



CHAPTER 7

Reshaping ‘Turkish’ Breasts and Noses: On Cosmetic Surgery, Gendered Norms and the ‘Right to Look Normal’

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With a large number of reconstructive plastic and cosmetic surgeons, Turkey now ranks among the top ten countries worldwide with the highest number of cosmetic surgeons per capita (ISAPS 2017), and its cultural capital Istanbul has become a regional centre for the beauty and fashion industries. Against the background of neoliberal urban restructuring, the feminization of the urban service sector and an expansion of the urban middle classes, aesthetic body modification and surgery have become ever more normalized forms of consumption. There are specific bodily concerns in Turkey that are the product of history and that tie a particular bodily appearance to imaginations of modernity, femininity and urban citizenship. ‘Heavy’ female breasts and ‘large’ or ‘hooked’ noses, whose surgical treatment is the focus of this chapter, are clearly among these.

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In the language of medical experts in Turkey, heavy female breasts and large or hooked noses are national bodily defects, and their treatment is commonly labelled ‘ethnic plastic surgery.’ Developed by US-based cosmetic and plastic surgeons, the notion of ethnic plastic surgery is commonly employed to account for the specific physical characteristics and different anatomic features of ‘minority patients,’ that is, non-Caucasian plastic surgery patients (cf. Mann 2014; Slupchynskij 2005). In societies in which ethnic features are tied to marginalized minorities, the correction of these features has been characterized as a major motivation for cosmetic surgery. For example, in his comprehensive cultural history of cosmetic surgery, Sander Gilman (1999) foregrounds ‘racial passing,’ that is, the desire to pass visibly from a negative category to a positive one, as ‘the basic motivation for aesthetic surgery’ (ibid., xvii). According to Gilman, the rise of cosmetic surgery at the end of the sixteenth century in Europe thus rested on attempts by those constructed as dangerous, namely the syphilitic, ‘no longer to be identified as different’ (ibid., xxi), in this particular case by reconstructing a nose lost from illness. Gilman shows that, with the emergence of ideologies of race and racial science, passing meant primarily racial passing, with patients turning their deviant ‘Jewish,’ ‘Irish’ or ‘Black’ noses into normative ‘Aryan,’ ‘English’ or ‘White’ ones (ibid., 23).

This chapter seeks to contribute to the debate on the standardization of bodily appearances by probing an understanding of cosmetic surgery, in particular nose and female breast (reduction) surgery, as a classed, gendered and racialized desire for a ‘normal’ body image in urban Turkey. Labelling specific cosmetic surgery procedures ethnic, I argue, is problematic not only because it sets a norm, namely Caucasian physical features, while labelling looks that deviate from this norm ‘ethnic.’ Also, as the following account will show, it pays little attention to the complexities of local meanings of and motivations for surgery within particular social, urban and cultural settings. Drawing on surgeons’ and religious experts’ accounts of what constitutes a ‘normal’ appearance with regard to nose and breast surgery practices on the one hand and female patients’ accounts on the other, this chapter analyses the multiple and changing meanings of nose and breast surgeries for women in contemporary urban Turkey.

As sexualized and prominent personal features, large breasts and noses are not problematic for women as racial or ethnic features per se, but they may become so in some cases and in particular social settings. Not least, female breasts and noses are scrutinized by a patriarchal society that seeks control over the sexual female body. Against this background, my

ethnographic data suggest that surgery may also be a tool for women hoping to reduce 'dominating stares' on their bodies by 'normalizing' them (cf. Garland-Thomson 2009) in an attempt to regain control. This, I argue, complicates the 'negative hermeneutics' (Felsky 2006, 273) of feminist approaches to beauty practices that focus on the oppressive, painful and harmful aspects of cosmetic surgeries that these certainly also involve. In line with recent approaches to beauty and cosmetic surgery (Coleman and Figueroa 2010; Elias et al. 2017; Jarrín 2017), I argue for an understanding of these as affective processes embedded in particular biopolitical histories as well as a transnational beauty economy.

In the following, I will discuss feminine beauty and normative body images in Turkey along four major lines, first, in respect of the historical relationship with hegemonic norms of femininity and citizenship in Turkey, where the 'Western' and secular woman has long been a normative ideal, including beauty, one that has been subject to heated debates and transformations in Turkey's recent past. Secondly, as a relationship that cosmetic surgeons and religious experts claim can be 'objectively' determined and treated. Thirdly, as a normative and affective practice engaged in by women to create 'normal-' and 'natural-looking' bodies that no longer defy the norm or, by refraining from aesthetic body modification, that actively violate the norm. Finally, this chapter documents the normalization of aesthetic body modification in urban Turkey, where an increasing number of (young) women, in spite of its risks and possible violation of religious norms, have come to regard cosmetic surgery as a standard practice of bodily grooming and proper self-care.

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter is part of ongoing research into femininity, beauty work, and aesthetic body modification in Istanbul,¹ drawing on fifteen months of anthropological field research, including five short field trips since 2011 and an uninterrupted period of eleven months of fieldwork in 2013 and 2014. I conducted some one hundred ethnographic guideline interviews, mostly scheduled and recorded, with customers and patients of hair and beauty salons and clinics; beauty salon owners and workers; cosmetic surgeons and other experts, among them tattoo artists; activists in various feminist organizations; a fashion photographer; and an Islamic scholar who rules on the permissibility of beauty treatments. Moreover, the project employs media analysis, including the systematic analysis of

newspaper archives, online forums (*Kadinlar Kulübü* and *Fetva Meclisi*), and so-called makeover shows on private television. In 2013 and 2014, I attended the annual Istanbul Beauty and Care Fair and distributed questionnaires among its visitors. I also distributed questionnaires among participants in two municipal training courses on make-up and facial care. The interlocutors selected for presentation in the following are not representative, but they do draw attention to some common themes and issues with regard to aesthetic practices in Istanbul, Turkey.

