

“Ceremonial Circumcision” as One of the Mechanisms Which Enables the Regeneration and Intergenerational Transmission of Manhood Culture in Turkey

N. Gamze Toksoy

Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University

Ayşegül Taşıtman

Sabancı University

Abstract:

Male circumcision is a male tradition which can be traced back to ancient times and is still practiced today as a religious duty by Jewish and Muslim societies. In today’s modern societies, across different geographical locations, there are cases in which members of different religions practice it by claiming that it enables the protection of men and baby boys from sexually transmitted illnesses. However, apart from such cases and the operations on baby boys carried out at hospitals, in Muslim and patriarchal societies like Turkey, male circumcision is ritualized by the majority of society. It is perceived as male rite of passage and practiced in a manner similar to a wedding ceremony - preparations extend over many days.

Starting from the day the preparations begin until the day the ceremony is realized and the day after, ceremonial circumcision involves culture codes centering around praises to manhood and symbolic meanings. Several details like, what kind of preparations are made before the ceremony, what parts the members of the family play in the ceremony, which place is chosen for the ceremony, how it is decorated, the qualities of the costume the circumcised child is wearing, the words and the moves repeated during the ceremony and the invitation cards chosen for the

ceremony give us significant footprints of how manhood is being regenerated in certain patterns in certain geographical locations. In other words, as a manhood practice which involves direct interference to male existence, ceremonial circumcision regenerates the manhood myth which is strong, enduring, unlike women, or belonging to the masculine society to found the basis of it.

In this article how circumcision ritual which is carried out as a religious and cultural practice is provided with a legitimate ground in social sphere and how it takes part in the generation and transmission of the existing manhood patterns are going to be problematized. The analysis that will be included in the text is based on an ethnographic research realized by a group of men who have experienced the circumcision ritual. The narratives related to circumcision rituals collected during the research will be examined in detail; in addition to this, the codes of manhood which have become common will especially be evaluated. Besides, the circumcision pictures every Muslim family has in their family album today in Turkey, the invitations announcing the circumcision ceremony in the social sphere also have important part in the spreading and transmission of manhood culture. In this regard, the analysis of visual aid will be covered in the article, as well.

Key words: Male Genital Circumcision, Ceremonial Circumcision, Masculinity, Man/Masculinity Studies, Gender, Social Memory

Türkiye’de Erkeklik Kültürünü Yeniden Üreten ve Kuşaklar Arası Aktarımını Sağlayan Mekanizmalardan Biri Olarak “Törenselleşen Sunnet”

N. Gamze Toksoy

Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi

Ayşegül Taşıtman

Sabancı Üniversitesi

Özet:

Erkek sunneti, kökeni oldukça eski dönemlere dayanan, günümüzde ise yahudi ve müslüman toplumlarında dini gerekliliklerden biri olarak hala sürdürülmeye devam eden bir erkek geleneğidir. Erkek sunnetinin günümüz modern toplumlarında dini gerekçelerin yanında çeşitli coğrafyalarda ve farklı dinlere mensup erkeklere/erkek bebeklere cinsel hastalıklardan korunmayı kolaylaştırdığı iddiasıyla da yapıldığı örneklerle rastlanmaktadır. Ancak, bu tür örneklerden ve erkek bebeklere yönelik hastahanelerde yapılan sunnet operasyonlarından farklı olarak, Türkiye’deki gibi kimi müslüman ve ataerkil toplumlarda, erkek sunneti toplumun geniş kesimleri tarafından ritüelleştirilen, erkeklığe geçiş töreni olarak kavranan ve günlerce hazırlanılan bir düğün olarak pratik edilmektedir.

Bu metinde; Türkiye’de dini ve kültürel bir pratik olarak sürdürülen sunnet ritüelinin toplumsal alanda meşru zemini nasıl sağladığı ve mevcut erkeklik kalıplarının yeniden üretilmesinde ve aktarımında nasıl rol aldığı sorunsallaştırılacaktır. Araştırmanın sorunsalı, görüştüğümüz sunnet ritüelini deneyimlemiş erkeklerin anlatıları ve ritüelin aktarımını sağlayan materyaller etrafında örülecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erkek Sunneti, Törenselleşen Sunnet, Erkeklik, Erkek/Erkeklik Çalışmaları, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Toplumsal Bellek

The male image is founded upon willpower, hierarchy, unconditional commitment and loyalty to qualities such as courage, fearlessness and invincibility. Yet, in the modern and modernizing societies of today's world, how much of a response to this traditional image can be found? During the past twenty years manhood studies have developed significantly, discussions about the eye-opening questions related to how the roles and acceptances attributed to men in the modern societies are perceived and how they are transformed continue today. It can be seen that the "new" forms manhood is transformed into are frequently discussed with thematic centering on the "manhood crisis" in modern societies. The determination of the crisis meets on the common ground that it is no longer possible to legitimize the superiority of men for biological, cultural, economical or ideological reasons. It is determined that a number of facts such as the changing living conditions, dissolution of the relations in the countryside, the modern organization of work life, the structure of the information society etc. mean the dominant qualities of the patriarchal societies are transformed (Sancar 111; Castells 134; Kimmel/Kaufman 261-266). In today's societies in which life is reorganized completely, significant transformations have been and are being experienced in the roles and acceptances concerning gender. On the other hand, in the aspect of Connell's definition, "beyond the visible power struggle hegemonic manhood continues to make its presence felt in the organization of private life and cultural processes" (246). In the countries which depend on male dominance like Turkey, we observe that manhood is pursued – more specifically- as a practice of power. The status of manhood in the basis of gender continues to be a determiner over the relationships among people of the same sex. Masculine dominance which is nourished with certain social institutions can still employ acceptance generating mechanisms and is accepted in the public sphere.

