2. Architecture of Seduction, or: What (Really) Goes On in the Hamam?

At the Turkish Bath
his chest, hairy as a gorilla's,
his penis, puckered
under its ruddy dome,
squat as a fireplug.
My father and I sat
ass to ass in the steam.
(Richard J. Fein, 34)

The Turkish bath—or hamam—has attained the status of a modern myth having "always held enormous fascination for the West" (Vanzan 1), and it continues to be celebrated for its "sublime" and "transformative" pleasures ("Mystery & Wonder"). Doubtlessly, visiting a Turkish bath while being in Istanbul seems both obligatory and challenging for dedicated tourists. It can be a relaxing and sensual experience—to be immersed in musky steam and subdued darkness. The Ottoman hamams are gorgeous in their architectural design, though some of them unfortunately are not kept to a standard everyone feels comfortable with. A dear friend of mine, whom I dragged into one of the oldest existing hamams in Istanbul—the Kılıç Ali Paşa Hamamı, now reopened after seven years of restoration[1]—dreaded getting all kinds of infections due to the lack of appropriate hygiene. He complained about reused towels, bath shoes 'alive' with bacteria, and the soap sponge used for massages having seen too many generations of dead skin follicles. And yet, by now even he has stored away this anxiety-ridden experience as a fond memory of experiencing Istanbul as a tourist, which now always serves as a laughter-inducing anecdote.

1 See <http://kilicalipasahamami.com/about/>.

Having myself paid repeated visits to most of the hamams in Istanbul, I can attest to some of my friend's concerns. I, however, particularly struggled with haggling about massage fees and tips, and sometimes with the overzealous, blood-drawing efforts of the masseurs, and yet, I returned again and again. The drowsy atmosphere of this all-male space can have an intoxicating, addictive effect—the all-female counterpart of a women's hamam must have a similar result from what I have been told, but of course, I would not know and therefore cannot share this experience myself.[2] What goes on in a hamam—what *really* goes on—is something that certainly differs depending on the selected hamam, on one's biological sex, on whether one is a local or a foreigner, and on one's openness to experiment if the chance is given. My own range of experience has been surprisingly broad, given my habitual shyness and usual reluctance to unknown experimentation. But no doubt, I did perceive the hamam as an alluring—and queer—space, prone to promises of pleasure and seduction. With this admission, I am aware of inscribing myself into the myth-laden tradition of exoticizing and eroticizing a space that is not part of my own cultural background and that has led to the abundant production of Orientalist fantasies surrounding the hamam experience, ranging from travel accounts such as Flaubert's and Lady Montagu's to gay pornography such as Jean-Daniel Cadinot's luscious *Hammam* (2004).[3]

2 See Hahn (464-465) for a discussion of a documentary on historical hamams in Istanbul that includes descriptions of the treatments and interactions in the female section between the service personnel and the clients.

3 See Boone, who calls Cadinot's *Harem: Sex Bazaar* (1984) and *Hammam* (2004) "modern avatars" of the hamam with their wild mix of authentic location shots "with Orientalist porn-props" (*Homoerotics* 90). Boone also includes, in his selection of such "modern avatars," Özpetek's *Hamam* as well as Salah Abu Seif's *Hammam al-Malatily* (1973; *The Malatili Baths*), the latter "a rare instance of homosexuality handled with relative nonjudgment in Egyptian film" (*Homoerotics* 90). These examples show that the trope of the bath "has remained such a consistently productive site for homoerotic imaginings and for Orientalist projections over the past four hundred years" (*Homoerotics* 90).

Travelers' Hamam Fantasies

"Es ist die Sünde, die durch den Blick geboren wird. Der Sehsinn ist der Verführung besonders leicht ausgesetzt" (Groschner 26).[4] With this résumé, Gabriele Groschner closes her synopsis of the secret pleasure of looking while bathing. In what follows, I wish to offer a few and selected 'insights' into the history and practice of the hamam, but above all about the myths it has triggered. Indeed, the 'peculiarity' of the pleasure that Groschner attests to undoubtedly is heightened by the exotic allure—for foreigners—of the place. It is almost impossible for a Western visitor and observer to break away from the sultry-erotic fantasies about the hamam that are so strongly embedded in our culture. But I want to counteract the dominance of a straight male voyeuristic gaze that attests to a long-standing tradition of privileged, hegemonic politics and economics of gazing. There are definitely different, less hierarchical constellations than that of a man who lustfully and secretly looks at a naked woman while bathing. Exchanging gazes in the context of bathing can follow completely different erotic rules and seductive skills, especially when this exchange entails a male-only setting.

First, however, I would like to look at precisely those depictions of the Turkish bath that are dedicated to that dominant, gender-coded economics of gazing, and thus first at the most famous male-Orientalist representation of the hamam: Jean August Dominique Ingres's *Le Bain turc* from 1862. The painting shows naked harem ladies bathing. Ingres painted this picture at the age of 82. He wrote his age on the canvas and according to Walter Pach, this painting was "a kind of résumé of all Ingres's work on similar themes" (132). In fact, he 'recycled' various bathing and odalisque figures for this picture, such as *La Grande odalisque* (1814) and above all *Baigneuse de Valpinçon* (1808). When Pach describes the painting as a "technical triumph of European painting" (132) and, moreover, as Ingres's "most emphatic statement of his feeling for women" (133), this does not hide the fact that it is also a major work of the Orientalist art wave of the nineteenth century.

The ladies in the painting do not seem particularly animated, but rather are, as one critic notes, exhibited like classic statues in a gallery full of antiques (Danto). This may be because Ingres created this painting as an assemblage, as a collection of different women and motifs that he borrowed from his own

4 "It is sin that is born by looking. The sense of sight is particularly easily exposed to seduction" (transl. R. P.).

and other sources of inspiration and brought together here. But it is also true that Ingres did not paint based on living models, and certainly not based on living Turkish models. The fact that his bathing ladies look so European is not least because he had never been to an authentic hamam, be it in Turkey or elsewhere, for example in Egypt or Algeria. Rather, he took his inspiration for the Turkish bath from the descriptions of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* from 1716 to 1718, to which I will return shortly. Arthur Danto compares Ingres's Orientalism with that of Delacroix's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1834) contrasting Delacroix's "unmatched visual excitement" to Ingres's "almost incomprehensibly inanimate painting" (Danto). Danto interprets Ingres's neoclassical use of antiquity as a conscious maneuver "to exclude himself, as if he were obeying the sanctions of the harem."[5] Ingres herewith contributes to the craze of 'classical' French Orientalism,

> [which] was centred on erotic images of unveiling or what might be termed the 'Scheherezade syndrome.' This fiction, a projection of European masculine fantasies, which claimed to uncover and expose to the public gaze the inner secrets of the forbidden and sacred, the harem and the Turkish baths (hammam), reflected French colonial hegemony, an invasion and sexual conquest of the space that Muslim society held to be most forbidden (haram). (Macmaster and Lewis 148)

I do not deny that the authors are right to interpret Ingres's pictorial composition in such an Orientalist manner, according to which "the 'eye' of the viewer is positioned as that of somebody peering in upon naked women, who are oblivious of the intrusion" (Macmaster and Lewis 149). I want to point out two aspects, however, that I find missing in this reading and that will be important to me in the following: the homoerotic allusions on the one hand, because some of the women unmistakably touch each other with relish; and the question of testimony, on the other: who is the viewer of this scene, and who guarantees authenticity?

Ingres was able to fall back on an established tradition for his Oriental inspiration, according to which European travelers had discovered, praised, and copied the Ottoman bathing culture at least since the eighteenth century. The term "Turkish bath" comes from these records, although geographically at that time a hamam did not necessarily have to be in Turkey or the Ottoman

5 Danto also comments: "By contrast, Delacroix gained entry to the women's quarters in Algiers."

Empire, but could be found in every other Oriental country with Islamic religion. Descriptions of visits to such baths were meant to arouse the interest of the European public in the exotic Orient. As with the paintings, it was mostly male travelers who provided the best possible evocative and detailed descriptions of bathing practices in letters and reports. In contrast to the paintings, however, the problem arose here that, due to the sexually separated bathing culture, men could only ever have access to the men's hamam, but not to the women's hamam. While descriptions of the women's hamam were thus left to the readers' erotic imagination, descriptions of visiting a men's hamam, if painted in erotic colors, could easily become unintentionally—or in some cases deliberately—homoerotic.

According to Ulrich Müller, Salomon Schweigger was the first to describe a Turkish bath in the German language in 1608. Schweigger was sent to Constantinople in 1577 as an embassy preacher in the service of Emperor Rudolf II. In his travel diary with the original title *Ein newe Reyssbeschreibung auss Teutschland nach Konstantinopel und Jerusalem* (A New Description of a Voyage from Germany to Constantinople and Jerusalem), the Protestant clergyman from Nuremberg describes one such hamam in Constantinople. He begins by explaining the architecture, which he compares with European church buildings, and then delves into the bathing practices:

> Sobald einer hineinkompt, setzt er sich auf diesen Herd. Da kompt ein Badknecht, der umbfahet ihn, renkt ihm den Leib hin und her, als wollt er ihm den Leib ineinanderrichten, desgleichen dehnet er ihm auch die Glieder, Arm, Händ und die Schenkel, als wollt er mit ihm ringen. Darnach legt er ihn nach der Läng auf den Herd, steht ihm auf den Leib, doch sänftiglich; daher unter unserm Gesind diese Schimpfred entstanden ist: "Ich will gehen und mich für die Langeweil lassen mit Füßen treten," das ist: "Ich will ins Bad gehen." (118)[6]

What is striking, in contrast to later descriptions of Western travelers, is the absence of that 'peculiar pleasure' in secret looking, despite all the compar-

6 "As soon as one comes in, he sits on this stove. Then a bath servant, who knocks him around, turns his body back and forth as if he wanted to straighten his body, at the same time he also stretches his limbs, arm, hands, and thighs, as if he wanted to wrestle with him. Then he lays him down on the stove, stands on his body, but gently; therefore, among our servants, this insult has arisen: 'I want to go and let myself be trampled for boredom,' that is: 'I want to go to the bathhouse.'" (Transl. R. P.)

ative cultural perspectives. It may be due to Schweigger's priesthood or his status as a diplomat, given the delicate political relations between the Habsburgs and Ottomans, that he lacks this desire—also and especially when referring to female bathing practices. On the contrary, he emphasizes the lack of chastity of the Germans in comparison to the 'barbaric' Turks:

> Die Männer haben besondere Bäder und die Weiber auch besondere. Sie bedecken sich im Baden fein züchtig und ehrbarlich und nicht so schimpflich wie die Teutschen, da es das Ansehen hat, als wollt einer die Scham mit Fleiß zeigen, oder— wie ich zu Venedig gesehen hab—daß die Männer allerdings bloß und unbedeckt ins Bad gehen. Sie knüpfen aber ein blauleinen Tuch umb die Hüft, das geht zweimal herum und geht bis auf den Boden hinab; also daß wir Christen in diesem Fall sollten Zucht und Ehrbarkeit von diesen Barbaris lernen. (119)[7]

Although Müller describes Schweigger's description as the "beginning of the fascination that the Turkish baths and bathing customs increasingly exerted on (Western) Europeans" (291, transl. R. P.), the report remains remarkable in contrast to many of the following because of its attention to detail and precisely because of the lack of voyeuristic desires. In another testimonial, written by the Prussian lieutenant Helmuth Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke, the comparative cultural perception of the Turkish bath is mixed with another, namely emotional component: astonishment and horror. Von Moltke initially started on an educational trip to Southeastern Europe, but then served as an instructor for the Turkish troops from 1836 to 1839 at the request of the Ottoman Sultan and traveled to Constantinople and the desert of Mesopotamia, among other places. He experienced his first visit to the hamam after a long ride, which not only left him exhausted but also completely hypothermic. Before he is led into the center of the bathroom, he is frightened by the chill in the anteroom:

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7 "Men have special baths and women have special baths, too. In bathing, they cover themselves decently and respectably and not as disgracefully as the Germans, because it looks as if someone wants to show their private parts with diligence, or—as I saw in Venice—that the men go into the bathroom indeed bare and uncovered. But they tie a blue linen cloth around the waist, it goes around twice and goes down to the floor; so that in this case we Christians should learn discipline and respectability from these barbarians." (Transl. R. P.)