In focusing on the manufacture of beautiful, feminine, and more generally proper bodies in a particular urban setting, I seek to contribute to a fast-growing body of feminist literature on the politics of beauty. Women's involvement in beauty work has long been criticized as the effect of disciplinary power (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993; Sawicki 1991) and indeed, as functioning as a pervasive 'beauty myth' that has triggered a feminist backlash in patriarchal societies (Wolf 1991). More recently, however, there has been what Elias et al. (2017, Pos. 366) call a feminist '(re)turn to beauty.' Recent studies have now come to re-centre the affective and future-oriented 'aspiration to normalcy' that is also involved in women's beauty work (Coleman and Figueroa 2010). My research contributes to this debate and is rooted in an inter-sectional critique of earlier feminist approaches to beauty that tended to assume the existence of a generalized female subject who is a 'racially unmarked, implicitly heterosexual woman, of unspecified class' (Craig 2006, 162). Instead, Craig suggests we conceive of individuals and groups as differently located in fields that promote 'particular ways of seeing beauty' (ibid.). Such an approach underlines the importance of ethnographic research on particular economies and cultures of beauty in relation to gendered subjectivities.

BODY AESTHETICS AND NORMATIVE FEMININITY IN URBAN TURKEY

As elsewhere, in urban Turkey the construction of femininity, and with it bodily beauty, is highly normative and excludes certain bodies or else creates pressure to modify them visually. It has long been tied to disciplinary practices that are a prerequisite for achieving what is considered 'the right look.' Being involved in beauty work and bodily self-care is widely expected, and women's failure to do so is commonly associated

with a lack of discipline, cleanliness and, more generally, moral degeneration. An oft-quoted saying in beauty salons and clinics is that ‘there are no ugly women, just careless ones’ (in Turkish, ‘*çirkin kadın yoktur, bakımsız kadın vardır*’). Urban middle-class women’s standard routines of bodily grooming are increasingly relegated to professional beauty service workers and include regular manicures, pedicures, complete body and facial hair removal, eyebrow shaping, the dying or highlighting of hair and, for middle-aged to younger elderly women especially, various anti-ageing treatments. Most importantly, as I will show in what follows, cosmetic surgery has become an ever more normalized technique for (re)shaping bodies so that they correspond to dominant ideals of gender.

However, the visible manufacturing of normative femininities in urban Turkey includes not just beauty (service) work, but also processes of identity politics and self-fashioning. Thus, it is the secular, modern and ‘Western’ feminine body that has long been the unmarked category in urban Turkey, against which other women have been measured and found wanting as a deviance from the norm. This normative ideal has to be seen within the context of Turkey’s nation-building process as a young republic seeking to replace and modernize a supposedly ‘degenerate’ Ottoman elite, one that nevertheless already regarded itself as a part of European cosmopolitan society based on civilizational principles and the desire for modernity (Aydin 2007). In her analysis of beauty contests in early republican Turkey, A. Holly Shissler (2004, 117) shows the pivotal role of the public presentation of feminine bodily beauty in republicans’ attempts to project images of just such a modern and ‘civilized’ nation. The public presentation of uncovered, yet ‘honourable’ (in Turkish, *namuslu*) women in state-sponsored beauty contests redefined patriarchal concepts of honour and shame to ‘secularize Islam’ and ‘normalize the female body’ (ibid.). The outcome was an imaginary ideal of the secular Republican woman that one pious interlocutor in Jenny White’s ethnography on the pious new middle class described as ‘blond and modern, also honourable (*namuslu*), clean, sexually honourable (*iffetli*). ... [and wearing] her skirt below the knees’ (quoted from White 2013, 141). In recent decades, this hegemonic ideal has been subject to change due to the increased importance of hyper-femininity in contemporary consumer capitalism, with its emphasis on youth and sexual attractiveness in women on the one hand and political changes towards more pious gendered norms on the other.

Much has been written on the role of Islamic dress and sartorial styles in creating new Islamic (elite) lifestyles and feminine subjectivities following the banning of the head scarf in the public sector during the 1980s and 1990s.² In an atmosphere of ‘hyper-politicization’ (Kandiyoti 2015, 8) and ongoing public debate and conflict about gendered roles and norms after the consolidation of power by the conservative and pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) and its increasingly authoritarian rule, women’s bodies have recently become a battleground once more between imaginations of modernity and tradition, secularism and Islamism. Today, a new Islamic urban middle class is questioning the taken for granted-ness of the earlier feminine ideal by promoting more pious modes of outer appearance and public behaviour for women. Defying common assumptions, and despite the problematic nature of aesthetic body modification from a religious perspective, upwardly mobile pious women often share a willingness to engage in forms of hyper-feminine beautification and actively negotiate the boundaries of moral permissiveness and bodily appearance (Liebelt 2016). Perhaps as an outcome of these dynamics, as what follows will show, the narrative focus in cosmetic surgery is on the ‘right to look normal,’ rather than the ‘right to be beautiful.’

