

Turban and *türban*: ‘Divider between belief and unbelief’. A political history of modern Turkish costume

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There is probably no other country like Turkey whose inhabitants succumbed so thoroughly to state interventions as to how to cover or uncover their heads and hair. Suppression and enforced alterations characterize the last two centuries. The headscarf has become an important topic for the Turkish press since the 1950s. Today, the headscarf plays a major role in the discussion about the ‘maturity’ of Turkey to become a member of the European Union.

In the Turkey of the old days, most rules on dress concerned religious minorities. When Sultan Mahmud II (1826–1839) introduced the fez for soldiers and state employees, for the first time a large group of Muslim men had to respect a stricter regulation. The abolishment of the fez and the ‘introduction’ of the hat in 1925 had deeper socio-psychological effects. The liberalization instigated by Turgut Özal after 1982 did not lead to the reappearance of the fez (which was reduced to a symbol in the service of folklore or tourism), although there was a very limited renaissance of the turban. It is the ongoing ban of the female headscarf from public education, which is a permanent source of conflict in contemporary Turkey. The headscarf itself was never the target of state persecution in the early Kemalist period and later, whereas the face veil prompted some regulations on the municipal level. Meanwhile, the secularized west with its anti-clerical heritage is equally restricting the use of the *foulard* for schoolgirls (France) and teachers (some German Länder).

The political story of Turkish dress and vestments is less difficult to survey as it may appear. But it is useful to know, for a better understanding, a number of words and things and their arrangement in time and space. Schematically there

are three ‘archaeological layers’ with the principal male headgear as ‘index fossils’.

The Ottoman *Ancien Régime* (before 1826)

In the Ottoman Empire, the state controlled the appointment of theologians and jurists and controlled their function. As part of the centralized organization, the *ulema* also played a decisive role in the application of the Islamic dress code. Collections of legal opinions (*fetvas*) reflect what the Ottoman muftis, particularly the prominent Sheikhülislams, thought on garments, as well as, advice on general appearance and the treatment of hair and beard.

In the ‘classical period’ of the Empire (ca. 16th–18th centuries) the muftis were often asked for reliable advice with regard to luxurious textiles, since costumes of pure silk were not lawful for men. The use of silk and precious metals, such as gold and silver in girdles, was clearly forbidden for the male sex. But there were no objections to silk in woven quilts and mattresses. The colouring of the beard with henna and other substances was considered blameworthy yet lawful, and a beard shorter than four fingers was a departure from the practices and rules derived from the Prophet Muhammad and his companions.

The amazing variety of headgear of officials, religious specialists and men in arms, urban dwellers and peasants, and their regional types between Albania and the Persian Gulf had one common denominator: all Muslim men covered their shaven heads with a round cap (*arakiye*) and wound some yards of cotton cloth around it. Regulations for the female costume in the pre-modern period involved complete veiling (*tesettür*). Most *fetvas* on women concerned their limits of mobility and the status of female slaves.

The Muslim dress code was inseparably connected with the discrimination of minorities. Whereas the muftis put relatively few stipulations for Muslims, they set up very detailed rules for Armenians, Greeks, and Jews. They had to use, for example, hats, gowns and footwear in different colours. Muslims were strictly forbidden to wear the garments of unbelievers, even risking personal safety when they went outside the dominion of Islam. Abolition of these differences would have been regarded as a loss of the visible superiority of the Muslims over the Christians and Jews.

The Fez century (1828–1925)

The Fez-age separates Turkish history as a perfectly distinct stratum from the ‘age of the wound turban’ and the ‘hat age’. In the century between 1828 and 1925, the fez became a distinctive marker of the gradually developing Ottoman ‘nation’. Thus, *Osmanlı* was no longer a term for the extended household of the sultan or



(A)



(B)



(C)



(D)



(E)



(F)



(G)

Figure 1. (A) Turban and Fez; (B) Çarşaf; (C) Atatürk and Latife; (D) Two women on Taksim square memorial; (E) Old and new; (F) Demirel at Isparta; (G) Silk *turban* and Istanbul lads.