> Mit Erstaunen erblickte ich auf der hölzernen Estrade, welche rings das Gemach umgab, mehrere Männer auf Teppichen und Matratzen liegen, bloß mit einem dünnen Leintuch zugedeckt, behaglich die Pfeife rauchend und sich wie an einem schwülen Sommertage an der Kühle labend, die mir in diesem Augenblick so entsetzlich schien.
>
> Der Badewärter, der in unseren bedenklichen Mienen las, führte uns in ein zweites Gewölbe, in welchem schon eine ganz anständige Hitze war. Hier bedeutete man uns durch Zeichen, daß wir uns entkleiden möchten; man wickelt sich ein halbseidenes blaues Tuch um die Hüften […]. Nach dieser Einkleidung schob man uns in eine dritte gewölbte Halle hinein, deren marmorner Fußboden so stark geheizt war, daß man ihn nur auf hölzernen Pantinen (Galendschi) betreten konnte. Der Telektschi (Tellak) oder Badewärter schreitet nun zu einer ganz eigentümlichen Prozedur. (59-60)[8]

This description of the rooms as well as what the text subsequently describes as a "procedure" on the "patient," to which von Moltke now confidently surrenders, may be regarded as the massage and washing application that is more or less still valid today:

> Der ganze Körper wird gerieben und alle Muskeln gereckt und gedrückt. Der Mann kniet einem auf die Brust oder fährt mit dem Knöchel des Daumens den Rückgrat herab; alle Glieder, die Finger und selbst das Genick bringt er durch eine leichte Manipulation zum Knacken. […] Der Patient wird nun demselben Verfahren unterworfen wie die türkischen Pferde beim Striegeln, indem nämlich Wärter einen kleinen Sack aus Ziegenhaar (Gebrek) über die rechte Hand zieht und damit den ganzen Körper anhaltend überfährt. Dies ist allerdings eine gründliche Reinigung, und man möchte

8 "With astonishment, I saw several men lying on carpets and mattresses on the wooden dais that surrounded the room, covered only with a thin sheet, comfortably smoking their pipe and refreshing themselves as if on a sultry summer day on the coolness that I had in this moment found so appalling. The bath attendant, who read our worried expressions, led us into a second vault, in which there was already a decent heat. Here we were indicated by signs that we should undress; you wrap a half-silk blue cloth around your hips […]. After this cladding, we were pushed into a third vaulted hall, the marble floor of which was so heated that you could only enter on wooden slippers (Galendschi). The Telektschi (Tellak) or bath attendant now proceeds to a very peculiar procedure." (Transl. R. P.)

> sagen, daß man noch nie gewaschen gewesen ist, bevor man nicht ein türkisches Bad genommen. Der Telektschi erscheint nun aufs neue mit einer großen Schüssel mit wohlriechendem Seifenschaum. Mittels eines großen Quastes aus den Fasern der Palmrinde seift er seinen Mann vom Scheitel bis zur Fußsohle, Haare, Gesicht, alles ein, und mit wahrem Vergnügen gießt man dann das kalte Wasser über Kopf, Brust und Leib.
>
> Jetzt ist man fertig: statt der durchnäßten Tücher erhält man trockene, über dem Feuer erwärmte, umgewickelt, einen Turban auf dem Kopf und ein Laken über die Schultern, denn die größte Dezenz wird beobachtet. (60-61)[9]

Having returned to the cool entrance hall, von Moltke now feels a great sense of comfort while enjoying coffee and a pipe: "It is impossible to describe how refreshing and beneficial such a bath is when you are very tired," he enthuses in conclusion (61, transl. R. P.). Other authors, however, emphasize less the slack relaxation, and more the erotic excitement of the hamam experience. The praised eroticism of the Orient, often referred to as a heterosexual male fantasy that focuses on a feminized Other, also features homoerotic fantasies. Nevertheless, even Edward Said's *Orientalism* has a blind spot here. Joseph Boone, in contrast, points to the proliferation of implicit heterosexist metaphors in the West appropriating the East and thus names "Said's failure to account for homoerotic elements in Orientalist pursuits" ("Vacation Cruises" 92). Boone concludes that not everything that appears seductively feminine has to be female. He takes Said's description of Gustave Flaubert's trip to Egypt in 1849/50 as an example of such a heteronormative discourse regarding Orientalism. Said interprets Flaubert's affair with the professional

9 "The whole body is rubbed and all muscles are stretched and pressed. The man kneels on your chest or runs the knuckle of the thumb down the spine; all limbs, fingers, and even the neck crack with his delicate handling. […] The patient is now subjected to the same procedure as the Turkish horses when grooming, namely by the attendant pulling a small sack of goat hair (Gebrek) over the right hand and driving it over the whole body. This is a thorough cleansing, however, and one would like to say that one has never been washed before having taken a Turkish bath. The Telektschi now appears again with a large bowl of fragrant soap foam. Using a large tassel made from the fibers of the palm bark, he soaps his man from head to toe, hair, face, everything, and with real pleasure the cold water is then poured over head, chest, and body. Now you are done: instead of the soaked sheets you get wrapped in dry ones, heated over the fire, a turban on your head, and a sheet over your shoulders, because the greatest decency is observed." (Transl. R. P.)

female dancer Kuchuk Hanem as a paradigmatic example of the mechanism of a male, penetrating Orientalism:

> She was surely the prototype of several of his novels' female characters in her learned sensuality, delicacy, and (according to Flaubert) mindless coarseness. […] The Oriental woman is an occasion and an opportunity for Flaubert's musings; he is entranced by her self-sufficiency, by her emotional carelessness, and also by what, lying next to him, she allows him to think. Less a woman than a display of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity, Kuchuk is the prototype of Flaubert's Salammbô and Salomé […]. (Said 186-187)

Said sees Flaubert here as a prototypical representative of the Western bourgeois traveler of the nineteenth century, who made an indiscriminate association between the Orient and—female—sexual availability, "although Flaubert's genius may have done more than anyone else's could have to give it artistic dignity" (188). Boone, in contrast, refers to the fact that Flaubert's first erotic encounter was not with Kuchuk but with a male dancer named Hasan. In a letter to Louis Bouilhet, dated 16 December 1849, Flaubert indulged in detailed descriptions of Hasan's erotic body play and his seductive dance skills:

> After our lunch on that same day we had dancers in—the famous Hasan el-Belbeissi and one other, with musicians; the second would have been noticed even without Hasan. They both wore the same costume—baggy trousers and embroidered jacket, their eyes painted with antimony (*kohl*). The jacket goes down to the abdomen, whereas the trousers, held by an enormous cashmere belt folded over several times, begin approximately at the pubis, so that the stomach, the small of the back and the beginning of the buttocks are naked, seen through a bit of black gauze held in place by the upper and lower garments. The gauze ripples on the hips like a transparent wave with every movement they make. […] The effect comes from the gravity of the face contrasted with the lascivious movements of the body; occasionally, one or the other lies down flat on his back like a woman about to offer herself […]. Now and again, during the dance, their impressario makes jokes and kisses Hasan on the belly. Hasan never for a moment stops watching himself in the mirror. (*Flaubert* 69-70)

A month later, in a letter of 15 January 1850, he again wrote to his best friend and confidant Bouilhet: "We have not yet seen any dancing girls […]. But we

have seen male dancers. Oh! Oh! Oh!" (*Flaubert* 83). He goes on, however, to deliver an extended and much cruder version of this last description:

> From time to time, during the dance, the impresario, or pimp, who brought them plays around them kissing them on the belly, the arse, and the small of the back, and making obscene remarks in an effort to put additional spice into a thing that is already quite clear in itself. It is too beautiful to be exciting. I doubt whether we shall find the women as good as the men; the ugliness of the latter adds greatly to the thing as art. I had a headache for the rest of the day, and I had to go and pee two or three times during the performance—a nervous reaction that I attribute particularly to the music.—I'll have this marvelous Hasan el-Belbeissi come again. He'll dance the Bee for me, in particular. Done by such a bardash as he, it can scarcely be a thing for babes. (*Flaubert* 84)

So far, Flaubert does not name the "thing that is already quite clear in itself." He chooses to remain ambiguous and resorts to sexual allusions such as "dance the Bee for me," instead. Also, referring to Hasan as bardash opens the space for further implications that are "quite clear" for knowledgeable insiders.[10] Only later, in the same letter and right after praising Hasan's dancing skills, does Flaubert explicitly confess to a same-sex experience. Significantly, this takes place in the hamam where his adventure ends with the admission of engaging in what he now names "sodomy." Flaubert writes: "Speaking of bardashes, this is what I know about them. Here it is quite accepted. One admits one's sodomy, and it is spoken of at table in the hotel. Sometimes you do a bit of denying, and then everybody teases you and you end up confessing. Traveling as we are for educational purposes, and charged with a mission by the government, we have considered it our duty to indulge in this form of ejaculation" (84). Taking his 'educational mission' seriously—and one can sense the

10 Murray explains that Flaubert uses *bardash* as a term for a cross-dressing dancing boy known in Ottoman culture: "Transvestitic homosexuality has occurred and continues to occur in addition to (and mixed with) pederasty. After all, *berdache*, the word European colonists applied to sexual and gender variances around the world, derives from the Persian *bardash* through Arabic" (24). He adds that the word in Persian originally refers to slaves of ambiguous gender, yet whereas Mediterranean (including Islamic) societies use slaves sexually, for them "the sense of effeminacy and sexual receptivity does not seem to have been primary originally. Although clearly a term for a homosexual role used by French observers of Arab (and other) societies, its status as a native term for a homosexual role is uncertain" (Murray 45).

self-irony in this admission—Flaubert seeks and finds the opportunity in the hamam: "It's at the baths that such things take place. You reserve the bath for yourself (five francs including masseurs, pipe, coffee, sheet and towel) and you skewer your lad in one of the rooms" (84). Afterwards, a masseur takes over "when all the rest is done" (84), and while Flaubert was hoping for one of the "nice young boys," his masseur was "a man in his fifties, ignoble, disgusting," nevertheless devoted to providing the pleasure Flaubert was seeking. The ensuing scene is rendered in a comic tone, wavering between bawdy pleasure, economic obligation, and brazen admission:

> my *kellaa* was rubbing me gently, and when he came to the noble parts he lifted up my *boules d'amour* to clean them, then continuing to rub my chest with his left hand he began to pull with his right on my prick, and as he drew it up and down he leaned over my shoulder and said "*baksheesh, baksheesh*." […] I pushed him away a little, saying "*làh, làh*" ("no, no")—he thought I was angry and took on a craven look—then I gave him a few pats on the shoulder, saying "*làh, làh*" again but more gently—he smiled a smile that meant, "You're not fooling me—you like it as much as anybody, but today you've decided against it for some reason." As for me, I laughed aloud like a dirty old man, and the shadowy vault of the bath echoed with the sound. (85)

Ultimately, in yet another letter (2 June 1850), he answers Bouilhet's question regarding sex with any of these young men in the affirmative: "By the way, you ask me if I consummate that business at the baths. Yes—and on a pockmarked young rascal wearing a white turban. It made me laugh, that's all. But I'll be at it again. To be done well, an experiment must be repeated" (*Flaubert* 203-204).[11]

11 The editor includes a footnote here—as I do here as well—to mention that Sartre in his study on the young Flaubert, *L'Idiot de la Famille*, has doubts about Flaubert's consummation of "that business in the baths." According to Sartre, the "pederastic talk in his letters to Louis Bouilhet is merely a form of joking […] and all the references to bardashes in the baths were the swank of a traveler wanting to impress a stay-at-home with his exotic experiences" (204). Bleys (112-113) and Murray (24) are among those—like myself—who differ from Sartre on this question.