The determination of the fact that manhood arises not from biological and natural causes, but from social and cultural conditions, inevitably points out that manhoods from different cultures and cultural practices intended for men will vary (Cornwall&Lindisfarne 11-12)

Considering this point, in Turkey manhood carries qualities special to geographical location and culture. The effort made to understand these qualities suggests the possibility of revealing the relations between different manhoods and cultural functionings they are in negotiation with, instead of perceiving manhood homogeneously through one point of view, as if a single definition is possible. Hence, the ongoing and changing forms of manhoods are nourished by numerous cultural practices, and while some of these practices lose their influence over time, some others can be adapted to present conditions and continue their existence. In this study, we will focus on circumcision as a male practice and despite the fact that social life has been widely reorganized through Turkish modernization, we will direct our attention to basic questions such as how we can give meaning to male discourse and the unchanging sides of its products, how we can define the ways manhood has penetrated into daily life and how we can evaluate the means which enable the spreading and transmission of pursued manhood practices.

Although the manhood studies in Turkey do not have a deep-rooted history, there do exist studies related to subjects within the scope of our research, such as how the male identity is formed as an identity and by which social institutions it is supported, how it can relate to militarist-nationalist opinion, especially revealing culture based qualities of manhood are increasing in number. (Kandiyoti; Atay; Sancar; Selek; Kuruoğlu; Erdoğan; Altınay)ⁱ. With these kind of studies, we can see corrosion of the traditional character of the system in parallel with the changes in the network of social and economical relations in the Turkish society which is dominated by patriarchal values. However, apart from these corruptions not resulting in the elimination of inequality between the sexes, it has led to the functioning mechanisms of male hegemony to become more and more complicated. It can be said that the norms and values which are influential in the organization of daily life are still highly defined from the masculine point of view. Therefore, examining the social mechanisms and cultural practices which are influential during the process of forming the male identity is of basic significance in order to understand the essence of manhood today and the social structure

which is becoming more and more conservative every day (Kandiyoti 187).

Let us start from the way a male child is raised: in the street, in work life, in the army where he must carry out compulsory service; in brief, across each field of social life structured with norms, the hegemonic qualities are protected in the aspect of Turkish men. In this sense, hegemonic male image is in social circulation and pursues its hegemony above the legitimacy it creates in the social ground. The mediums which enable the continuity of its legitimacy are the rituals which are rooted and repeated unquestioningly as much as today's media which deal with masculine values. Rituals like circumcision are examples of how the male body is "trained" and turned into cultural image in the practices of daily life. On the other hand, these kinds of traditional institutions provide the environment in which codes related to manhood that are protected in the collective memory are regenerated through repetition. In this context, it must be remembered that ceremonies have the function of making a connection with the past to form a basis for the identity of a group. The repeated words during the rituals, practices reminding figures belonging to the roots refresh social identities in the social memory. As a result, the sense of belonging to the collective identity is strengthened (Assmann 56).

Male circumcision is a male ritual which can be traced back to ancient times. A fresco which depicts a circumcision ritual in Ancient Egypt shows that the known proof is dates back to 2400 B.C. (Gollaher 1-4) Some research points out that the practice of circumcision can be dated back to very early times (DeMeo, J. 9-13). The study of circumcision is one of the most disputed issues in contemporary anthropology and anthropologists are criticized male circumcision from multiple angles during the last century. Silverman's analysis of anthropological literature on male circumcision elucidated the wide range of approaches to male circumcision (419-427). While some of these approaches focused on circumcision as moral, political, and scientific obligations of a cultural practice some others criticized this practice as an impassioned debate on human rights. In this article, we

are focusing on male circumcision as religious duties which reinforce masculinity and as a cultural indicator.

The most widespread reason which brings the practice of circumcision from the past to the present and enables its validity, even today, is the fact that it is accepted as the compulsory condition of religious duties. The unifying aspect of religious tradition differentiates him from his other (female body and the uncircumcised); in other words, ostracizes the other and brings him closer to the same kind. Owing to the mark of circumcision, the male identity and the values attributed to manhood are approved socially. In this context, it has been emphasized that it has social meanings as a sign of masculinity (Immerman and Mackey 267-273; Gün 32; Paige 40-47; Segal 119). The continuity of this sign with rituals, which comes to surface with the rise of patriarchy can be associated with the fact that patriarchal tendency is still strong. Although religious reasons and traditions are shown as the causes of the circumcision ritual today, the real cause is that hierarchical superiority of men continues to exist in patriarchal societies (Montagu).