During the 1990s and early 2000s women in Islamic dress who ventured into the more ‘secular’ neighbourhoods of Istanbul’s upper (middle) classes were commonly subject to verbal abuse and harassment as space intruders (Turam 2013). More recently, an increasing number of stories of attacks on women for dressing ‘provocatively’ in shorts or miniskirts, sporting ‘un-Islamic’ tattoos, make-up or piercings and more generally behaving ‘loosely’—for example, by kissing or consuming alcohol in public—have gone viral in the social media and the wider public.³ To varying degrees, however, *all* women are subject to dominant stares that, according to Garland-Thomson (2009, 42), function to regulate looks and may lead those stared at to employ strategies of ‘gender and racial passing.’ As one interlocutor, Esma,⁴ a veteran beauty service worker and beauty school teacher in her early thirties observed:

[In Turkey today,] there’s no one who dresses in a really extravagant way, really. ... If you go to Spain, for example, you see girls dressed in miniskirts, coloured tights and Converse [shoes]. Also in Britain. They might even go to work like this, dressed in sneakers. ... In Turkey, you won’t see this. You won’t even see young women cutting their hair very short.

The maximum is like this (points to her chin), and they will go to have blow-outs all the time to look presentable. ... People pay much attention to what others might think of them, [wondering:] ‘If I do this, what will they think?’; ‘If I do this or that, what are they going to say?’; ‘How will they look at me?’⁵

The quote illustrates the strong normative ideals of gendered identities and body images in urban Turkey and shows that ‘people’, as Esmâ puts it, take great care of what others might think or say or how they might look at them. While she quotes long hair and ‘presentable’ looks as gendered ideals for women, adherence to such norms, as what follows will show, now prominently includes cosmetic surgery which promises not only to ‘beautify,’ but also to ‘normalize’ the body.

BODY AESTHETICS AND THE ‘RIGHT TO LOOK NORMAL’

In the past two decades, cosmetic surgery in Turkey has developed from an elite phenomenon associated with the urban *sosiyété* (high society) to an increasingly common procedure among younger and middle-aged women especially. The most common cosmetic surgery procedures in Turkey—in descending order and according to the statistics gathered by the International Society of Aesthetic and Plastic Surgeons (ISAPS 2017)—are rhinoplasty or nose surgery, breast augmentation, liposuction or fat removal surgery, eyelid surgery, and until recently, breast reduction for women. While this list resonates with the global average, as well as with the ISAPS listings for the US, Brazil, Japan, Russia and India, who currently top the list of countries with the highest number of plastic surgery procedures worldwide (ISAPS 2017), nose and breast reduction surgeries are more frequent in Turkey than in any of the countries just listed. As mentioned above, these procedures are commonly called ‘ethnic plastic surgery’ by cosmetic surgeons in Turkey and associated with particular national or even ‘racial’ bodily defects. By utilizing ‘standard’ measures of beauty, cosmetic surgery promises not only to beautify bodies, but also to normalize them.

In contrast to Brazil, where Alex Edmonds (2007) reports cosmetic surgeons proclaiming the ‘right to be beautiful,’ in Turkey, where the High Commission on Religious Affairs and other religious experts regularly warn that aesthetic body modifications are a ‘sin’ (*günah*) for both men and women, cosmetic surgeons and their patients more usually

champion the ‘right to look normal,’ framing cosmetic surgery within a discourse of health rather than aesthetics. Religious experts commonly emphasize *inner* beauty in contrast to outer appearance and frequently quote the well-known saying that beauty and ugliness lie in the eye of the beholder. In Sunni Islam and the Hanafi school of thought and jurisdiction, which are dominant in Turkey, changing one’s features as created by God and, following a particular hadith, shaping one’s eyebrows and tattooing are prohibited (*haram*), an interdiction that has been confirmed by a number of religious commissions and individual clerics.⁶ However, even the most staunchly conservative religious experts are prepared to consider exceptions to this rule, for example, if the surgery is predominantly a matter of health or is intended to correct ‘inferiority complexes’ or bodily ‘abnormality,’ according to the High Commission on Religious Affairs.⁷ In prototypical fashion, Ahmed Şahin, a chaplain at the Istanbul Süleymaniye Mosque, who regularly contributed to and provided advice on cosmetic surgery in the popular conservative daily *Zaman* (1986–2016), differentiates between two cases in response to a reader’s query about the permissibility of cosmetic surgery. In the first case, a person looks ‘normal’ but desires to become more attractive, for example, by changing their nose. In such a case, cosmetic surgery is ‘absolutely not permitted’ (*haram*) because it means changing ‘God’s creation’ for no good reason. In the second case, an ‘extraordinarily ugly’ person desires the same surgery because they feel ‘disabled’ or ‘anxious’ due to their appearance. In this case, cosmetic surgery is permissible (*caiz*) because it is a ‘medical treatment’ to ‘correct an abnormality.’⁸

This raises the question of how religious experts establish criteria for scrutinizing bodies and measuring bodily ‘normality’ or ‘abnormality.’ To this question, another religious scholar and advisor on cosmetic surgery, Nureddin Yıldırım, venerated as Nureddin *Hoca* (teacher Nureddin) by his many followers, replied:

I mean, there are certain ideal standards in the creation of human beings. What is a standard human being? Women are usually 165 cm in height and men about 170 cm. So, if there is one boy who reaches 220 cm at the age of 18, how to account for that? It is an exception to the norm. Then again, if a lady ties herself up and does stretching to grow taller, this is a different matter altogether. The latter is denying God’s creation; the former is what we call a malfunction. It is a [medical] problem, because it is an exception from the standard norm. Like being born with six fingers, or having a

crooked finger... These things can be fixed by cosmetic and plastic surgery. ... Being created as an exception to the norm and being fixed by plastic surgery – there is no problem according to our religion. It is not up to us to criticize. We also consider it normal to fix a broken bone. But, for example, if a 45-year-old man or woman makes themselves look the age of 35, this is forbidden by the religion. It may be considered a form of deceit. ... And both the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and the Holy Koran prohibit deception.⁹

The quote illustrates how the description of bodily averages and the establishment of standard measurements, in this case a person’s body height, function as ‘a prescription for normality’ (Garland-Thomson 2009, 30). Other examples of permissible cosmetic surgery provided later on in the same interview included the reduction of large noses that made ‘a woman look like a man’ and the reduction of female breasts so large that they created backache and could be considered a ‘natural disorder.’

In an age of the medicalization and normalization of invasive procedures, whenever possible the treatment of aesthetic ‘abnormalities’ is thus regarded as legitimate even by those who were otherwise quick to condemn the same kind of procedure because of its potentially deceitful impact, or because it was based on a presumptuous intention that was disrespectful of divine creation. As in other situations of Islamic decision-making, the final decision is with the believer, who is forced to scrutinize his or her intention (*niyet*) to undergo surgery. It should be emphasized that the arguments put forward by religious experts like Şahin or Yıldırım, which are widely reported and discussed in the Turkish public sphere, have a legitimizing impact on decisions regarding cosmetic surgery regardless of whether patients consider themselves pious or not.

Cosmetic surgeons, even more than religious experts, claimed to be able to objectively establish and measure bodily ‘abnormalities’ or ‘deformations,’ often routinely employing tables of standard measurements in their medical practice. One interlocutor, Prof. Dr. Ismail Kuran, who was also President of the Turkish Society of Plastic-Reconstructive and Cosmetic Surgery in Turkey, championed the idea of a ‘mathematics of beauty’:

[In cosmetic surgery,] you need mathematics. Even on the face, on most parts of the body, you can use mathematics. I have been employing these measurements, not only on the nose, but also on the breast, and now this

[procedure] has become a standard method to decide about the right implant, the right width, the right projection [in breast surgery].... I think mathematics is a very important part of the *scientific* process and for those [who believe that] cosmetic surgery cannot be taken only as an artistic study. It is a combination of science and artistry, so you have to develop some kind of measurements to regulate your practice.¹⁰

When, for example, I wondered how these measurements responded to patients' different and changing desires, given the recent trend towards smaller breasts, he responded:

Of course, there are fashions, but we should also talk about the *optimum*. I am not talking about trends here. You might want a bigger breast, but there are limits. What happens if your shoe number is 39 and you try to use [a shoe of the size] 35? – it's impossible! What if you use 45? It will be loose. Just like our feet or hands, breasts have a size to start with. This includes the width and height, and if you go beyond your limits, you're in trouble. ... There are more than five hundred different types [of breast implants, in terms of] shape, height, width and projection. So, breasts are an important area for the decision-making process with mathematics, actually.

As will have become clear, Prof. Kuran's understanding of bodily aesthetics relies on the idea of a universal, transcultural 'optimum' that clearly extends beyond cultural or personal taste, not to speak of fashion. Elsewhere in the interview, Prof. Kuran called this quality 'harmony,' with a beautiful person being someone 'who has harmony about her body and face.' This kind of bodily harmony was clearly measurable, and the fact that his medical practice relied on the refashioning of bodies in accordance with a sample of 'standard measurements' indeed qualified it as science, in contrast to an understanding of cosmetic surgery as merely 'artistry.' As Jarrín (2017, 134–35) notes, in Brazil, plastic surgeons conceptualize cosmetic surgery as a strategy for harmonizing patients' somatic features in association with the idea of treating the 'miscegenation' of Brazilian society. On the background of a historical linkage of cosmetic surgery with eugenic thought, Brazilian cosmetic surgeons established a 'right for beauty' that is tied to nationalist narratives of progress (ibid., 54–65).

To sum up, in their medical and theological practices respectively, cosmetic surgeons and religious experts in Turkey likewise assume that 'normal' looks can be objectively established. They regard the treatment of

bodies that defy standard norms of appearance as a ‘right’ untouched by moral objections or religious bans. I will now turn to female patients’ cosmetic surgery practices, namely breast and nose surgeries, that are intended to create ‘normal-’ and ‘natural-looking’ bodies that no longer defy the norm.

RESHAPING ‘TURKISH’ BREASTS

Human breasts are a symbol of femininity, and the popular imagination often seems to regard them as its measure. Thus, in her insightful book on *Staring*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes that ‘[t]oo much breast means too much femininity; too little breast means not enough’ (2009, 143). Given that women’s breasts come in very diverse shapes and sizes, Garland-Thomson remarks upon the astonishing fact that, in the ubiquitous media images of them, they ‘look remarkably uniform’ (ibid., 147). This too is the case in Turkey, where women use various techniques, including (push up) brassieres, breast-shaping treatments in beauty salons and cosmetic surgery, to change the size and shape of their breasts, and indeed, as the following account of Özge’s breast reduction surgery will show, to ‘normalize’ them.