Lady Montagu Visits the Hamam

Besides all the male travelers and reporters, there were also some women who were interested in the baths, visited them, and told their compatriots about them. No one did this as successfully as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, not least through her influence on visual artists like Ingres. In contrast to her male colleagues in the writing guild, her *Turkish Embassy Letters* from 1716/18 explicitly emphasize female nudity and she does so, which is crucial here, as an eyewitness: "The emphasis on nakedness in Lady Mary's 'letter,' which was composed specifically for publication, runs counter to all other accounts, which state that only slaves or 'women of the lower orders' went naked in the women's baths" (Conner 39). However, she does not measure herself against other writers, but rather against visual artists. It should, therefore, be emphasized that Montagu strangely takes on a male gaze position—she calls it "wickedness"—when she asks her readers to imagine that she is an invisible male painter who casts forbidden glances on the bathing scenario: "I had wickedness enough to wish secretly, that Mr. Gervase [i.e., Charles Jervas, a popular Irish portrait painter, R. P.] could have been there invisible. I fancy it would have very much improved his art to see so many fine women naked" (Montagu 59). With this ethnomasquerade[12] she achieves two things: while she strengthens her narrative authority as a travel reporter, this strategy also prevents accusations of lesbian desire. She not only testifies to not having attended any indecent acts but also assures her readers that she herself was always dressed. The very thing that Montagu did not see or want to describe, namely eroticism among women, is what Ingres extracted from her lines and brought to the canvas. Lady Montagu's letters had eight editions alone in France at the time of Ingres and they were an important part of the Orientalist mania. Ingres copied the following passage from Montagu and it would serve as inspiration for his erotic painting:

> I believe, in the whole, there were two hundred women [...], all being in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed. [...] so many fine women naked, in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking coffee or sherbet, and

12 Kader Konuk uses this term to describe Montagu's participation in Ottoman culture: "Ethnomasquerade is defined here as the performance of an ethnic identity through the mimicking of clothes, gestures, appearance, language, cultural codes, or other components of identity formation" (393).

> many negligently lying on their cushions while their slaves (generally pretty girls of seventeen or eighteen) were employed in braiding their hair in several pretty manners. (Montagu 59)

Not only had Ingres never visited a hamam—and certainly not a women's hamam—in this text he decidedly asks his viewers to envision an image of the erotic customs of Muslim women. And he does so in a way that differs from Lady Montagu: she also wanted her readers to get a picture of the female Oriental, but this picture was far more complex than the one Ingres painted. Scholars are divided on whether she used cultural difference as a distinguishing feature in her description of the Turkish bath or as a means of dialogic collaboration. Her supposedly male artist gaze in particular becomes the target of different readings here. Joseph Lew draws attention to the various frames of the description and interprets them as Montagu's skillful maneuver to shield herself from accusations of erotic projections, which she must have anticipated since the tableau of herself amid two hundred naked women undoubtedly builds up an erotic connotation. But Lew also notes how she explicitly draws attention to the frame, namely the artist, in whose place she steps:

> The reader of the letter sees not merely the spectacle of the two hundred and one women (Lady Mary as the "one") but also the fantasized male artist watching the spectacle, learning from it, and later reproducing it—as Ingres actually did. […] By placing herself inside the central frame with the Oriental women, yet also insistently remaining outside the larger frame as artist, producer, and letter writer, she foregrounds her solidarity with the Turkish women as subject / subjected: all women become *objects d'art* for the Western male. (Lew 443)

Although it withdraws the interest from the woman (herself) or the (other) women and redirects it to the frame, she actually gives herself freedom of agency: "she escapes being framed by framing the framer (Mr. Jervas). […] Lady Mary's victory, however, remains purely personal: the one may escape representation by presenting herself; the two hundred cannot" (Lew 443). Srinivas Aravamudan also recognizes a partial identification of Montagu with the Turkish women but sees this as a utopian Levantization that reaches

its climax in the bath.[13] It is of particular importance here on the one hand that of all identifiable addressees the decisive hamam letter is intended for an anonymous lady and thus becomes a metafictional reference by fusing the author and the reader and turning the text into a masquerade: "The subject, Montagu, addresses her object, womanliness, through a *mise en abîme* that reduces womanliness to masquerade. […] anonymity, fictionality, and realism concerning female interiority coincide" (Aravamudan 78). On the other hand, the letter becomes political just at the moment when the bathhouse serves as an equivalent to the coffee house for English ladies. Montagu invokes a social institution as a comparative model that did not even exist: "'tis the women's coffee house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented etc." (Montagu 59).

Inge Boer notes the transgressive aspect of this comparison, namely that in this exclusive feminine place, the hamam, women can meet and exchange ideas undisturbed, regardless of social hierarchies (Boer 57). But the coffee house was a masculine monopoly in the English sociopolitical sphere, and therefore this is not just a comparison that should make it easier for the domestic audience to make a cultural transfer.[14] On the contrary, it implies, as Lew affirms, a deep disturbance of the male English reader and a directive to the female English reader: "we must first remember that Lady Mary's true median term, a women's coffee house, did not exist. English coffee-houses were male enclaves; this suggests a 'haremization' of English men. Second, Lady Mary believes her median concept *should* exist" (Lew 441). Ahmed Al-Rawi also emphasizes the lack of homosocial spaces for English women implied by Montagu and refers to the opening of the first Turkish bath in London in the

13 Aravamudan notes that Montagu's perception reflects the increasing loss of a ritual-symbolic significance and in turn the rising modernization and "cross-cultural levantinization:" "Montagu's own gesture converts the liminal communitarianism of the *hammam* into what Victor Turner characterizes as the 'liminoid' genre of free tropological appropriation typical of modern commodity culture" (87).

14 Said considers such comparisons as part of an Orientalist discourse: "Something patently foreign and distant acquires, for one reason or another, the status more rather than less familiar. One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well-known: a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time as versions of a previously known thing" (58). The argument of the well-known falls short in Montagu's example, however, since both the hamam and the coffeehouse are unknown to the female English readership.

1860s.[15] While the Turkish women in hamams formed a tight social network that could take on cathartic functions in the exchange of joys and sorrows, there was nothing like this for the English women:

> By 1739, there were 551 coffeehouses in England but women were forbidden to enter them. As a matter of fact, Montagu satirized England and its society for limiting the freedom of British women, because they did not take part in these important social gatherings where different intellectual and political topics were discussed. (Al-Rawi 26)

In addition to Montagu's controversial artist's perspective, her clothing—or rather her insistence on such within the hamam—triggered a debate among critics. First of all, in contrast to the considerable number of naked women, Montagu prefers to be mostly—but not entirely, as many inadvertently note[16]—clothed. She writes: "I was in my traveling 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" (58). While Lew admits Montagu's subtle etiquette here ("she refrains from 'going Turkish'" [442]), Mary Jo Kietzman admits that the reference to the riding costume could symbolize the authority of her national identity, but then reads the description as a conscious and ironic self-presentation:

> By calling attention to her costume, Montagu paints an ironic self-portrait that emphasizes the tentative essays of a foreigner who is willing to interrogate her positionality and to assume the relatively limited role of participant in the *creation* of culture rather than that of a detached cultural analyst. (540, original emphasis)

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15 John Potvin describes the inauguration of the male hamam by the ex-diplomat David Urquhart in London's West End in 1862 as a temple of health, distinct from the city's polluted streets but also as an ambiguous space of homoerotic potential: "Here, masculinity's integrity and gender performance are at once challenged and maintained in the very embodiment precipitated by how the senses are enlivened, that is, the touching, the sensuality—things not allowed for in the outside world. […] It stands to reason, therefore, that these baths, particularly those charged with a heightened sense of the exotic, were spaces in which masculinity and sexuality were as slippery as the soapy passageways of the baths themselves" (330).

16 See, for example, Lew 441; Boer 57; Aravamudan 83.

Such a view emphasizes the extraordinariness of the situation in such a way that Montagu, as an outsider, takes on the culturally restrictive role of the English woman. Nothing embodies this restriction more vividly than the vestmental element of the corset:

> The lady that seemed the most considerable amongst 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 shirt, and show them my stays, which satisfied them very well, for I saw 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 59-60)

It is not the Ottoman woman who has to suffer under her husband's rule here, but the English woman whose husband strangles her in such a way that she is "locked up in that machine." Even though Montagu presents this as a presumption on the part of the Turkish women, the image of her 'locked up' body remains a gesture that thwarts the usual binary of veiled/unveiled and suppressed/free in many descriptions of the Orient. In doing so, she prevents the Orientalist desire to free the woman of the East from the fetters of her unjust patriarchy from being continued. But she also demonstrates, as Teresa Heffernan states, "her cognizance of the gender inequity that underlies the very articulation of freedom in the social contract, a document that, although supposed to protect individual freedom assumes, as Locke does, the 'natural' right of the husband over his wife" (211).[17] Montagu's game of veiling and revealing goes as far as ascribing protective anonymity to the veil of Turkish women as well as to the nudity in the hamam, which liberates women from the compulsion to distinction. She writes about the equality of nakedness: "I was here convinced of the truth of a reflection I had often made, that if it was the fashion to go naked, the face would be hardly observed" (59). And in view of her allusion to the control of her own husband, it is particularly piquant

17 Heffernan goes on to quote from John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: "But the husband and wife, though they have but one common concern, yet having different understandings, will unavoidably sometimes have different wills too; it therefore being necessary that the last determination, i.e. *the rule*, should be placed somewhere; it *naturally* falls to the *man's share*" (qtd. in Hefferman 211-212, emphasis added).

how in another letter she fantasizes wearing a veil not only as a democratizing piece of clothing but also as a license to transgression:

> 'Tis very easy to see they have more liberty than we have, no woman, of what rank so ever being permitted to go in the streets without two muslins, one that covers her face all but her eyes and another that hides the whole dress of her head […]. You may guess then how effectually this disguises them, that there is no distinguishing the great lady from her slave and 'tis impossible for the most jealous husband to know his wife when he meets her, and no man dare either touch or follow a woman in the street. (71)

These and other passages in Montagu's *Letters* remain ambiguous, trapped in a "fictional double bind" (83), as Aravamudan puts it: she affirms her own English modesty through the 'false' modesty of the Turkish women. For the English readership, her allusion to the prison of the corset is most likely "a fictional by-product of the steamy bathhouse atmosphere, […] readily associated with the English pornographic fantasy concerning the oversexed Turkish milieu that confuses harem with *hammam*" (84). Even if Montagu affirms, "there was not the least wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst them" (59), there is still the possibility for the reader to fantasize an alternate scenario: "In this description of naked interiors, 'Sapphism' will suggest itself, but in a very different way from the salacious discussion by previous male writers with overheated imaginations. […] The bathhouse letter conceals a challenge to its addressees even as it delivers it" (Aravamudan 85).