In today's Muslim communities like Turkey, the practice of circumcision which is an absolute must for boys to be admitted to religion carries significant traces of how symbolic meanings related to manhood and codes are embedded, how religious duties are functionalised in this context and how it can still be performed in modern societies. The event in which these traces are unfolded is the circumcision ceremony. The ceremony enables the inheritance of circumcision as a tradition from generation to generation and its social legitimacy. Circumcision becomes a stage of transition to manhood by way of the ceremony. It then is the indicator of belonging to male society and finds its place in the socially approved belief system.

The holiness derived definition and design of the institutions which are indispensable for the perpetuity of the masculine reign enable their continuity and transmission. With the use of holiness, social institutions and the meaning codes which shape their characteristics can be more effective and permanent. Hence, circumcision is applied as a

religious necessity in Turkey as it is applied in most of the countries which are populated by a muslim majority and there is social acceptance and approval of the ritual. In fact, in the Koran, the holy book of Islam, there is neither a direct reference to circumcision, nor a suggested way of celebrating it. The religious side of circumcision is based on the prophet Muhammad's sayings which state that male children must be circumcisedⁱⁱ. Similarly, there is not a source clearly stating at what age circumcision must take place. A muslim man can be circumcised at any age. The period between the ages seven and twelve which is known as puberty is mostly recommended for children. As for the ceremonial circumcision practices in Turkey, the tradition of circumcising children within the recommended age range is substantially approved of. In certain cases, when there are two sons in a household, even if one is much younger, they can be circumcised at the same time.

The perception of circumcision as a religious obligation in Islam enables the continuity of this practice; thus it keeps existing by repeating itself in the social memory. For this reason, the ethnographic observation of the ceremony provides us with a rich field of study in which we can perceive how the words and practices repeated through the ceremony become permanent and turn into memory codes that we can associate with manhood. Hence, we can see how the sexist discourse and practices related to body become ordinary in daily life and how their intergenerational transmission become stronger as they become norms. The words and behavior repeated through the ceremony, the relations founded with the objects, the new design of the place, wishes, prayers, all give new meanings to the images of the past today, recycle them and turn them into mediums of male hegemony.

On the other hand, rituals and ceremonies are a way of embracing the values transmitted from generation to generation in order to be part of a certain culture as well as being applications of the practices which are products of those values. For this reason, a way of perceiving the social acceptance of circumcision and how every man positions himself within the male culture is achieved by listening to the experiences of the circumcised men. Therefore, the basic arguments in the article you have

before you, center around the circumcision stories of the men who have agreed to share them with us. Certainly, the limited number of narratorsⁱⁱⁱ we could interview cannot be claimed to represent the entirety of circumcision experiences in this country. None the less, listening to the experiences of the circumcised men in their own words makes it easier to see the connections between the present gender regime and those experiences. As we looked for the answer to the question, we could see the transitivity between the stereotypes concerning rooted genders in society and circumcision ceremonies. This was observed through the circumcision stories of these men who were born in different regions of Turkey, who have experienced living in a cosmopolitan city (Istanbul) and who have grown up in average economical conditions and had educational opportunities. The common emphasis in the narratives has enabled us to understand how the judgments which found hegemonic male identity are reorganized in the field of discourse and to deepen our questioning about the male existence under the masculine hegemony. Below, in spite of the changing life conditions, roles, identities, and relations between genders in today's modernizing Turkey, the continuing masculine discourse and practices which are influential on daily life and the relations between them and the details of the ceremony will be examined by focusing on the details of the ceremony.

Ceremonial Circumcision, First Step Taken to Manhood

The circumcision ceremony for which the child and the family have been waiting for weeks, months, even years and to which relatives and neighbors are invited is arranged through a number of preparations. A considerable part of the preparations take place in the house of the child to be circumcised. The child rests on the specially adorned circumcision bed after being circumcised and the guests visit him there. For this reason, the house is cleaned days in advance, the place of the bed is determined, the decorations for the bedhead are selected with care; moreover, additional shopping is done

for the bed lining and decorations. The house is prepared so that it can host the guests during the circumcision ceremony and the following few days and treats like snacks and beverages are kept available. Among the preparations, the costume of the circumcised child is of significant importance because of the symbolic meanings it has. Particular shopping is done for the circumcision costume in advance. As every piece of the costume has a different meaning and function, details are taken into consideration. A comfortable undershirt is bought and appropriate underwear and pajamas to be worn after the circumcision are chosen. The outer pieces of the costume usually consist of circumcision pants, shirt, a cloak worn over the shirt, and most of the time a hat designed like a tarboosh.



Figure 1: Circumcision dress (see www.sunnatelbisesi.com)



Figure 2: Circumcision dress (see www.sunnetelbisesi.com)

Protection from all evil is wished for the circumcised child with the band saying ‘*maşallah!*’^{iv} worn over the circumcision costume and blue beads^v. The hat, the gilded cloak, the scepter which completes the costume turn the male child almost into a king. One of the interviewees expresses what he remembers about the costumes as follows:

*I remember going to İstanbul to buy the circumcision needs. Lots of things are bought, all just for you. Such an important thing! Your aunts, mother are making an effort. Some have bought something and they are making a cloak, there is the ‘*maşallah!*’ band, those strange scepters, crowns. That is, you*

become the sultan's son! It was beautiful in that sense. Then the bed is made, huge, like a real sultan's bed." (1986, İzmir)