Since the early 2000s, there has been a global trend towards smaller breasts, which has also impacted on Turkey, where during the early 2000s, according to the acting general secretary of the Chamber of Turkish plastic reconstructive and aesthetic surgeons, Ali Barutçu, the ideal breast size fell ‘from 85 to 80 [cm]’, with the exception of performing artists, who apparently continued to prefer larger breasts.¹¹ The same report goes on to quote him saying that ‘[b]reast reduction surgery reduces stress in social life while it also improves the quality of women’s everyday life and their success in working life.’ The following account will help to understand in what ways women’s breasts could possibly be linked with social stress, the quality of life and professional success in contemporary urban Turkey.

Özge, a mathematics teacher at a private college and a cheerful woman in her mid-thirties with accurately shaped eyebrows, short black hair and a preference for casual dress, framed her breast reduction surgery within a discourse of patriarchal oppression of the sexualized female body in Turkey. Early on in the interview, Özge distanced herself from ‘those women who easily have cosmetic surgery,’ stating that for her, ‘cosmetic surgery had always been, well, something that popular

culture *enforces* upon women.’¹² Instead, she emphasized the health aspect of her surgery, which resulted in the removal of two kilos of fat from her breasts, as her main motivation for undergoing the procedure. However, when I expected Özge to continue talking about backaches, an ailment women seeking breast reduction surgery often reported suffering from, she told me about the restriction of movement she experienced as the result of the ‘over-sexualization’ of her pre-surgery body. In order to explain what she meant by this, she recounted the restrictive atmosphere of her coming of age as the daughter of rural-urban migrants in a working-class neighbourhood in Istanbul during the conservative post-military putsch era of the 1980s:

We were raised in the culture of the neighbourhood [*mahalle*]. At those times, girls who had their periods and whose breasts started growing, they couldn’t play outside anymore. It was a society that forced you to grow up early. ... If this [menstruation and the development of female breasts] happens too early, it is a disadvantage for the girl. I remember feeling ashamed [because of my breasts]. My friends were saying: ‘Are they really this big?’ Such kind of things really troubled me. I had many problems during adolescence. I felt it [my body/breast] was ugly. ... I mean, as a kid, you want to play outside with your friends, but your physique has turned you into a woman from one day to the other. In this [cultural] context, I experienced puberty too early.

During high school, Özge remembered being constantly on a diet, trying to reduce the size of her breasts. Dieting, however, proved useless, she said, because, pointing to her breasts laughingly, ‘Everything I ate went there!’ While Özge attempted to reduce the sexualized femininity of her body by losing weight, she felt she was becoming ever more attractive to men:

Girls are sexual objects in Turkey. For example, if your hips are big, it is not considered erotic. But if you are slim and your breasts are big, you’re like ‘very sexy.’ ... Like I said, you can have a big body and just be a fat person, but me – my body was thin, I was so thin. My size in clothes was 36, and my breast measurement was like 100 [cm], so these two things combined made me look too sexy.

This resulted in ever more (self-chosen) confinement, because whenever she ventured out alone Özge felt men staring at her breasts, with some

also harassing her verbally. Accordingly, she tried to hide her breasts under 'layers of loose clothing.' It was only after breast reduction surgery that Özge felt she was no longer being stared at and happily proclaimed that now, quoting her cosmetic surgeon, she had 'standard-size breasts.' As soon as the bandages were removed, she went shopping for a new and indeed sexier set of clothes, including tight T-shirts and, for the first time in her life, a bikini. Now that her body was 'normal' and she felt she was in a position to control and regulate her publicly visible attractiveness better, men's stares no longer made her feel vulnerable. While her choice to undergo cosmetic surgery met with a divided response from her feminist friends, Özge felt that it had earned her respect among her female colleagues at the private college where she taught and where many female employees engaged in various forms of aesthetic body modification.

In contrast to Özge, who was single when she undertook breast surgery, many younger interlocutors intended to postpone their breast reduction surgeries until after they got married and had had children, fearing that the surgery might impact on their ability to breastfeed or else harm their attractiveness for their sexual partners, who were commonly assumed to prefer larger female breasts. This was the case with Sevda, the fashion-conscious daughter of a beauty salon owner in the conservative neighbourhood of Fatih, who fantasized about breast reduction surgery. Sevda's large breasts made her feel uncomfortable about her body, especially since she knew from female relatives who suffered from the same kind of 'problem' that these tended to become even larger after giving birth and breastfeeding. While Sevda's maternal grandmother had undergone breast reduction surgery several years earlier, other relatives shunned the procedure out of moral and religious conviction. Among them was her aunt, whose breasts Sevda had recently and accidentally seen naked, an encounter that continued to haunt her. For Sevda, her aunt's breasts made her look like 'the typical old peasant woman (*köylü kadın*),'¹³ namely those in her family's hometown in the Black Sea region, who had given birth and breastfed many children. Inheriting this look, Sevda confided, was among her greatest fears.

Talking to me about her breasts shortly before and again shortly after she got married, Sevda was still not prepared to undergo surgery. She knew that her husband actually 'liked' her larger breasts and feared that reducing them might prove risky for their sexual relationship. As a 'good wife,' she hoped to seek his consent in the near future, perhaps after

giving birth and breastfeeding, which would provide her with the opportunity to frame the surgery as a form of postnatal ‘reconstructive’ surgery that also had a health aspect to it, namely the reduction of backache.