Harem Suare: Fictions within Fictions

Linking the hamam and the harem is still a veritable motif even in our time, [18] particularly suitable for the representation of Oriental practices. The Turkish-Italian film director Ferzan Özpetek used this connection to make it a central location in his film *Harem Suare* (1999). The film takes place on two spatiotemporal levels, the older of which shows the last harem of the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamit II in 1908 before his empire goes to pieces and the harem is dissolved. The second plot takes place in 1953 in a train station café in Parma, Italy, where an older woman tells a younger one about her past, with verbal

18 See Macmaster and Lewis (148), who note that both the hamam and the harem are spaces of the sacred as well as of the forbidden in Muslim society.

and visual allusions making it clear that this is the protagonist of the main narrative, the harem lady Safiye. Winner of a number of awards, this historical film thus tells, as the English poster promises, "An Erotic Tale of Sexual Freedom" and, significantly, uses a hamam scene in the film as the poster motif.

For me, the film serves as a bridge between Ingres's French-Orientalist neoclassicism and a nostalgic, indigenous introspection. Like Ingres, Özpetek uses the secret male gaze and shows women on erotic display. Yet the situation here is more complicated by the fact that Özpetek deals with his own culture; accusing him of Orientalization thus becomes problematic. The film follows the impossible love between Safiye, the sultan's favorite harem lady, and the sultan's servant and guardian of the harem, the eunuch Nadir.[19] While the revolution, and with it the dissolution of the sultanate, is already forming in front of the gates of the Yıldız Palace, the interior of the palace and especially the harem still seem a place of absolute seclusion and exclusivity. And yet here, too, signs of 'decay' hint at the intrusion of 'foreign' influences: a young concubine drowns herself 'outside' in the river, the sultan has Safiye translate and rewrite European operas—he would like *La Traviata* performed with a happy ending—, and Safiye, herself an outsider in the harem who comes from Italy and was sold as a slave in Cairo, falls in love with the black servant Nadir.

Just as Sultan Abdülhamit adapted the opera for his escapist purposes while simultaneously preparing the opening of the future Turkish nation to the West, the figure of Safiye also testifies to a historical turning point. Her Western education, her emancipated spirit, and her will to transgress mark her as a mediator between cultures. Especially if you take into account her narrative role in the spatiotemporally suspending space of the waiting room of the train station, the Italian Safiye, who lives in exile in Turkey, can be interpreted as the stand-in for the director, who was born in Istanbul and took Italian citizenship, and who says about the film: "With a Westerner's eye I'm trying to unravel one of the most crucial knots of my original culture:

19 Nadir therefore is a "Kızlar Agha," "the third highest-ranking officer of the empire, after the Sultan and the Grand Vizier (Chief Minister). […] He was the most important link between the Sultan and the Valide Sultan (mother of the Sultan). The Kizlar [sic] Agha led the new odalisque to the Sultan' bedchamber, and was the only 'man' who could enter the harem should there have been any nocturnal emergencies. His duties were to protect the women, to provide and purchase the necessary odalisques for the harem, to observe the promotion of the women (usually after the death of a higher-ranking Kadin [sic]) and eunuchs" (Sansal).

the end of the Ottoman Empire, portrayed in one of the places dearest to the imagination—the harem" (qtd. in "Harem Suare Reviews").

Özpetek certainly serves most Western fantasies of the harem as an exotic place of excessive sexuality, where willing beauties give themselves to their potent master. The submissive, lascivious harem ladies—called odalisques (Turkish for slave and thus de facto at the lower end of the harem hierarchy) and at the time a popular subject of Western painters—live in this purely female space, completely cut off from the outside world. After all, harem comes from the Arabic *arām*, meaning "forbidden." But Özpetek also shows this place as a porous space of diverse ambiguities, in which women of different generations—by no means only odalisques and concubines—tell each other stories, in which the Sultan's family lives, men—albeit eunuchs—also socialize and, ultimately, solid politics are negotiated. Historically there was even a so-called "Sultanate of Women," which shows that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the women of the royal Ottoman harem exercised extraordinary political influence on state affairs. Thus, it was mainly the mothers of the heir to the throne and the later sultans (*valide sultan*, royal mother) who often took on important diplomatic and economic functions. Leslie Peirce emphasizes that "[t]he Western stereotype of harems as stables of sex objects for male masters misses some important features of élite social structures in Muslim societies. Among them is the important fact that women controlled their own property and therefore had business dealings" (n.p.).[20]

Özpetek's film shows, in addition to all the pomposity, this unknown side of the harem, above all the resulting struggles among women for rank and power, as well as in the closing sequences the great bond and loyalty that has developed between the women. In the brutal process of the harem's dissolution, the formerly sacrosanct place is forcibly opened by the military, and the women are sent into 'freedom,' where they are left to their own devices completely unprotected. And Safiye, formerly the favorite (*ikbal*) and informal wife (*kadın*) of the Sultan with the birth of a son, says goodbye to Nadir and hires herself out as a dancing harem lady in an Italian cabaret, Harem Soiré.

Due to the encroachment of historical reality into the harem's sheltered space, the Italian film title turns out to be only partially a nostalgic-Orientalist portrayal of customs of a past era, while also referring self-referentially and self-ironically to the act of staging a night in the harem and the legends that

20 See also Peirce's *The Imperial Harem*.

come to encircle such a night. Just as Safiye glosses over her story to the strange woman at the train station (for example, by converting Nadir's suicide into a happy ending) thus continuing the sultan's practice of escaping reality, the last look at and into the historical harem can no longer match the voyeuristically enjoyed "strange lust" that Groschner describes above. At the end of the film, this look is not innocent anymore. The film about the harem turns into a film about storytelling.

And so, in retrospect, the insight that the film gives into the women's hamam also changes, because part of the daily routine in the harem consists of visiting the hamam. Initially, Özpetek uses standardized clichés here too: naked women have their lavish bodies oiled and massaged; they lie lasciviously by the pool and adorn themselves for the powerful ruler, whose status symbol they are considered to be. The first hamam scene in the film shows exactly such a scenario, only to be rewritten subversively by the second scene. While in the first scene Safiye is being prepared for her aptitude test as a concubine and is being observed by Nadir, who is carrying out this test, the second scene shows a completely different scenario. Again, Safiye is massaged by a black female slave and observed by Nadir, but she first reverses the roles and massages the irritated slave in a strikingly erotic manner only to finally acknowledge her awareness of Nadir's presence by addressing him directly. Here, too, Safiye turns out to be a clever strategist, just like before when she misled Nadir during the aptitude test. She stages an erotic performance in the hamam in front of Nadir—and in extension for the cinema audience—only to question any lesbian desire by exposing her cognizance. In addition, a playful, erotic ménage à trois is created, which places her as a white woman between two black partners. Although all three actors are slaves in the legal sense, a quasi-colonial situation is played out, which grants Safiye sole power in the constellation. The hamam room, shrouded in myth, proves once again to be the scene of forbidden eroticism, and yet the scene is metatextually charged due to its performative character. Like the film about the harem as a whole, this special incident in the hamam turns out to be self-reflective fiction within fiction.[21]

21 See chapter 4 for Sinan Ünel's portrayal of a female harem experience in his play *Pera Palas*.

Hamam: The Official Tour Guide Version

Harem Suare was not Özpetek's first film to deal with Turkish erotic cultural history. Rather, the director became known through an earlier film that is central to the recent reception of the Turkish bath and shows that the myths surrounding a visit to a hamam are still circulating today. In every travel guide of Istanbul or Turkey, there is a chapter on the hamam with explicit instructions on 'correct' tourist behavior. One should respect the rules of modesty of the locals, Manfred Ferner admonishes, for example, in his *KulturSchock Türkei* (CultureShock Turkey), a guide addressed to German tourists. Even if there are "establishments" (152) spiced up with fitness studios and saunas that accept mixed audiences, this is an offer specifically catering to tourists. Ferner thus refers to the traditional hamam's gender segregation and emphasizes that no Turkish man ever shows himself completely naked. It is in this context that he mentions the film by Ferzan Özpetek, *Hamam—Il bagno turco* (1997), which, with its homoerotic theme, revived an image of Turkish bathing culture that infuriated the Turkish hamam guild. The film offers a false, distorted fantasy that has nothing in common with everyday reality, according to Ferner. Under the rubric "The intercultural encounter in everyday life: cleanliness and purity," he concludes his description of the standard cleaning and massage procedure as follows:

> Während der ganzen Prozedur bleibt das nasse Badetuch lose zwischen den Beinen und um die Hüfte gewickelt; kein türkischer Mann pflegt sich nach seiner Beschneidung jemals nackt zu zeigen. Als vor wenigen Jahren der Film "Hamam," eine italienisch-türkisch-spanische Koproduktion unter der Regie von Ferhan [sic] Özpetek, das Thema der Homosexualität aufnahm—seit osmanischer Zeit kursieren Gerüchte, dass die Badeanstalt mehr als nur der körperlichen Entspannung dienten—, verwahrte sich der türkische Bäderverein wütend gegen derartige Lästerungen und wies darauf hin, dass gerade Männer abends das Hamam gezielt und kurz als Badeanstalt zu nutzen pflegen. (153)[22]

22 "During the entire procedure, the wet bath towel remains loosely wrapped between the legs and around the waist; no Turkish man ever shows himself naked after his circumcision. When the film "Hamam," an Italian-Turkish-Spanish coproduction directed by Ferhan Özpetek, took up the subject of homosexuality a few years ago—rumors have been circulating since Ottoman times that the baths were used for more than just physical relaxation—the Turkish bathing association angrily protested against such

This passage has curious gaps and allusions. On the one hand, the information that no circumcised, i.e. adult Turkish man ever shows himself naked here implies the added, but unspoken qualifier 'naked in front of another man.' Furthermore, homosexuality seems connected to the mutual presentation of male nakedness as well as to an activity that is "more than just bodily relaxation." The anger of the Turkish officials against such "blasphemies" resorts to the assertion that men visit the bathhouse only briefly and in the evenings. This not only implies that there is no time for anything like naked sex (but what about the relaxation? doesn't that take some time?); it also, and again without saying so directly, entails the reasoning that this applies to men only. So, what about the women and their own hamam tradition?

Ferner's skirting the question of what possibly was and still is going on in the hamam leads to the somewhat lame conclusion that all "this is certainly true because, in contrast to women, who always come in groups and often spend the whole day in the hamam, men only visit the bath for a relatively short time after work. They also often come alone, want to be silent and relax from the day's troubles" (153, transl. R. P.).[23] The same quality that makes the visit to the bath a "social happening" (153) for women is a solitary experience for the male visitor. So it seems.