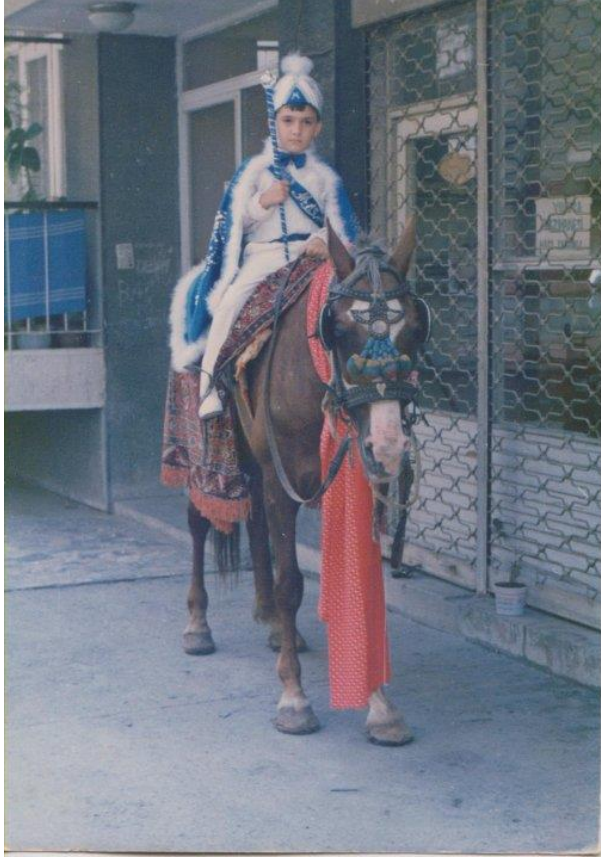


Figure 3: *Circumcised child* (Taşıtman's Family Album, 1988 used with permission)

The bed which is prepared for the guests to see the child and the balloons hung around the bed are of material that can entertain the child. Besides, the gifts which the guests bring for the child (gold, money, wristwatch, toys etc.) are placed on the bed in a way that they can be seen. A jewellery case or pillow are kept ready for these. Moreover, above the bedhead nationalist symbols such as the Turkish flag and religious symbols like sections of the Koran and streamers written with 'maşallah' are given place. The direct association of circumcision with

decretals are supported with the religious items that we see in different ways, symbols with religious references and religious practices starting from the preparations of the feast till its end. On the other hand, we encounter nationalist symbols and nationalist discourse in certain occasions throughout the ceremony. When it is taken into consideration that nationalist point of view and nationalist movement are realized with the power relations based on social gender, the relation between the employment of nationalist elements during the circumcision ceremony and the “masculinizing” practice of the male child can be seen. The manhood myth which is nourished with discourse such as devotion to one’s country, owning the mission of defending the country, sacrificing it all for one’s country, have the function of strengthening and supporting the relation between hegemonic manhood values and militarism. When institutions like the army which enable the continuity of militaristic and nationalist factors are observed, it can be seen that they completely involve gendered practices. As a matter of fact, turning a young man into a warrior requires certain institutional organisations and cultural practices. To be invincible, powerful, fearless, to endure physical pain, etc. are qualities which are stipulated for men by militarist-nationalist policies and also lead to the reinforcement of the sexist policy in which strict hierarchy between sexes gets stronger (Sancar 153-174; Enloe 208-224; Nagel 68-90) The perception of manhood as the basic element which the nation is founded on and the mission of defending the country assigned to him, require him to be a strong, courageous, venturous, warrior. Likewise, endurance to pain, trial of the body with pain which are frequently emphasized in the narratives are prices to be paid “to leave behind the dependence and weakness of childhood and have a new feeling of belonging in the different world of the grown up men” (Segal 169). Thus, the male body trained with pain rises in rank and fictionalised courage is attributed to men by the society. The masculine words which form these virtues are uttered to the male child repeatedly during the circumcision feast. The symbols which are placed beside the bed are praised and the child is taught to respect and value these symbols.



Figure 4: *Circumcision bed* (Hanged paper means “Real men must be circumcised”) (Interviewees’s Family Album, 1995 used with permission)

After the preparations in the household are completed, the family members and the close relations start organising the circumcison feast. One day before the day of circumcison feast, the child is dressed in the circumcison costume and taken to a Turkish bath with the children of the relatives and other invited men. After the ‘purification’ and ‘cleaning’ ritual, again in the circumcison costume, visits the relatives and kisses the hands of the elderly. If there are any religiously significant places in the city the family inhabits, these places are visited to make wishes and pray for the circumcison to be auspicious.^{vi}

In some regions the circumcison feast starts with the henna ceremony. The henna ceremony is a festivity which takes place the night before the circumcison to which close relations and family friends are invited. Snacks are served and guests dance with the child to be circumcised. The henna night is a commonly practised part of the Anatolian culture and is celebrated at the bride’s house the day before the wedding or it can also be organized for a man who is conscripted (Sharabi 11-42; Acara 91-94). Henna is applied to the bride’s hands with

best wishes. Likewise, it is applied to the child's hands praying that he will be a healthy, strong and successful man in the future. As it has been mentioned above, the symbols identified with male strength can be observed during the henna night. One of our interviewees describes his henna night as follows:

The circumcision festivities last two days. Before the circumcision the henna night takes place. There is entertainment and henna is applied to my hands. That day, women applied henna to their hands besides me. Henna was applied to my hand in the shape of a gun, my thumb pointing up and my index finger forward. Not in my hand palm but to my fingers like that. (1986, İzmir)

The men interviewed used themes in common to define the day of circumcision as a stage one has to go through, or even a childhood trauma. An interviewee born in 1981 describes the necessity of circumcision as follows;

It is as if circumcision is like a doxa, it was going to happen anyway. I mean, nobody had to cheer me up or prepare me for the event. There was no need for neither my father nor my brothers to prepare me as it was going to happen; it had to happen. This thing that had to happen was completely a requirement of religious codes and Islam which had to be carried out (1981, Van).

In these stories, "uncle circumciser" who comes to the house to circumcise the child is a feared person. Most of the time he is not a doctor, but someone experienced in circumcising. Before and after the circumcision the child bears in mind the scary image of this man holding a razor in his hand for a long time.

The circumciser is a feared profile, but uncles tell about him, your father tells about him and you just remember the known razor. (1985, Ankara)

The circumcisers in the village...well, the man never had schooling, but he circumcises. For two days we couldn't walk. On the fourth day, we could stand up, I waddled for fifteen days. What's worse we had it done in winter, I was galled all over. (1975, Kars)

Besides, the person who holds and keeps the child still during circumcision, 'kirve', tells him calming words such as he should be a strong man, he should endure pain and be a real man. He is also a person who will be an important figure in the child's future. Being a Kirve is a sociocultural institution in the tradition of circumcision. Kirve can be a friend of the family or a close relation like an uncle or an adult man who is granted rights over the child like a father by the family. Even when there is no blood relation between the child and his kirve, he is counted as one of the close relatives of the family and is of moral and material support to the child. Kirve may also have a share in the circumcision feast and his wife or his mother may help with the preparations.

Circumcision is realized in a room of the house where women (especially the mother of the child) are not allowed to enter, with the operation of the uncle circumciser accompanied by the kirve and close male relations who are present in the room to hold the child still. The child who may shout and cry during the operation is calmed down with words like, a real young man/man does not cry. After the child is circumcised, he is put to the circumcision bed. The family members, relatives and guests visit him lying in his bed. They celebrate and dance before him. Special dishes are prepared only for him. They try to entertain him all day so that he can forget his pain. The circumcised child gets pats on his back, hearing sentences like, "now you are a man", "from now on you are a strong man enduring pain". He is spoiled with gifts such as toy cars mostly and toy guns and rewarded for his courage. However, the liveliness of the festivity day is replaced by the painful healing process of the child's wound. The majority of the interviewees who were circumcised between 1960- 90s have stated that the dressing for the wound to heal is an unbearably agonizing process. It can be understood that different from today's hospital treatment or doctor

practices, in those years quite primitive techniques were commonly used to dress wounds.

The period after the circumcision was much worse than circumcision itself. I still remember that. Especially what happened to my brother and I. I really cried for that. It was one of the worst pains I have ever had. (1980, Aydın)

The dressing was applied first. It has a special powder and there is a hat on it. The man came again 3-5 days later. Of course, by then you are alone, there is no attention. The excitement disappears. He came to take off the dressing. Taking off that bandage was the most painful of all. It hurt so bad. (1952, İzmir)

I always saw that moment in my dreams after the circumcision. It was terrible. It had to happen, everyone's watching you. It was a disaster for my brother. It caused serious damage on him. (1975, Kars)

It may be the first trauma of a man. The earlier, the better. It better not be remembered. I generally sense the worry that the child shouldn't remember it. I do remember. I don't know, but maybe it has several effects on me which I don't know or haven't realised. (1981, Van)

There are studies stating that the trauma created by the moment of circumcision taking place during childhood or even infancy and the treatment stage following it, remain in the body memory and thus affect the behaviors of the person in the future (Immerman and Mackey; Montagu; Salam 9-17). In this context, male circumcision provides a field of study for disciplines such as medicine, psychology and interdisciplinary studies they are interested in as much as it does for social sciences readings related to rituals. Within the framework of our focus of attention in this study, we emphasize that the codes related to male body that have long been reproduced are reproduced during circumcision ceremony. On the other hand, ceremonial circumcision has