In postponing breast reduction surgery, Sevda was juggling contrasting expectations of her as a young urban, modern and sexually attractive woman. These expectations and her related fears were tied to two distinctive connotations of larger female breasts in Turkey, on the one hand the erotic female breast as a strong symbol of sensuality and sexuality, commonly seen as desirable by male sexual partners, and on the other hand the maternal breast, signifying fertility and exuberance but also, in the popular imagination, a characteristic of the devalued peasant woman. As indicated by common caricatures of the *köylü kadın*, as well as media coverage of the topic,¹⁴ if not carried by an urban upper-class woman or a performing artist, larger female breasts risked linking its wearer with a lower social status and those regions most readily associated with peripheral rural life in Istanbul, namely the Black Sea or the Anatolian southeast.

Changing the size of their breasts was never an easy choice for women, one that was commonly hidden from or else had to be negotiated with relatives and/or sexual partners. Within more conservative or, as in Özge’s case, feminist circles, decisions about breast reduction surgery were commonly framed within a discourse of medical normalization and health, rather than aesthetics. Moreover, women whose parents, like Özge’s and Sevda’s, had been part of the large influx of rural-urban migrants to Istanbul in the 1960s and 1970s seemed to be especially haunted by the symbolic connection between larger female breasts and rural cloddishness. However, as exemplified by Sevda’s hesitation to undergo surgery and Özge’s account of men’s predatory stares at her pre-surgery breasts, they were also well aware of the normative link between larger female breasts, sexual attractiveness and gendered roles, carefully weighing their surgery decisions against it. In spite of the high costs, pain and risks involved, the reshaping of breasts seen as ‘abnormal’ was commonly seen as a powerful way of managing one’s adherence to gendered norms. To Özge, her surgical choice to go for more ‘standard-size’ breasts seemed an almost subversive act against the ever more sexualized, hyper-feminine bodily ideals that for many years had made her the object of dominating male stares and subsequently, restriction of movement. On the other hand, it was also embedded in a professional environment of socially aspiring women, who clearly knew how to take care of themselves and actively participated in the booming beauty service economy.

RESHAPING 'TURKISH' NOSES

As mentioned above, the idea of an aesthetic optimum is deeply racialized in Turkey, with 'large' female breasts and noses being considered especially problematic and widely associated with more peripheral regions in Turkey, and more generally, rural backwardness. Rather than being considered a national characteristic per se, 'big' or 'hooked' noses are linked with the Black Sea region and the Anatolian southeast in particular. For example, in an interview with the *Hürriyet* daily newspaper in 2006, cosmetic surgeon Prof. Dr. Onur Erol, himself a media star in Turkey and internationally renowned for his so-called Turkish Delight-nose surgery technique (Erol 2000), talked about different types of 'deformed' noses in need of correction, differentiating between the 'big and pointed noses' of the Black Sea population and the 'big and fleshy noses' of those originating in the Turkish southeast.¹⁵ As the religious scholar Nureddin Yıldırım, mentioned above, put it, '[w]omen especially are obsessed with their noses ... Actually, in Turkey, in the Black Sea and in eastern regions, women *do* have big noses. So when they migrate to big cities like Istanbul, they think they draw attention to themselves.' While interlocutors rarely linked their decisions about nose surgery with migration directly, they nevertheless often half-jokingly stated their desire to change their 'Turkish' or 'Greek' noses into smaller 'French' ones, reflecting yet another geography of beauty.

Among them was Ruken, a 23-year-old woman who was introduced to me by her uncle, a friend of mine, shortly after she moved in with his family while flat-hunting in Istanbul. About a year prior to our first meeting, she had graduated from university and taken up employment as a lawyer in Izmir, where her family had resettled from the eastern Anatolian region of Tunceli/Dersim during the Kurdish uprising and violent armed conflicts in the region during the 1990s. Shortly before starting to apply for jobs in Istanbul and eventually moving there, Ruken had undergone nose surgery to remove her 'bump,'¹⁶ as she put it. Arriving for our interview in a café in central Istanbul straight from a lecture given by the well-known philosopher and feminist-socialist writer Gülnur Acar-Savran, Ruken joked about the irony of talking to me about her cosmetic surgery right after having listened to a lecture on feminism, something she clearly perceived as a contradiction in terms. She quickly moved on to tell me how important the surgery had been for her, after many years of suffering from a nose that had made her feel 'really ugly,' even 'handicapped.'

She had fantasized about nose surgery ever since her childhood, but was forced to wait until she was finally able to pay for it out of her own savings, this being the first major purchase from her own income. With her new, smaller nose, she felt perfectly equipped to start ‘a new chapter in life,’ as she told me, and prepared for moving to Istanbul. About ten months after the surgery, with a new position in an Istanbul-based law firm and all signs of surgery gone, Ruken happily recounted how finally she felt ‘perfectly normal.’ Indeed, she expressed surprise at the fact that her initial euphoria about her long desired new nose had quickly given way to a sense of ‘normal everyday life.’ While she had not talked to her new colleagues or Istanbul friends about the surgery, she knew of others having had the same type of surgery. She mused that for young upwardly mobile women in Istanbul, a smaller nose or else cosmetic surgery were simply ‘part of the deal.’