This author can personally testify that a visit to a hamam does not have to be as chaste and modest as the Turkish bathing association would like us to believe.[24] Yet he is not the only such source: the 'rumors' revolving around

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blasphemies and pointed out that men in particular use the hamam as a bathing establishment in the evenings for a short time." (Transl. R. P.)

23 "Das stimmt sicherlich, denn im Gegensatz zu den Frauen, die stets in Gruppen kommen und oft den ganzen Tag im Hamam verbringen, besuchen Männer nach der Arbeit das Bad nur für eine relative kurze Zeit. Auch kommen sie häufig allein, wollen schweigen und sich von den Mühen des Tages entspannen."

24 A case in point is the Çukurcuma Hamamı, a historical hamam built in the 1830s that closed in 2007 allegedly because of its decrepit condition, though it was openly rumored that the real reason was too much men-on-men activity going on. Indeed, gay travel brochures at the time advertised this highly popular bathhouse as particularly welcome to gay tourists who want to meet Turkish men of all ages for sex, and having seen the rampant (and mostly unsafe) sexual activity there, I find it most likely that policing actions caused the shutdown. This bath is noteworthy also for having been Constantinos Kavafis's favorite haunt while he lived in Istanbul between 1880 and 1885, and it served as setting for Özpetek's *Hamam*. Both references signify a gay history and are listed on the official homepage. After renovation, the hamam reopened in 2018 as a "boutique Turkish Hammam," now being advertised as a mixed hamam for male and

what goes on in hamams can also be confirmed insofar as there are sufficient historical pictorial and textual sources in this regard. Klaus Kreiser (64) mentions, for example, the literary genre of the "hamam praise" (*Hammâmîye* or *Hammâm-nâme*), in which Ottoman poets sang in classic poetry forms such as *ghazals* about the steam bath as a place where bath attendants were adolescents of adorable beauty, whose sexual services were also available.[25] The 'moral history' of the hamams is also documented in some texts by bath attendants themselves:

> A text from the late 17th century called "Book of the Heart-Opening Bath Servants" offers a dramatic panorama of the city's pederast scene. The author, a certain Dervîş İsmâ'îl, the chairman of the guild of bathing tenants and a connoisseur, moved within the circles of the Janissaries of the 59th Regiment and the sailors of the Golden Horn. His slender document presents the physical qualities and professional habits of eleven adolescents who were employed as bath attendants (*tellâk*) in various hammams of the city, but not only working with soap and bathing gloves but also fulfilling the sexual desires of certain visitors. […] The boys took at least 70 *akçe* for intercourse. The particularly popular Yemenici Balcı asked for 300 for a whole night on the shared mattress. Of course, the operators of these baths were instructed and knew in which side rooms "a henna-colored lamb" was waiting for customers who "pounced like donkey bees on a bowl of honey." Obviously, certain baths at night were reserved exclusively for the pleasure of those "curly hyacinths." […] During the day, the pleasure boys called *tokmakçı* (from *tokmak* "club, mallet") attracted attention in the coffee houses. Dervîş İsmâ'îl describes a so-called Sipâhî Mustafâ Bey, who was so attractive that a very rich customs tenant became interested in him and a high-ranking kadi (after all, the Molla of Galata) brought him home from the bathhouse, "dressed him in the finest of clothes, buried himself in his jewelry and appointed the darling pipe keeper (*çubukdâr*, which could also be translated as 'holder of the rod')." (65, transl. R. P.)[26]

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female customers ("Çukurcuma Hamamı 1831"). For contemporary tourists' anecdotal accounts of hamam visits, including gay sexual encounters, see, for example, "Hammam – Paul's Travel Blog."

25 See chapter 5 for more on *ghazals*.

26 "Ein 'Buch der herzöffnenden Badediener' genannter Text aus dem späten 17. Jahrhundert bildet ein drastisches Panorama der Päderastenszene der Stadt. Der Verfasser, ein gewisser Dervîş İsmâ'îl, seines Zeichens Zunftvorstand der Badepächter und Con-

Besides providing an annotated list of historical bathhouses in Istanbul, a Turkish hamam guide by Orhan Yılmazkaya (translated into English) also includes a section on "The Baths and Sex," which confirms that Ottoman literature often refers to same-sex encounters in the bathhouses. This literature celebrates the legendary dancing boys, whose reputation was based not least on the fact that women in the Ottoman Empire were forbidden to dance in public, and therefore young men were hired to do so.[27] Such a *köçek* could also be rented for sexual services, as well as the aforementioned *tellak* (bath attendant), who did more than dance for his customers. "Oğlancılık," literally "using a boy," was the common word for sexual activity with these young men. Yılmazkaya also refers to the already mentioned bath attendant Dervish İsmail, who published a book in 1685 under the title *Dellakname-i Dilkuşa* (*The Pleasure-Giving Tellak*). It recounts the legendary life stories of eleven famous bath attendants vividly and in great detail, including their price lists for corresponding sexual services to customers. The dedication and the intention to

naisseur, bewegte sich im Milieu der Janitscharen des 59. Regiments und der Schiffsleute vom Goldenen Horn. Seine kleine Schrift stellt die körperlichen Vorzüge und professionellen Gewohnheiten von elf Jünglingen vor, die als Badediener (*tellâk*) in verschiedenen Hammams der Stadt beschäftigt waren, dort aber nicht allein mit Seife und Badehandschuh arbeiteten, sondern auch die sexuellen Wünschen [sic] bestimmter Besucher erfüllten. […] Die Knaben nahmen für einen Verkehr mindestens 70 *Akçe*. Ein besonders gefragter Yemenici Balcı verlangte für eine ganze Nacht auf der gemeinsamen Matratze 300. Selbstverständlich waren die Betreiber dieser Bäder eingeweiht und wussten, in welchen Seitenräumen 'ein hennafarbenes Lämmlein' auf eine Kundschaft wartete, die sich 'wie Eselbienen auf eine Schale Honig' stürzte. Offensichtlich waren bestimmte Bäder nachts ausschließlich dem Vergnügen mit jenen 'Hyazinthenlockigen' reserviert. […] Tagsüber machten die *Tokmakçı* (von *tokmak* 'Keule, Schwengel') genannten Lustknaben in den Kaffeehäusern auf sich aufmerksam. Dervîş İsmâ'îl beschreibt einen sogenannten Sipâhî Mustafâ Bey, der so attraktiv war, dass sich ein steinreicher Zollpächter für ihn interessierte und ein hochrangiger Kadi (immerhin der Molla von Galata) ihn vom Bad nach Haus holte, 'mit den edelsten Gewändern bekleidete, sich in seine Schmucksachen vergrub und den Liebling zum Pfeifenwärter (*çubukdâr*, was man auch mit 'Halter der Stange' übersetzen könnte) ernannte.'"

27 See the miniature painting from the eighteenth century showing these dancing boys in women's clothes, from the collection of the Topkapı Palace museum in Istanbul <www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Prostitution>. See Boone (*Homoerotics* 77-90) for more historical and contemporary illustrations of homoeroticism in hamam settings.

write are based on the praise of male beauty and eroticism by the aforementioned young *tellak* Yemenici Bali:

> I wrote this book upon the enticement and teasing of an attractive lover, a lover whose beauty is wondrous and unique. The most honorable name of that young man is Yemenici Bali, a personage whose beauty is the jewel in his crown, a lad whose sable eyebrows are the very object of his sinner's desire. […] One day Yemenici Bali told me, "Master, each day is followed by a night. What if the work we do pleasuring others could be described in a little book? And what if—after we are long gone—his book were to remain as a memory of who we were and what we did?" And thus did he entice me and so I began to write. (qtd. in Yılmazkaya 54)

In poetic diction he describes the career of the young bath attendant: "Bali was once an apprentice to a scarf maker in Tophane, but now the dainty boy struts around the garden like a peacock in his clogs" (qtd. in Yılmazkaya 54). And of another *tellak*, Hamleci İbrahim, Dervish İsmail writes:

> He's the light of our eyes, tall as a sapling, with the traits of an angel; the locks on his cheeks are golden threads; he has a narrow waist, and dainty hands and feet; his lips are a perfect rose; his tummy is a flower, a hyacinth. He's a sip of cool water. When he reclines on the turquoise mattress he has spread on the white marble floor of a private cubicle he imparts new life into another life. He only works with the most elite and gets 200 kurush each time he does. He gets 1000 kurush for a night on the mattress, and 250 kurush for providing extra services. (qtd. in Yılmazkaya 55)

In addition to other evidence from later centuries, Yılmazkaya also mentions kidnappings of *tellaks* by Janissaries as well as newspaper reports of jealousy dramas about these young, desired men. In 1908 (i.e. the year that *Harem Suare* also took as the starting point of its narrative), as a result of constitutional reform, any sexual activity by these bath attendants was forbidden. And yet, Yılmazkaya somewhat surprisingly—given the explicit evidence just provided regarding same-sex practices in baths—ends this informative section with the warning to the tourist that such sexual practices in the hamam largely correspond to Orientalized Western ideas of Turkish baths:

> The history of sex in the Ottoman bath differs greatly from the general western impression of the Turkish bath as representing the "mystique of the harem." And while there was some sex at the bath (*usually same sex*),

> this was the exception and far from the rule. Some mistakenly believe that the Turkish bath was a place for group sex and that people of both sexes bathed together. Some "tourist" baths […] support the myth by providing tourists with "mixed baths." This is unfortunate as it does great injustice to *the essence of the Turkish bath* and may be a ploy to humiliate women. Be forewarned and use your common sense! (Yılmazkaya 56-57, emphasis added)

Here too, just like in Ferner's admonition, there are breaks and omissions, albeit differently positioned. On the one hand, a richly documented literary history of same-sex bathing is charted for pages, only to end up with the conclusion that this was by no means a matter of regular behavior. The violation of the rules, previously documented as a literary topos, is on the other hand linked to the accusation of Orientalization and the assurance that the hamam can neither serve the myth of the harem nor fantastic ideas of group sex. With a double negation, the previously described and documented tradition of same-sex practice is eradicated and converted into a warning to the tourist that he should not denigrate the "essence of the Turkish bath" with 'dirty fantasies.'

After Sex Is before Sex: The Hamam as Sacred Space of Transition

Beyond erotic allusions and practices, there are many Turkish or Arabic sources in which the hamam is understood from a historical perspective as both a sacred space of transition and a decaying phenomenon. With the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the founding of the republic at the beginning of the twentieth century as having an avowedly Western orientation, Turkey sought to abandon 'unfashionable' customs, and this included the use of the hamam. At the same time, a change in understanding of existing same-sex erotic practices took place, which was reflected in the linguistic usage: "The word 'homosexual' entered Turkish by translations from European languages: first as *homoseksüel*. During the turkification of the language after the foundation of the republic in 1923 the word *eşcinsel* (equal-sex-ual) was coined, but this did not fit the roles and identities in Turkey and confusion arose" (Necef 73). With the adoption of European legal norms,

boy love (pederasty)—still common in the Ottoman Empire[28]—gave way to a strict rejection of 'homosexual' men: "One component of [the founding father Kemal] Atatürk's criticism of the Ottoman Empire was the polemic against homosexual practices, which was taken as a reason for its decadence and its decline" (Bochow 108, transl. R. P.). Atatürk's resistance to the supposedly ailing morality of the Ottomans was also expressed in the criticism of the institution of the Turkish bathhouse.