a dominant part in the construction of the codes related to the “myth of the mighty man” which connects the past with the present and enables the continuity of the patriarchal system and the reconstruction of these codes in the cultural area. In the mythological narratives which came into existence thousands of years ago, circumcision stories with different cultural functions from one another can be encountered. In these stories, circumcision is sometimes a condition to become a member of a tribe, the symbol of growing into manhood from childhood, sometimes a proof of strength, the fruitfulness and holiness spilling blood brings or knowing your enemies and at times, a sign of building a different identity from the others, a way of punishing prisoners of war (castration), a control over sexual pleasure, a protection from disease etc.^{vii} (Gün 33-34; Taburoğlu 37; Bell 104; Salam 1-9) In the narratives about ceremonial circumcision and its application it can be observed that themes such as blood, sacrifice, trial with pain have always been repeated. There are strong ties between the meanings attributed to these themes by the society and the continuing advantageous status of the male child in patriarchal societies. Blood and blood relation are indicators of belonging to a group. In patriarchal societies, male sided blood relations are in the centre of the line of descent and masculine discourse. It is believed that the genealogical and common religion based qualifications are transmitted by blood from father to son. In religious texts and mythological narratives many examples are given related to the holiness that is reached by spilling blood, protection from evil spirits derived by the blood of the sacrifice, blood as an indicator of a heavenly contract. The blood spilled, the discourse generated about the pain suffered are still significant parts of the circumcision ceremony today. The fear the child experiences, the pain he suffers are of vital necessity for him to proceed to an important stage in his life, becoming a “man”. From then on, with the contributions of the adults, the child starts to feel himself in the advantageous position he deserves. His body which is tested through pain is blessed and heroized.

Circumcision is about being a man and when we consider it publicly I can say it is related to courage. If you dare to do

something, if you can present a bold front you are a man. If you can't, you are called a sissy. It can be said, courage is a must to be a man. (1977, Ankara)

With this intervention to a male child's sexual organ his body is marked and this mark turns into a special indicator which ensures that he is approved by other similar collectives of men. Like his peers, the child is marked with the piece ruptured from his body. In this regard, penis, an organ of a male child's body, gradually leaves behind its biological existence, finds a place among practices which help his collective identity as a "male" to be approved and ceremonial circumcision turns into a public approval of manhood. According to this point of view, ceremonial circumcision can be described as an operating male institution. That is to say, it is an indicator of a man's acceptance to religion and his becoming a member of a group of men of his kind; therefore, it is one of the most significant factors of a man's socialization. In the protection and transition of the male culture within certain codes, the social mechanisms which enable the approval of the culture function in various ways. In the masculinizing process of men, families, relatives, male friends, neighbors, local culture, cooperate as homosocial structures feeding this process. The realization of the ritual as it should be and its being announced to the social circle are the necessities of the social control mechanism:

As you cannot isolate yourself from the society, circumcision is a prior condition to be a man. We should look at the matter from the society's standpoint. To me, that ritual is necessary. To be a man, you are to be circumcised. For this reason, I would have my child circumcised and with a feast. (1985, Ankara)

When everyone around you says, you can't be a man without being circumcised, what can you think as a boy of 7-8? (1987, Trabzon)

Circumcision does not mean anything to me, but the society puts pressure on you for this. It is probably the same with

marriage, you get married because of social pressure. If I were to turn 20 without being circumcised, I would be ostracised. I would be ostracised by my close boy and girl friends. (1986, İzmir)

When I was circumcised, I felt relieved when among my friends. I had it done too, I joined them as well. Indeed, the circumcised are like a community in childhood, saying, oh that boy isn't circumcised, he still hasn't had it done at this age, worked like a ostracizing mechanism... (1981, Van)

On one hand, the ceremony which is defined as the very first occasion that gives joy to the family is referred to as *mürrüvet*^{viii} by the male child's parents, and is really significant for the prestige of the family as much as it symbolizes the approval of manhood in their own social circle. Details such as how the family organized the feast, whom they invited, how they carried out the preparations, what was served to the guests etc. are also related to the family's, especially to the father's status among relatives and neighbours. The parents have to carry out their religious duties and socially approved responsibilities as well as strengthening their own socialization process by way of the ceremony.

For starters, there is pressure on your family. Parents who don't have their son circumcised are very likely to be despised. Senior members of the family will put a lot of pressure on them to have it done. Secondly, it will be a problem for the child's social circle. Hey, are you uncircumcised? Moreover, as it is imposed by Islam, it can be drawn to the religious ground or the person can even be exposed to sexual insult. The person may be made fun of about his gender. These things happen. For this reason, not being circumcised may cause lots of problems. (1980, Aydın)

While referring to the role of the circumcision feast in the socialization of the family, it must be mentioned that as the stories covered in this study belong to the middle class urban families, the details quoted are of ceremonies which middle income families can afford to. However, as the level of income changes, although the traditional elements which form

the basis of the ceremony are repeated, some differences or additions may be observed in celebration styles. For instance, for a family with a high level of income, the circumcision feast may take place in luxurious places. It can turn into ceremonies in which special nights, dinner parties, entertainment are prepared for guests which may even last for days. In Turkey, especially during the last ten years of conservative governing, this kind of circumcision feasts have become popular. Some of these feasts have been so attention grabbing that they aroused great public attention, found coverage in newspapers and televised.^{ix} On the other hand, it is striking that for families who cannot afford to hold a feast, municipalities organize “mass circumcision ceremonies” These ceremonies in which many children are circumcised together are referred to as public service and whose expenses are covered by the municipality are worth being the subject of another study. They are also significant as they show the part institutions of public utility play in the generation of acceptance related to circumcision.

