circassian ladies, Turkish women with long and braided black hair blown onto their shoulders and breasts, in a myriad of elegant and strange states" (Amicis, 1896: 229). See also *'Turkish Letters'* by Austrian male traveler Ogier Ghislain de Busbecq who claims that "a *hamam* is quite a convenient space for some elderly women to fall in love with young girls coming from all around the world" (Busbecq, 1968: 150-151).

⁹For a better understanding of the timeless character of the *hamam* feminotopia, please see the article 'Re-visiting the Turkish Hammam as a Gendered Heterotopia through the Narratives of Female Western Travellers (Pasin, 2009: 48-49)' for an analysis of the *hamam* experiences of three female travelers.

¹⁰For a detailed analysis of masculinized gay *hamams*, please see the article 'Turkish Hammam as an Oriental Representation of the Sexually-Coded Otherness in Contemporary Turkish Metropolitan Life (Pasin, 2007)'.

¹¹See the book chapter 'Fantasies of Bathing: Hotel *Hammams* as Orientalized Stereotypes (Pasin & Himam, 2012: 34)'.

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Kadınlık, Dişilik ve Feminotopya: Homososyal Bir Mekan Olarak Kadın Hamamı

Burkay Pasin

İzmir Ekonomi Üniversitesi

Öz

Mekanlar, sadece çeşitli kullanıcı kimliklerine değil aynı zamanda bu kimliklerin kurgulandığı sosyal, kültürel ve politik ortamlara da bağlı olarak birçok farklı biçimde cinsiyetlenebilirler. Mekanların bu çok yönlü cinsiyetlenme potansiyeli, erkek egemen sistemin, erkeği kamusal, kadını da özel alanlarla ilişkilendirdiği küresel ikiliklerle kaçınılmaz olarak başetmek zorunda olsa da; mekanların bu ikili cinsiyetlenme biçimi farklı kültürel coğrafyalardaki yaşanmışlıklar yoluyla ters yüz edilebilir. Türk mahalle hamamı, tarihsel olarak kendi çevresel donanımını düzenleyen kamusal normların, kadın kullanıcıların özelleşmiş mekansal pratikleri yoluyla ters yüz edildiği, cinsiyetlenmiş bir mekandır. Bu çalışma hamamın erkek egemen kurulumlarına, alternatif eleştirel bir yaklaşımla bakmakta ve hamamdaki kadınlar bölümüne, 'homososyal bir mekan' olarak odaklanmaktadır. İlk bölümde, hamamın cinsiyetlere göre bölünmesinin günlük mekansal pratiklere yansımaları sorgulanırken, ilerleyen bölümlerde, kadın araştırmacı, etnograf ve gezgin yazılarının derinlemesine okunması ve yorumlanmasına bağlı olarak kadınlar hamamında ortaya çıkan çeşitli cinsiyetlenme biçimlerinin üçlü bir analizi yapılmaktadır. Sonuçta, kadınlığın kültürel mekanı, dişiliğin temsili mekanı ve kadın otonomisi, güçlenmesi ve iradesine ait bir feminotopya başlıklarında yapılan bu analizler ışığında, kadınlar hamamındaki homososyalleşmenin, Osmanlı-Türk toplumundaki heterojen cinsiyetlenme biçimlerinden türeyen özgün bir, homojen sosyalleşme biçimi olduğu üzerinde durulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: mahalle hamamı, homososyal mekan, kadınlık, dişilik, feminotopya.

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