The architectural, habitual, and literary history of the Turkish bath therefore not only provides information about the history of the decline of the Ottoman Empire but also about the related changes of sexual practices, because the hamam as a social phenomenon gives manifest insights into the connection between everyday life and larger historical contexts. Following Arjun Appadurai, one can also say that local phenomena are to be considered within a larger, global economic, social, and cultural network, because "locality is itself a historical product […] subject to the dynamics of the global" (18). Viewed this way, the hamam, too, is no monolithic institution that remained unchanged over centuries in its pure form. On the contrary, the history of the hamam traces the moral history of Turkey.

The oldest baths in Turkey are of Roman origin and testify to the expansion of the Roman Empire to England, North Africa, Anatolia, and the Middle East. The Roman model still combined a visit to the bath with physical exercise and was also a space frequented by both sexes. From the fifth century AD, the importance of the baths initially declined, especially because they were increasingly viewed as concealed brothels. With the rise of the Byzantine and later the Ottoman Empire, however, their popularity increased again. After the conquest of Istanbul in 1453 by Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror, a bathing culture flourished, which was also to be considered an expression of a powerful Ottoman Empire. At the height of the bathing boom, there were 237

28 According to records, pederasty, euphemistically called 'boy love,' was practiced from at least the eighth century and has become habitualized as a social practice due to the gender segregation prevailing in Islam, although it is explicitly condemned as a homoerotic danger in the hadiths. Hadith scholar Ibn al-Jawzī wrote in *The Devil's Deception* that a boy in the hamam is a devilish temptation: "Abdullāh Ibn al-Mubārak said: Once when Sufyān al-Thawrī had entered the bath there entered after him a handsome boy. Sufyān bade them remove him, saying: I see one devil accompanying each woman, but see a dozen or so accompanying each young boy" (395). A multitude of classical Islamic literary examples, in which the veneration of boys and young men is sung about as literary topos, testify to the flourishing of boy love (see also Mohr 29).

baths in Istanbul alone, and many more in other parts of the empire as far as Hungary (Yılmazkaya 15). The hamam—"the word means something like 'heat source'" (Gouvion 87, transl. R. P.)—was now in the service of religion and therefore transformed into a sexually segregated space. In addition to religious purposes, the hamam also served medical-therapeutic and hygienic interests, which is why there were barbers and doctors on-site in addition to the masseur. The income from hamam visits in the Ottoman period was also administered by the sultan's family and used for religious charitable purposes. The Ottoman hamam not only separated the sexes but also Muslims from non-Muslims due to the Muslim purity law. The changing rooms or the devices for cleaning the body, for instance, could not be used by Muslims and people of different faiths at the same time (Yılmazkaya 21). For the Muslim woman, on the other hand, the extremely high level of social control to which she was subject made visiting the hamam the one exception where she was allowed to leave the home without a father or spouse. For women, the bathhouse therefore not only became a place of religious cleansing and elaborate body care but above all a center of social life:

> For over 1000 years, Arab women have had a fitness center, including a cosmetic institute, which, since it is affordable for all budgets, including its countless beauty products, is also deeply democratic. While the men spend an hour or two at most in the hamam, the women stay there for half a day. The body care procedure is interrupted by other pleasant rituals: the women rest, chat, drink mint tea, and nibble on pastries. (Gouvion 103-104, transl. R. P.)

The Turkish bath can therefore to be understood as a social space where the secular meets the religious. For the devout Muslim, the body practices performed in the hamam bring body and mind, sexuality and sacredness into harmony. The hamam thus figures as a concrete and symbolic place, and hence fulfills a significant function as a space of transition between the organization of sexual experience in everyday life and the perception of religious prayers. According to Muslim belief, purity is an integral part of the faith: "The men who devoted themselves to cleansing their bodies in the hamam in order to obey the prophet's purity law—'Purity is half of faith. The key to prayer is purity'—were increasingly discovering sensual wellbeing" (Gouvion 95, transl. R. P.).

Devout Muslims are supposed to wash themselves after any form of physical activity and before every prayer. That is why a hamam is traditionally

always in the immediate vicinity of a mosque. Since impurity in Islam is seen in close connection with the devil, ritual cleansing is also understood as a security technique with which one protects oneself against the devilish temptation that emanates from wicked spirits: "Djinns are supposed to live in dirty places so bathhouses make perfect djinn houses" (Yılmazkaya 27). Body secretions such as blood, urine, or excrements are considered to be minor impurities that only require local, limited washing, while those secretions resulting from a sexual act, masturbation, childbirth, or menstruation require extensive body cleansing: "On a religious level, *hamams* allowed Muslims to perform the full-body ablution (*gusül*) which is necessary to restore ritual purity (*taharet*) after defilement through sexual activity, menstruation, childbirth or touching a dead body" (Cichocki 99). Bouhdiba, therefore, understands the cleansing process in a ritualist sense not only as cleaning of the body, which has been polluted especially by sex, but also in its now restored purity as a preparation for the sexual act: "The hammam is the epilogue of the flesh and the prologue of prayer. The practices of the hammam are pre- and post-sexual practices" (165).

The hamam is thus a transitional place in a state of emergency: entry into the hamam and exit from it form a preparative framing concerning the following religious act. And it is crucial for an understanding of this framing that the Qur'an may not be quoted within the rooms of the hamam. The topographical and ritual tabooing of God's word results in a temporary suspension of the moral constraints this word imposes. And to the extent that purification and sexuality are intertwined in Islam, the hamam is the place that provides the necessary connection between sexual pleasure and religious devotion. The practices of the hamam are therefore to be understood as a series of adaptations toward the spiritual and toward relieving physical and psychological tension. This is why Bouhdiba speaks of a "hammam complex" (169) governing the way in which a whole field of sexual life is organized around the hamam visit:

> The hammam has been the way that has enabled Muslim society sufficient leeway. If Muslim society has been able to preserve itself for so many centuries, it may be because of the hammam, which has been able to function as a powerful release of all the tensions of which the Muslim is necessarily subject. In using the hammam Muslim society has forged a valuable instrument for itself to channel the sexual drives liberated by religion, but repressed by the misogynist Puritanism that grew up over the centuries and

> by a strict, universal separation of the sexes that might have proved fatal to it. (173-174)[29]

Thus, Bouhdiba maintains that the hamam is a social space par excellence as it can harmonize the sexual and the sacred for the Muslim (173). That may sound illogical and paradoxical, but it leads to the crux of my argument. Since a traditional understanding of gender has continued to be predominant in Turkey, heterosexual marriage as a common social practice remains the most common way to escape threatening marginalization through homosexuality. Because marriage remains one of the basic institutions of Turkish society, bachelordom continues to be perceived as abnormal. Accordingly, Koray Ali Günay claims the behavior based on firmly anchored gender roles to be responsible for a same-sex eroticism in Turkey that can only occur in firmly outlined patterns and in very specific spaces: "The patriarchal order with the overshadowing imperative of reproduction not only rigorously excludes a deviating sexual orientation, but everything that questions the dichotomous gender system which unequivocally defines femaleness and maleness" (Günay 131, trans. R. P.). As a result of both sexes having clearly assigned roles "whose spaces, freedoms, and limits are clearly defined" (Günay 130, trans. R. P.), the borders of separating private and public established for Western countries are also delineated in different ways. Due to this clear segregation,

29 For the male Muslim in particular, the visit of a hamam turns out to be an initiation rite, because only when he reaches puberty does he gain access to the male hamam. Before that, he is still with his mother or his sisters in the women's hamam until it is determined that it is now time for him to join the adult men. With this transferal, the boy ritually enters the world of men and from then on moves almost exclusively in this homosocial environment. Bouhdiba describes this process of ritualist transition in a very drastic way: "Indeed one must now enter another social sphere, that of monosexual promiscuity. Spiritual actions, but also political, economic, aesthetic and even biological actions are performed in common. The body is now literally snatched up by the male world. Purification is performed collectively in the *midhas* or hammams and prayer in the mosques. Everywhere […] the youth belongs to an all-male community. More seriously still, this is accompanied by the de-realization of the female world. The world of women is a 'sub-world,' devoid of seriousness and all too easily treated with the contempt that boosts the male's confidence in himself, in his knowledge, in his wishes and in his power" (169). With the entry into such a 'monosexual' world, the male adolescent not only loses his previous point of reference to the world of the feminine—Bouhdiba calls this the de-realization of the female world; from now on he also generates his complete understanding of himself and his environment from his interactions with other men.

spaces that are considered public in our understanding can have a much more 'private' meaning in Turkey, because they are strictly homosocial spaces. And these spaces, in turn, often allow for dealing with members of one's own sex in a way that blurs the boundaries between private and public as well as between social and sexual. The hamam traditionally is such a space where according to Günay—and in contrast to the 'official' version outlined above—the "main events" take place, "where men often have sex with men:" "In the hamams, family fathers can have sex with other men; when they step outside on the street again, they are again all married and honorable men" (Günay 130, trans. R. P.).

Through the privatization of the baths in Turkey at the end of the nineteenth century, the hamams no longer primarily served the general welfare. And yet at the same time, the social-religious practices in the baths themselves changed. In the context of a reorganization or, better still, reregulation of the gender order, this process reflected the gradual Europeanization and urban modernization of the young Turkish republic. With the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and, in return, growing cultural and political contact with Europe, it was not only a privatization of the baths that took place in the nineteenth century, contributing to the decline of the esteemed bath culture. New public spaces such as avenues, parks, theaters, and cinemas moreover emerged in the urban cartography, intended—based on the French model—to have a 'de-Orientalizing' effect, and gradually softened Ottoman society's rigid gender segregation and its associated social, religious, and sexual practices. Even if this was primarily an elite phenomenon at first, unveiled women and mixed-sex couples could increasingly be seen in public, at least in urban centers. This disruption of gender segregation as well as the changed city architecture with now increasingly private bathrooms in one's own house meant that it was simply no longer 'chic' to go to the hamam. The public bathhouse now symbolized an Islamic traditionalism and thus stood in the way of a modernization desired by the elite. Atatürk's reforms in the twentieth century targeted a reformist, republican nation, and the bathhouses as quasi-religious institutions of daily life opposed this secular and nationalist idea (see Cichocki 102-106).

This only changed again with the emergence of modern tourism in the second half of the twentieth century, which now praised the exoticism and eroticism of pre-modern Turkey in a decidedly nostalgic revival. The Turkish baths were recognized as a newly strengthened source of money, and in the wake of restoration efforts, which were now taking place again, the public

attitude towards the Ottoman cultural heritage shifted. This produced that double effect of destructive nostalgia as well as emancipatory reconsideration, which Özpetek's film *Hamam* in particular captures and with which I conclude my reflections.