The Repeated Images of Social Memory



Figure 5: “The Dance of the Father and Son”, (Taşıtman’s Family Album, 1988 used with permission)

As is seen, the circumcision feast is a performance displayed in the social sphere rather than being the privacy of the child or an event in the family from beginning to the end. It adjusts to the patriarchal system of values. It is reinforced by the religious and nationalist discourses. Although there is direct intervention to the child's body at an age he can remember the event, this intervention – with the social discourse and practices which frame it- is approved of by large sections of the community; in other words, it has a legal ground in the eye of the public. At this point, visualizes must be considered among the means of circumcision which feed the hegemonic male culture and normalize it in daily life. Hence, pictures certifying various moments starting from the day before the circumcision when the circumcision costume is bought, to the time when the feast ends are kept as the page of honour in the family album in the homes of the average Muslim Turkish family. Beyond being the pictures of this special day, they are the repeated images of a social memory in which we can find the traces of the cultural history of a specific society.^x These conventional pictures in the family albums represent the memories which the family finds important and therefore, chooses to pass on to the next generations. They are a way to affirm and keep the experience the family had alive. In certain cases the pictures of the circumcision day are hung on the walls for many years and thus, kept observable. Similarly, the invitation cards which are the announcement of the circumcision day are still significant parts of it.

It is customary to send invitation cards to acquaintances, relatives and close friends to inform them about the ceremony in advance. The words and images repeated in these invitation cards are like the refined versions of the common acceptance of hegemonic male culture. When the words, written mostly as short poems, and the visuals accompanying them are evaluated as a whole, we can see the examples of how hegemonic male culture is kept fresh in daily life. These images which are the announcement and notification of manhood to the neighbours are the stimulus of the manhood myth rooted in the social memory and they normalize them in daily life.

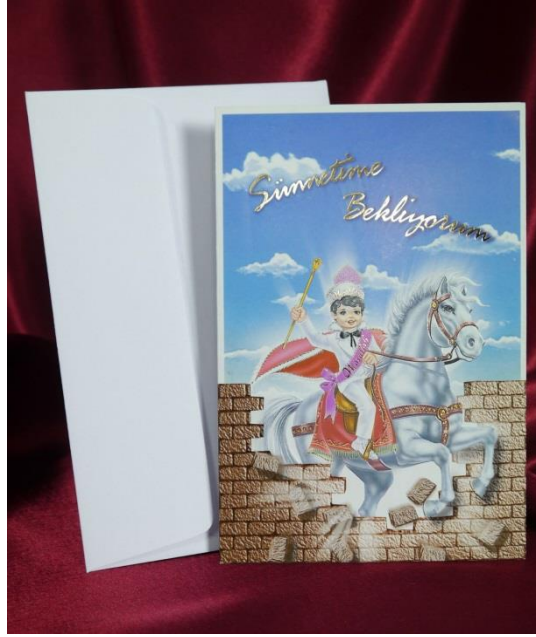


Figure 6: Invitation Card (see www.sedefcards.com)



Figure 7: Invitation Card (see www.sedefcards.com)

The idea emphasized in most of the invitation cards is that the boy will become a man from then on. In the majority of the samples there are expressions referring to the necessity of ceremonial circumcision to grow into adolescence, the continuity of the father's lineage, courage and fearlessness. Mostly, a picture of the child in his circumcision costume, holding a scepter in his hand on horseback (like a prince) accompany these expressions.



Figure 8: Invitation Card

*"They put a tarboosh on my head, and I suddenly
Turned into a prince, I am not afraid circumciser,
Cut as much as you will."* (see www.yasambu.com)



Figure 9: Invitation Card

*“On this blissful day our one and only son
will take his first step to manhood,
we will be honoured to see you, our friends beside us” (see
www.bursadavetiyeci.com)*



Figure 10: Invitation Card

*It will hurt, but I am not afraid, come and see I am becoming a
man,
I expect the ones who love me and my beloved to my feast (see
www.bursadavetiyeci.com)*



Figure 11: Invitation Card

*"They kept saying 'circumcision' and got me fed up.
And they said, if no circumcision, no bride,
Farewell to childhood, salute to youth, I will be expecting you to my
feast"
(see www.fotobeyza.de)*

As well as the traditional circumcison costume, we may come across visuals of toys such as cars and motorbikes which are coded as boys' fields of interest in the invitation cards. The short folk poem which emphasizes the importance of the male child, *"I am the only son of the family and the right arm of my daddy, I grew up and I am becoming a man"* is one of the most frequently used ones. These short poems which are employed in the invitation cards are customary, just like the rituals repeated during the ceremony. Despite certain improvements in the technical specifications of the photographs, studio shootings or invitation cards, the lines of the overtold poems are old-dated and they are imprinted in our memories along with the visuals which they form a symbolic pattern with. Among these ingrained images which nourish the hegemonic male culture, we can encounter nationalist and militarist expressions as well. The short folk poem, *"I must cross such a bridge, I am the Turk son of a Turk, not a coward. Come and see I will be circumcised, then everyone shall know how a man must be"*^{xi} is remarkable for the

emphasis it puts on both manhood and nationality as we have mentioned. In the invitation cards which this emphasis is made, Turkish flag can be seen in the circumcised child's outfit or in the background.