There is a history of the operated nose in Turkey, with the President of the Chamber of Plastic Reconstructive and Aesthetic surgery in Turkey telling me that ‘it used to be a [pre-]fabricated operation before: small noses with upturned tips.’ This earlier aesthetics of the ‘standard’ operated nose, popularized by Turkish celebrities such as pop star and cosmetic surgery aficionada Ajda Pekkan, who had her first nose surgery in the mid-1960s, were now widely rejected as ‘overdone,’ ‘artificial’ or even ‘tasteless,’ especially if performed by patients from lower social strata, who might engage in cosmetic surgery as a form of conspicuous consumption. Instead, many cosmetic surgery patients and surgeons were concerned with what were commonly called ‘natural’ designs. These were seen as being both in line with the aesthetic standards of the day and hardly recognizable as having been operated upon. Ruken, mentioned above, had also been concerned about acquiring a ‘natural-looking’ nose and engaged in much research along these lines in preparation for her surgery, especially in the large nose surgery section of the popular online forum Women’s Club (*Kadınlar Kulübü*).¹⁷ With the help of this virtual community, she had chosen a surgeon who was renowned for his ‘natural’ nose surgery designs. When this surgeon suggested that Ruken return with the picture of someone whose nose she liked, her resulting query posted in the forum triggered a long debate on natural-looking designs. While some uploaded pictures of celebrities, whose noses they liked for their naturalness—among them that of the Turkish model and actress Deniz Akkaya, rumoured to have had her own nose modelled after the looks

of US American model Liv Tylor by celebrity surgeon Onur Erol—others warned that emulating another person's nose posed a great threat to natural looks.

The common reference to 'naturalness' with regard to bodily aesthetics is closely linked to the ideal of looking 'normal', yet it also relies on a particular aesthetic style that draws heavily on current discourses of the beauty industry. In its claim to produce 'naturalness,' this discourse relies on an understanding of the body as something that has to be made, preferably through the consumption of beauty services and cosmetics, rather than something that has been given. Among interlocutors, naturalness as the outcome of surgery was an important criterion in talking about satisfaction with their surgery, with those remaining dissatisfied claiming that surgery had made them look 'unnatural.' Among them was Sibel, a middle-aged entrepreneur, who, thirteen years after her first nose surgery procedure, lamented that, by changing her 'kind of characteristic nose' into an unnatural-looking smaller one, she had 'turned into a regular cosmetically touched woman.'¹⁸ While for Sibel too 'normalizing' her nose had been a major motivating factor for surgery, paradoxically the standardization of her body as an unnatural-looking one that had been operated on becomes similarly problematic.

Indeed, in the 2010s, the aesthetic modification of noses had become so common among young, upwardly mobile women in Istanbul that the decision of individual women not to undergo surgery was commonly seen as a very 'brave' or 'cool' choice, even as a fashion statement. Talking about her favourite Turkish model, Didem Soydan, a female fashion photographer told me: 'She is blond, she has blue eyes, she's one of the most popular models [in Turkey] – *and* she has a big nose! I think she is *so cool!*'¹⁹

In an age of consumer capitalism that makes one desire and easily achieve the 'right look' through cosmetic surgery, Didem Soydan's 'big' nose, which seemed to defy the dominant beauty norms, could indeed be interpreted as a 'cool' countercultural aesthetic move. Engaged in by someone who otherwise conformed to dominant beauty ideals, Soydan's 'refusal' of cosmetic surgery of course did little to destabilize the pressure to 'normalize' bodies for Ruken or others. Instead, the decision not to reshape one's 'Turkish' nose (or breast, for that matter) was beyond debate for those less firmly established within the urban geography of fashion and beauty, even if, like Özge or Ruken, they shared feminist positions that were critical of beauty.

CONCLUSION

This chapter contributes to the debate on standardization in bodily appearance by describing the normalization of cosmetic surgery in Turkey's recent past, especially with regard to women's nose and breast (reduction) surgery. Given the construal of large female breasts and noses as particularly prevalent and problematic in urban Turkey, the treatment of these bodily 'deformations,' in medical language, was commonly narrated as based on an affective desire for, and indeed a right to, a 'normal' rather than (merely) 'beautiful' look.

Whereas early republicans were eager to emphasize that Turks formed a homogenous 'race,' with predominantly light skin and eyes and a straight nose, thereby idealizing the look of the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal 'Atatürk,' as the perfect representation of this type (Özyürek 2004, 219), in contemporary aesthetic discourses a rather heterogeneous image and ideal of national 'mixed-ness' is emerging. At the same time, hitherto dominant (secular) gendered norms have been challenged by the rise of a conservative urban middle class, as well as ideals and images of hyper-femininity in the global market. Similar to what Edmonds discusses with reference to cosmetic surgery in Brazil, rather than creating room for manoeuvre for women by making it possible for them to conform to one of many different models of gendered beauty, the national ideal of 'mixed-ness' puts additional pressure on women to conform to the demand to 'take care of oneself.' Given the demands of hyper-feminine outer appearances in an age of consumer capitalism and medicalization, taking care of oneself also comes to include invasive forms of beautification, such as cosmetic surgery.

Moreover, similar to Brazil, where northeasterners hope to become upwardly mobile by 'getting rid of the noses that mark them as rural migrants' (Jarrín 2017, 135), there is an imagined national geography of beauty in Turkey, where the large influx of domestic migrants from the Black Sea and south-eastern Anatolia to Istanbul has led to a particular form of social distinction by long-term urban residents. Female breasts and noses, as well as their surgical modification, are imbued with specific meanings in this particular location, with large breasts, for example, connoting both erotic femininity and rural backwardness, depending on who has them and at what point in the lifecourse. Tanıl Bora (2010) analyses the stereotypes of the urban and secular elite, the so-called White Turks, towards those who do not qualify as modern city-dwellers in their

eyes as a form of ‘racism that has an emphasis on class, relating social differences of people with cultural and even physical characteristics.’