Hamam: Architecture of Seduction

The hamam—and what happens in it—stands in the midst of the interplay of local denial and foreign interest that characterizes the treatment of homosexuality in and around Turkey in general. The real scandal of the film *Hamam* lies not so much in the portrayal of male nudity and intimacy per se—the film shows almost nothing in this regard—but rather in the public display, the exposure, of a strictly regulated and long-established tradition of homosocial and in part thoroughly homo*sexual* practice.[30]

Özpetek's film *Hamam* follows a codified visitor routine that goes back a long way and thus nostalgically ties in with a lost Ottoman bathing culture. Francesco, the protagonist of the film, inherits a house in Istanbul from his aunt. From his perspective of both an Italian tourist in Istanbul and a professional interior designer, we follow Francesco on a physical and psychological journey of discovery through a city in a radical upheaval between decay and modernization. Since Francesco's aunt had settled in the city long before the events of the film, he did not even know her. The beginning of the film shows him as a man who is annoyed with and bored by his life with Martha, his dominant wife and business partner, and who is now going to Turkey to sell his aunt's house as quickly as possible and take the burden off himself to get rid of the inheritance. However, when it turns out that the house is an old hamam, to everyone's surprise he decides to renovate and reopen it. The host family with whom the aunt had been living welcomes him with open arms, and while the daughter immediately falls in love with him, the son Mehmet also shows interest. Francesco initially flirts with the daughter, but then increasingly responds to Mehmet's advances. As Francesco's return to Italy comes to be delayed longer and longer, Martha finally loses her patience and travels after her husband to set things straight. She confesses to Francesco that for many years she has had an affair with a mutual friend and colleague and now wants to get a divorce. Against her will, she also succumbs to the charm of the

30 See chapter 1 for more general reflections on male homosexual practices in Turkey.

city. The film ends in an extremely dramatic climax: Francesco is murdered and Martha now seems to take over the hamam instead.

The film is framed by two sets of correspondence. In the beginning, we listen to and read with Francesco long-ago letters from his deceased aunt to her Italian sister (Francesco's mother), and at the end, it is Martha, who in turn begins an exchange of letters with Mehmet, thus continuing the tradition of women reporting on the hamam and the changing urban life. The film uses these letters from two travelers to express the 'magical' attraction a visit to a historic hamam entails. Francesco, too, begins to be interested in the institution of the hamam after reading his aunt's letters. This incentive, already evident in Lady Montagu, is here transferred to the modern tourist and exemplified by the two women, but especially by the character of Francesco. Before he even knows that he has inherited a hamam himself, he feels drawn to another old hamam in an almost mystical way. The visit that takes place there leads to significant eye contact with a young man, which is to be understood as a proleptic preview of his later homoerotic relationship with Mehmet. Francesco is shown here in the role of a tourist who is unfamiliar with the place and who is magically lured by its exoticism, only to fatally succumb to its Oriental charms.

This is a critical reading of the film, which acknowledges it mainly as a vehicle for a revitalized and at the same time nostalgic-morbid Orientalism. Elisabetta Girelli, for instance, sees the film as depicting an "image of Turkishness [that] is a textbook Orientalist representation, resting on Western notions of Oriental difference, antiquity, seduction, and alternative lifestyle; […] it depends on an original distance between the Self and the Oriental Other" (23-24). Cichocki draws a connection from the film to the Orientalist travel accounts and paintings of the nineteenth century: "the *hamam* has come to symbolize the epitome of the sensual Orient that many tourists wish to experience and has thus entered the codified visiting routine, or moral structure, of sightseeing in Istanbul" (107). For as soon as Francesco gets involved in the magical eroticism of the strange place, he embarks on a process of transformation that frees him from an unhappy and also sexually unsatisfactory marriage and carries him into the arms of Mehmet. The hamam, the place where this homoerotic desire is realized, is once again the setting of a sensual Orient, where the promise of an authentic encounter with Turkish culture is literally fulfilled in the climactic encounter of physical intimacy with a pretty young Turk. However, Francesco's violent death at the end of the film does not grant the male relationship any future. He is stabbed to death on

the threshold of his hamam on behalf of a scheming real estate speculator who wants to buy the property on which the old building stands and plans to erect a modern urban business park instead. Francesco's plan to restore his inherited bathhouse in the old style and memory of his aunt had thwarted this plan.

This scenario reflects the problematic modernization process of a city like Istanbul, where magnificent buildings from Ottoman times are now being restored and 'refurbished,' while the sunken underground architecture of the baths prevents them from serving such an externally visible representative purpose. Francesco, who as an anticapitalist troublemaker heroically and single-handedly wants to stop this process, is removed and symbolically transformed into a martyr. The simultaneous elimination of the burgeoning homoerotic desire reinforces a negative effect, which is absorbed and postponed by the suggestion at the end that instead of getting divorced as planned, Francesco's widowed wife will now take over the hamam in his place, thus continue the unusual legacy of his aunt as a female hamam owner. This nostalgic recourse to a female desire that is not based on sexual pleasure but cultural fascination not only puts Martha on the level of the film's plot in the tradition of the exiled and extravagant aunt but also links her to travelers to the Orient from earlier times in their search for experiences beyond those of one's own familiar occidental world.

Yet the film allows another, covert reading based on the second effect that the film produces. The fact that, despite all adversities, the old, closed hamam is restored to its former glory with laborious, collective manual labor, is a consequence of the aforementioned newer trend of the hamam revival, especially in Istanbul. In the course of growing tourism and the resulting increased interest in the 'authentic' hamam experience, many bathhouses that have long been closed have reopened their doors in recent years. This revival stands in the larger context of a rediscovery of the Ottoman past and culminates in urban redevelopment projects, which serve less for their own—Turkish—cultural memory and more for the purpose of tourism-oriented consumption. And yet this revival has a secondary effect on the modern, young, urban middle class of the locals because they are now participating in the renaissance of a culture that they believed to have been lost. Nina Cichocki speaks of an "internal tourism," according to which Turks walk in the footsteps of foreign tourists in autoethnographic fashion and rediscover their own culture from an ethnographic perspective: "the otherized Ottoman past becomes a foreign country—within their own home country—where Turks

like to travel as tourists, follow tips given by guide books and visit such sites as the *hamams*" (108). Although Cichocki explicitly eclipses Özpetek's film from her semiotic analysis of tourism as much as she implicitly excludes a remembering of queer desire from the hamam revival, I believe that Özpetek calls up such a scenario of culturally reminiscent reexperiencing in this film as well as in his other films.

It is not insignificant at this point that Özpetek himself is an openly gay Turkish director who lives and works mainly in Italy, but often takes up Turkish themes in his films. He does this explicitly in *Hamam* and *Harem suaré*, the historical film about the harem of the last Ottoman sultan that I mentioned earlier. But in other films with a predominantly Italian setting such as *Le fate ignoranti* (2001), *La finestra di fronte* (2003), *Saturno contro* (2007), *Magnifica presenza* (2012), *İstanbul Kırmızısı* (2017), and *La dea fortuna* (2019) Turkish characters (above all those played by Serra Yılmaz) also appear who, like himself, take on a culturally hybrid position in society through their experience of emigration and exiled existence.[31] His 'transnational Orientalist' view from Italy on Istanbul's bathhouse culture may be nostalgically romanticized and only covertly denounce the homophobic and misogynic gender order of his homeland.[32] There is only one scene in *Hamam* that openly discusses homosexuality, which occurs in the course of the marital dispute after Martha discovers Francesco's relationship with Mehmet. But Özpetek's film also offers insights and outlooks that take new cultural developments into account. The decisive factor here is the economy of the gaze, which often runs counter

31 See Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio, who recognizes *Hamam*'s and *Le fate ignoranti*'s complexity within Özpetek's transnational, diasporic context as process of becoming, which "destabilizes discrete categories like homosexual and heterosexual, inasmuch as it foregrounds bisexual behaviour and the process of becoming a queer, namely a person aware of how one's non-normative sexual and erotic practices define one's sexual identity as non-normative too" (164).

32 See Girelli for such a reading, which argues that "Özpetek's use of an Orientalist code relates dynamically to the experience of dislocation, serving the director's mnemonic strategy by framing and conserving a specific national image" (23). While for Girelli "'transnational' may well denote a double bind, a double cultural weight to negotiate" (25), Elena Boschi proposes considering Özpetek's films in terms of a critical transnationalism "without erasing the national as the dominant backdrop against which differences are defined, while incorporating a consideration of popular music in the national imaginary" (247). Boschi thus aims to complicate Özpetek's making visible queer identities by showing how such identities are spatially and musically contained and 'othered' within the landscape of Italian mainstream cinema.

to the diegetic action. From the moment Francesco sets foot on Turkish soil, his homoerotic desire manifests itself. But this desire is never directly articulated verbally, but primarily through looks.[33] His first visit to an old hamam is marked by a clear division along the axis of age. The older Turks go about their bathing routine very traditionally, unimpressed by the foreigner. It is the young Turks, among whom Mehmet will then also belong, who express their erotic interest in Francesco through looks, which Francesco then increasingly reciprocates.

This eye contact, guided for the viewer through Francesco's perspective, is due to a modern cultural practice that can be described as cruising. As the Viennese architect Helge Mooshammer writes in his study on the connection between architecture, psychoanalysis, and queer cultures, cruising is about an experience of architectural spaces that lies beyond traditional practices and is based in particular on the playfully performative interface of visibility and invisibility. Cruising describes "a way of approaching," which, as Mooshammer notes, "can lead us to a different notion of architecture: its locations do not necessarily require visual-materialized representation, they are often dark, blurred, and 'in-visible.' They unfold in the physical performance of the desires and imaginations of those involved" (7, transl. R. P.). Not only has the practice of cruising, i.e. the search for anonymous sexual adventures in public space, proven to be an "often targeted field of cultural studies and queer studies in recent years" (Mooshammer 8, transl. R. P.). The theorization that follows this practice, in turn, makes it possible to describe certain paradoxical phenomena that have arisen in the course of urban modernization processes.

The recoding of a same-sex sexual practice like that of Islamic cultures, which is based on a traditionalist segregated gender order and does not understand sex between men as homosexuality, to a nontraditionally coded, genuinely homoerotic desire can be grasped with the changed architectural script of cruising in the hamam. According to the psychoanalytically shaped idea of a homophobic society—and I would claim that Özpetek follows such an

33 It should be noted that Francesco spends his first night at the Pera Palas Hotel (more about the history of this hotel in chapter 4), where a zealous young bellboy leads him, gossiping about the history of famous visitors of the hotel, to his room, the "Trotskiy Room," named after 'one of those former' celebrities, the Russian revolutionist Leon Trotsky. The bellboy's tongue-in-cheek comment "Good night, Signor Trotsky" might well be taken as a foreshadowing of Francesco's 'revolutionary' personal change.

idea—this homophobia is characterized by the separation of being and doing, existence from action. In her study on *Space, Time, and Perversion*, Elizabeth Grosz describes this as a form of oppression that "reduces homosexuality to a legible category […] and in a certain way minimises the threat that the idea of a labile, indeterminable sexuality, a sexuality based on the contingency of undertaking certain activities and subscribing to certain ideas, has on the very self-constitution of the heterosexual norm" (226). Grosz's interest, however, lies "in the ways in which homosexual relations and lifestyles, expelled from and often ignored by the norms of heterosexuality, nonetheless, seep into, infiltrate the very self-conceptions of what it is to be heterosexual, or at least straight" (227). The reopening of the hamam in Özpetek's film is situated on the threshold of the rediscovery of such an erotic potential, now under the auspices of coherence of existence and action. The two men, Francesco and Mehmet, no longer belong to the homophobic generation of Mehmet's father, and they can therefore meet in this space of possibilities for pleasure, seduction, and subversion. In this sense, the film is dedicated to an analytical-archaeological technique of unearthing hidden layers and exploring a spatial practice of sexual desire as a process of mutual transformation.[34]

The two cultures from East and West, which meet here in this space of possibilities, encounter one another both symbolically and spatially, and precisely on the threshold of a historical turning point: with the appearance of Francesco, not only is Mehmet's queer desire set free, the women in the host family also increasingly begin to oppose the *nom du père*, the law of the father, and develop their own structures of desire. The father, still completely relying on the traditional model of a homosocial male society, is gradually losing his authority as the head of the family. The son moves abroad after Francesco's death and presumably continues on his way as a young urban *gay* man, the daughter does *not* marry the chosen candidate, and the mother allies with the emancipated foreigner, Francesco's Italian widow Martha, who is now the new hamam owner.