Figure 12-13: Invitation Card (see www.sunnetdavetiyeleri.org)

Conclusion

Since the 90's the organization of daily life has been changed significantly by the social transformations and these changes are pressing forward toward new lifestyle habits in which identities and belongings make themselves more visible than ever. In the beginning, the transformation of present social habits which is felt especially in the cities, reflected on the relations between the sexes. The roles and responsibilities assigned to sexes at home, in the work place, and in the street are brought up for discussion from different perspectives. Especially, as an attainment of the struggle of the feminist movement which is getting stronger day by day, the practices causing inequality between the sexes are being questioned and are trying to be neutralised. However in Turkey, with those who are currently in power in the political system, institutions that foster and cultivate the patriarchy have continued to dominate without the slightest sign of a loss or diminishing of power. Indeed, institutions such as that of the family, the institution of marriage that confirms the heterosexual male and heterosexual relationships, the institution of male justice, which aims to control women sexually and socially, implements sanctions and punishments in the name of morality and takes shame and honour as criteria for decision making, are still quite intact and functional.

All these make it vital for us to reconsider the ongoing practices in our daily life and the present permanent social institutions that we are accustomed to. Hence, circumcision, a functioning institution, can regenerate the basic values of the patriarchal system and the roles and responsibilities given to men within the opportunities of the modern world. It can add legitimacy and normalize it in the public eye. Looking at male practices, like circumcision, is a way enabling us to see how masculine discourse, which penetrated into the details of the ceremony and generations of this discourse, can be brought to life through repetitions, and how it wins a place in the social memory and is transmitted to the next generations. Moreover, ceremonial circumcision is the story of the experiences they have on the road to "being made a

man” which is in fact, a burden that they are forced to carry throughout their lives and which becomes heavier every day.

ⁱ As an example for the socially influential platforms where critical discussions on manhood are made and male experiences are shared in Turkey, see <http://www.erkekmuhabbeti.com/>.

ⁱⁱ The word circumcision originates from “Sunna” in Arabic. It means track, course of events. As an Islamic Law term it refers to the statements, actions and proposals of the Prophet Muhammad. They are accepted as the secondary source to code decretals after the commandments of the Koran. Although circumcision is also used to mean male circumcision in Turkish, in Arabic there is another word, “hitan” for it. For further details, see,

<http://kurul.diyaret.gov.tr/soruSor/DiniKavramlarSözlüğü>

ⁱⁱⁱ The stories of twenty men interviewed so far are covered in the study (the ages and the places of birth are stated at the end of the stories told so that they can give an idea about the period of time the information belongs to). The research is expanded around the academic thesis of Ayşegül Taşıtman.

^{iv} The term maşallah which means, will of God shall happen, is used to state appreciation in case of a well-liked, nice, good or succesful event and to ask for protection from evil eyes in colloquial language. For further details, see <http://kurul.diyaret.gov.tr/SoruSor/DiniKavramlarSozlugu.aspx>

^v These beads which are dated back to ancient times and are believed to protect people from evil eyes are mostly eye shaped , blue in colour and made of glass in Turkey. Especially, when there is a birth or circumcision ceremony, these beads are pinned on the child’s costume or somewhere on the bed along with the other gifts presented.

^{vi} Among the visits made a few days before the ceremony the one to Eyüp Sultan is the most respected. This is the place where the grave (tomb) of His holiness Eyyüb Ensari which is enshrined by the muslims is. It also has historical value. It is visited before the circumcision and prayed for the circumcision operation to be succesful and good wishes are made for the male child. As the tomb is in İstanbul, mostly inhabitants of İstanbul visit the place; yet there are also people coming from other cities.

vii We may come across the practice of circumcision in mythological narratives which generated in different geographical locations with different cultural functions and symbolic meanings. Among these mythological narartives, Kybele and Attis is remarkable for the symbolic loss of manhood, sacrifice, blood and fertility. For an example narrative, see <http://mitoloji-mithology.blogspot.com/2008/12/kybele-ve-attis.html>

viii The word “mürrüvet” which means character, manhood and personality originates from Arabic, and is used to express the pride and joy felt in occasions like birth and circumcision. For further details, see

<https://kurul.diyenet.gov.tr/SoruSor/DiniKavramlarSözlüğü.aspx> ;
http://www.tdk.gov.tr/index.php?option=com_gts&arama=gts&guid=TDK.GTS.5311cdfc3330a6.83919735 Here, the expression “ilk mürrüvet” refers to the first of the three stages men are expected to go through. In the social acceptance these are circumcision, military service, and marriage (becoming a father).

ix For further examples, see the following news coverages:

<http://www.haberler.com/isadamindan-ogluna-festival-gibi-sunnet-dugunu-haberi/>; <http://webtv.hurriyet.com.tr/2/54667/0/1/isadaminin-oglundun-sunnet-dugununde-dolar-yagmuru.aspx> ; For the organization of circumcision feasts in Cıragan Palace, one of the most luxurious places in Istanbul, see <http://www.adilorganizasyon.com/sunnet-dugunu-organizasyonu.html>

x For the article about circumcision photographs which provided the motivation which had significant influence in the beginning of this research, see Taşıtman, Ayşegül (2012), “Kutsal Erkekliğin İnşasında Bir Durak: Sünnet Ritueli”, in N.Gamze Toksoy (ed), Bellek İzleri, İstanbul: Kalkedon Yayınları.

xi For similar short folk poems, see <http://www.ankaramatbaa.web.tr/sunnet-davetiyesi-sozleri-manileri.html>

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