Immigrants to the city or those living in more marginal neighbourhoods are scrutinized visually for not belonging fully and may thus put particular emphasis on reshaping their bodies to conform to certain gendered ideals concerning their appearance. For them, intensive beauty work proves especially tricky, because both their bodies *and* their aesthetic bodily modifications may give away their more peripheral regional backgrounds, especially if the latter produce ‘unnatural’ results.

To sum up, there are strong normative ideals of gendered images and subjectivity in urban Turkey that are regulated not only by patriarchal control of the female sexual body, but also by affective desires and an ethos of women taking care of themselves. As argued above, the negative hermeneutics of earlier feminist studies of beauty failed to grasp this complexity. Cosmetic surgery patients, many of whom are aware of and even share the feminist critique of beauty, still manage to draw satisfaction from and legitimize their efforts to beautify themselves as a form of ‘normalization.’ Beauty, writes Alex Edmonds (2007, 371), in his ethnography of cosmetic surgery in Brazil, ‘can become a “right” during a neoliberal regime where rights are re-interpreted as access to goods and the antidote to social exclusion is imagined as market participation.’ For the young women portrayed in this chapter, the consumption of cosmetic surgery is an often hard-earned, albeit double-edged ‘right’ that may indeed enable them to move more freely and participate in the urban economy embedded in a particular history of biopolitics within a transnational imaginary.

NOTES

1. This chapter is based on a larger study supported by the German Research Foundation (No. LI 2357/1-1) and the Chair for Social Anthropology at the University of Bayreuth, in affiliation with the Department of Sociology of Boğaziçi University.
2. See, for example, Çınar (2005), Gökarıksel (2009, 2012), Gökarıksel and Secor (2009, 2010), Navaro-Yashin (2002, 78–113), Secor (2001), Turam (2013), and White (2002, 29–55, 212–41).
3. See, for example, the Turkish daily *Cumhuriyet Gazetesi* from 17 July 2016, available online at http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/video/video_haber/568899/Moda_da_gericiler_cimlerde_oturan_vatandaslara_saldirdi.html (accessed 14 February 2017).

4. The names of research sites and participants without a public role or function have been replaced with pseudonyms throughout this article.
5. Interview with Esma, 3 April 2014.
6. For example, the Religious Commission Committee in Konya prohibited cosmetic surgery in 2000 (*Hürriyet* 2000. Konya müftülüğü: estetik günah [Konya Religious Commission Committee: Aesthetic Surgery Is a Sin]. *Hürriyet*, 19 December), the grand mufti of Istanbul, Ahmet Okutan, in 2005 (Ferah, Metin 2005. Ameliyatla güzelliği dinimiz tasvip etmez [Our Religion Does Not Agree to Beauty through surgery]. *Hürriyet*, September 10) and the mufti of Edirne, Ömer Taşcıoğlu, in 2009 (*Hürriyet* 2009. Edirne Müftüsü: Estetik yaptırmak günah [The Edirne Religious Commission Committee: To Undergo Aesthetic Surgery Is a Sin]. *Hürriyet*, July 17).
7. Quoted from Özdemir, Şemsinur 2005. Estetik ameliyat ruh sağlığını bozuyor. *Zaman*, 5 June.
8. Şahin, Ahmed 1995. Estetik ameliyat caiz olabilir mi? [Can Aesthetic Surgery Be Permissible?] *Zaman*, 20 July.
9. Interview with Nureddin Yıldırım, 22 October 2013. The following quotes by Yıldırım are also taken from this interview.
10. Interview with Ismail Kuran, 10 July 2014. The following quotes by Kuran are also taken from this interview.
11. *Hürriyet* 2002. Kadınların tercihi artık küçük göğüs [Women Now Prefer Small Breasts]. *Hürriyet*, 17 March.
12. Interview with Özge, 21 January 2014. The following quotes by Özge are also taken from this interview.
13. Interview with Sevda, 21 July 2014. The following quotes by Sevda are also taken from this interview.
14. For example, in an article about breast reduction surgery published in the *Hürriyet* daily, the focus of reporting on the topic is on southeastern Anatolia, where, the authors claim, the waiting period for breast reduction surgeries is six months in the leading regional university hospital, and surgeons no longer give out appointments (*Hürriyet* 2010. Bu ameliyat için 6 ay sıra yok [For This Surgery, the Waiting Time Is Six Months]. *Hürriyet*, 28 October).
15. Quoted from *Hürriyet* 2006. Dünyanın en güzel kadınları Türkler [The Most Beautiful Women in the World Are Turkish]. *Hürriyet*, 6 December.
16. Interview with Ruken, 10 March 2012. The following quotes by Ruken are also taken from this interview.
17. See <http://kadinlarkulubu.com/portal/> (accessed 4 March 2016).
18. Interview with Sibel, 15 January 2014.
19. Interview with Demet, 18 December 2013. In spring 2015, the tabloid press reported that Didem Soydan did have nose surgery (see, for example, Posta 2015. Didem Soydan burnunu neden yaptırdı? [Why Did

Didem Soydan Have Her Nose Done?] *Posta Magazine*, 15 May, online: <http://www.posta.com.tr/didem-soydan-burnunu-neden-yaptirdi-foto-graflihaber-282173>, accessed 28 September 2017).

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