34 In his description of cruising, Mooshammer employs the archaeological metaphor that Freud used as a model of psychoanalysis. He sees the peculiarity of this metaphor "not in offering a straightforward explanation of what is buried under other layers, but rather in exploring the resistance that a spatial practice has to deal with (in particular its dynamics of discovering, uncovering, reading and understanding material, and thus also the cultural handling of locations and their architectural designs)" (40, transl. R. P.).

Archives of Feeling: *Hamam*'s Queer Temporality

Francesco's death was supposed to restore the established temporal and spatial order according to which the outdated bathhouse was to give way to a modernized and lucrative business. But Martha's claim of ownership interrupts this scheme, ultimately breaking apart the utilitarian forward movement into a more profitable future. Instead, she concludes her late husband's plan of rekindling a past tradition, thus actively resisting the pressure of capitalist corporate policymaking. But her interference has even more consequences upsetting social orders and gender customs.[35] Queer scholars such as Elizabeth Freeman call such forms of interruptions "queer temporalities" as points of resistance to a given spatiotemporal order "that, in turn, propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others: that is, of living historically" (xxii). Besides intervening in 'male' economic affairs, a "hiccup in sequential time," as Martha has produced in her act of defiance and restoration, has "the capacity to connect a group of people beyond monogamous, enduring couplehood" (3). Her decision to stay in Istanbul as self-chosen exile in the state of widowhood and as hamam owner is a queer act of dissidence, I claim, that both commemorates her queer husband and the queer history of the hamam without, however, discounting her own presence and autonomy. On the contrary, as her letter writing suggests, she is very much engaged with current affairs.

The last moments of the film, after Francesco's violent death, are dedicated to Martha, who sincerely mourns her estranged husband after all—she puts on his wedding ring on her own finger—and wanders through the halls of the hamam, caressing the newly restored ornaments. Her voiceover can be heard as she reads from her letter to Mehmet. She tells him about family news, her enthusiasm to take over the hamam, and ensures him of her devotion to him. The letter points to the future ("Since you left, the neighborhood has rapidly changed," she writes), but it can also be related to the past through her admission of lingering melancholy: "Sometimes at sunset, I am overwhelmed by melancholy. But then suddenly this cool breeze comes and carries it away. It's a strange wind that I haven't felt anywhere else. Almost flattering. And he loves me." With these last words of the films and while she stands on top of a roof in the breeze looking out onto the Bosphorus, her voice blends into a hypnotic

35 I want to thank Michael Taylor for urging me to give Martha's character more space and attention.

song, "Istanbul Uyurken" ("While Istanbul Sleeps"), which then concludes the film. The song includes lyrics that like Martha's feelings oscillate between loss, despair, and hope such as "Köhneyi anlat / Seni çok sevdiğimi / Düğümlü yolları / Çıkmaz sokakları / Yarın yarın diyerek / Geçen zamanı" ("Tell me about the old / I love you so much / Knotted paths / Dead end streets / Saying tomorrow tomorrow / Elapsed time").[36] Emphasizing the film's archival agenda, the trance music blends past and present through its fusion of traditional Middle Eastern sounds and percussion, and modern ethno-ambient electronics. Also, Martha's melancholic feeling can be related to the traditional Turkish notion of *hüzün*, a feeling of loss, of pain over the death of loved ones, which in a Sufi understanding also denotes a feeling of personal insufficiency caused by not getting close enough to God. In his autobiography, Orhan Pamuk interprets this Turkish variant of melancholia in a modern sense. For him, it represents a failure in life, a lack of initiative, evoked by the humiliation of the fall of the Ottoman Empire and 'ruling over' a ruined Istanbul ever since. Crucially, however, for Pamuk this feeling of melancholia is a transmitted affect derived from, among others, Flaubert's foreign travel writings and his exoticized images of Istanbul. *Hüzün* in Pamuk's understanding is a symptom of the Turkish "love-hate relationship with the Western gaze" (212), since it reveals the way "we see ourselves reflected […]. To feel this *hüzün* is to see the scenes, evoke memories, in which the city itself becomes the very illustration, the very essence, of *hüzün*" (Pamuk 84). *Hüzün* still today allows Istanbulites to perceive their metropolis through the eyes of outsiders, as a formerly splendid treasure of the Ottoman Empire that has deteriorated into a city of ruins, and therefore Pamuk gets a sense of communally shared pride from this foreign gaze: "But being unable to depend on tradition alone as my text, I am grateful to the outsider who can offer me a complementary version—whether a piece of writing, a painting, a film" (260). As contradictory or even masochistic as this may seem, *hüzün* in this interpretation allows contemporary Istanbulites to longingly commemorate former splendor through Western exoticized images but at the same time generate a sense of identity as survivors in a ruined, but cherished city (Laschinger 113). And just as for Pamuk artworks give *hüzün* an aesthetic expression, making it culturally productive by integrating

36 Özpetek contributed to the lyrics of the song by Transcendental, a duo comprised of Aldo De Scalzi and Pivio, two Genoese composers, who aim for a fusion of Mediterranean/Middle Eastern musical traditions, Sufi spiritual ceremonies, and modern electronics ("Transcendental").

the contradictory perspectives of outsiders and insiders, Özpetek's film can be said to embrace *hüzün* on multiple levels: as an homage to the director's homeland, as an archival commemoration of the living history of the hamam, and as a narrative that questions and transcends traditional norms of gender and sexuality. Martha's melancholia cannot be identical to that of native Istanbulites, since *hüzün* is "not a feeling that belongs to the outside observer [...]. Westerners coming to the city often fail to notice it" (Pamuk 93). But precicelsy because she senses *hüzün*, as the film's final images and sounds in their archival thrust of blending past and present suggest, Martha is transitioning from an outsider to an Istanbulite who starts to feel like one, too.

Although the intercultural gay love story leads nowhere, other doors have opened and paths have branched out. Martha is not victimized and silenced by the apparent gender asymmetry that seems to favor male queer desire. On the contrary, she moves out of the binary male/female model, frees herself from the strictures of heteronormativity, and ultimately steps into a queer position herself. The film's last images show her as powerful, independent woman, and even though she is and will remain a foreigner for others, she is shown to have found her equilibrium, being in harmony with her situation and surroundings, specifically the hamam and Mehmet's family, and also significantly Istanbul at large. Through Martha, the film's ending links the past—the Ottoman legacy of the hamam customs as well as, more personally, the legacy of Francesco's aunt as hamam owner—to the present and the future in ways that supersedes conventional, normative forms of association, belonging, and identification. Jack Halberstam thinks of such eccentric economic practices, visionary life schemes, and strange temporalities as "queer uses of time and space [that] develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (1). This notion of queerness is detached from sexual identity and therefore from the tendency to focus on gay men, as I myself have partly done when tracing the 'gayness' of hamam practices throughout history and especially in Özpetek's film *Hamam*. As my discussion of his other film, *Harem Suare*, has shown, a queer archival project needs to pay particular attention to female queer desire and identity, precisely because it is less visible as well as less fixed. While in many ways the hamam is more discernibly a space of male desire for men, it also and more clandestinely can be a space of female desire for women. Özpetek's portrayal of female characters and desires offers queer possibilities in rewriting the past and imagining future memories outside a dominant temporal and spatial organization. Through inviting us to look to partially negated and forgotten,

partially recovered and revived histories, Özpetek's films bring the past into play with the present in ways that counteract a temporality which is based on linearity and that José Esteban Muñoz has called the autonaturalizing temporality of "straight time." For him, straight time "tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life. The only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality, the spectacle of the state refurbishing its ranks through overt and subsidized acts of reproduction" (22). In contrast, queerness's time means stepping out of the linearity of straight time and imagining another collective belonging, reaching from a depressive position of failure to a queer futurity. Within the confines of straight time, the queer can only fail (Muñoz 173), and in the case of *Hamam*, Francesco's futile attempt to stop the spatiotemporal norms of straight time undoubtedly counts as failure. But his project in the end does not. Martha's continuation and completion of Francesco's project shows her as a queer agent in her own right, giving credence to the film's ultimate purpose of demarcating heteronormativity's bias against a queer aesthetics of desire.

Francesco's hamam project has made a symbolic—and for Mehmet and Martha real—return to the traditional family system based on gender segregation and reproductive heterosexuality impossible. And this paves the way for an increasing queering of gendered and cultural orders, from the desiring female gaze on a male as an erotic object, to the intercultural love of two men and an emancipated female foreigner establishing herself as a Turkish hamam owner. In this sense, the film dedicates itself to an archeological technique of excavating hidden layers of desire. The hamam figures in all this as a space of various potentials of seduction and thus as a spatial practice of sexual and cultural transformations. Throughout history, the hamam has reinvented itself as a truly transnational site, "a living cultural heritage spanning time, geography, religion and ethnicity. […] one of the rare remaining multicultural utopian spaces: a space of hope" (Sibley and Fadli 117). In both his films but especially in *Hamam*, Özpetek pries open the archives of a queer past, provides a glimpse of ephemeral traces from other times and places that may appear nostalgic but that nonetheless "assist those of us who wish to follow queerness's promise, its still unrealized potential, to see something else," a surplus that is both cultural and affective and, in the words of Muñoz, "a queer feeling of hope" (28). Likewise speaking of the affective power that archives—and especially archives of sexuality and queer lives—can evoke, Ann Cvetkovich emphasizes that the preservation must include not only knowledge but feeling. And precisely because it is difficult to document and chronicle intimacy,

sexuality, and love through the materials of a traditional archive, it is even more important that archives of feelings "address the traumatic loss of history that has accompanied sexual life and the formation of sexual publics, and [] assert the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect" (110). Borrowing the term from Toni Morrison, Cvetkovich calls this "emotional memory," remembering "details of experience that are affective, sensory, often highly specific, and personal" (110). These unusual, idiosyncratic, incoherent, fragmented, and ostensibly arbitrary archives record and preserve what has been contested and invisible. Earlier histories of homoeroticism and same-sex relations—"different forms of sexual public cultures" (Cvetkovich 111) that I have been tracing in this chapter—remain a historiographic challenge that nevertheless can be conjured and preserved through the affective power of artworks such as films: "Popular culture has much to teach us about this archive because it is so vulnerable to dismissal as trivia or waste or low culture and because it is also kept alive through personal history, nostalgia, and other queer investments" (Cvetkovich 137). A film like *Hamam* is, to my understanding, emotionally invested in archiving stereotypes and myths about the hamam and at the same time in reinventing this past for a different, resignified future. The pain of loss is not discarded, the cultural mourning of a lost hamam tradition and the personal mourning of a lost beloved are both conjured and intricately intertwined. Even though this is a film of the 1990s, predating the peak in queer visibility and freedom in the next decade, it still today figures as a counternarrative, as a powerful critique of the political backlash of the present. With its call to feel beyond its ending, *Hamam* urges to open up queer spaces for affecting otherwise.

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