Table 1. The vocabulary of costume. Some frequently used terms.

(Ottoman-)Turkish term	English meaning
<i>arakiye</i>	Soft felt cap worn under the <i>sarık</i>
<i>çarşaf</i>	Women's baggy outdoor garment
<i>ferace</i>	Over mantle
<i>fes</i>	Fez, red brimless hat
<i>fötr</i>	Felt hat (French: <i>feutre</i>)
<i>kabalak</i>	Military headgear worn in World War I
<i>kalpak</i>	Fur cap
<i>kasket</i>	Cloth cap belonging to villagers
<i>peçe</i>	Black face veil
<i>sarık</i>	Turban with skullcap as a foundation for the folds
<i>şapka</i>	Hat (Russian)
<i>tac</i>	Dervish headgear
<i>tarsbush</i>	Term for fez in Egypt and Syria
<i>türban</i>	Modern word derived from French, not the elaborately wound turban of former times (see <i>sarık</i>) but a scarf, covering a woman's hair more or less completely

the Turkish-Muslim elite as in the classical period, but rather designated undifferentiated Ottomans separate from other Muslim 'nations'.

The introduction of the red brimless fez and trousers in the 1820s for the reformed army, which replaced the disloyal Janissaries did at first not lead to a complete uniformity of male headgear. Only servants of the state were forced to put on a cap without more or less complicated windings. Men of religion continued to wear their turbans, which were called *tac* in members of brotherhoods. The *tac* displayed a greater diversity of material, shape and colour and a higher symbolic value than the headgear of other social groups.

1828

At the beginning, the fez was despised by the conservatives who identified it with the headgear of Greeks and other unbelievers from the Balkans. Indeed, the name and origin of the fez is from the Maghreb. It was imported from Tunis at a time when this distant province was only nominally considered part of an already decaying empire.

Nevertheless, the establishment of the fez was a success story. From Mahmud II to Mehmed VI (1918–1922) all sovereigns wore it proudly and without exception. A regulation dated April 1829 distinguished between a fez set with

jewels for the padishah, and an embroidered fez for the pashas and viziers etc. The lower ranks wore the unadorned 'ordinary fez'. The shape and diameter varied slightly: Sultan Abdülaziz (1855–1876), who was stout, gave his name to the broad Aziziye fez. The difference between the shape and colour of the fez allowed a discrimination of the finer strata of society. In the days of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), the fez was the undisputed marker of a progressive *Osmanlılık* (being an Ottoman). Its conspicuous form and colour made Ottomans easily distinguished not only in the streets but also on the official oil paintings.

The fez was worn by the children in the state schools, by modest scribes in bureaux, military and civil pashas, and ambassadors. Foreigners in the Ottoman service had to wear the fez at work. This rule was applied equally to officers of the Polish detachment in the Crimean war, Italian Court Musicians and Painters (Donizetti Pasha, Zonaro), and the German Professors, who reformed the University of Istanbul during World War I.

At first, imports from Tunisia were indispensable, but the rising demand soon led to an Ottoman mass production. Between 1848 and 1850 more than 400,000 were produced. Like the turban, the fez had a privileged place in Ottoman houses, on the *kavukluk*, a wooden stand hanging in a corner of the private apartment. It goes without saying that the fez, like the turban was never raised for salutation or as a sign of respect. The *Fezhane* (a huge building complex at the Golden Horn, which was unfortunately pulled down in 1986) continued the fabrication of affordable headgear, but a more ambitious clientele preferred imports from Bohemia. After the formal annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria-Hungaria in 1908, a successful boycott of Austrian goods was organized, directed, in the first place, against fez made in Bohemia. Efforts to replace the high quality product by local fabrications were only partly successful.

Boycotting imports from Bohemia

The counterrevolution of 1909 was supported by a great number of turbaned hodjas and medrese students. Among their six principal demands was the restoration of the Holy law (*şeriat*), which included the return to a stricter form of Islamic dress. After 1909, the fez was slowly replaced by the *kalpak* as a national symbol. Together with the *kabalak*, another military headgear, it became the 'hallmark' of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and other military officers in the wars between 1911 and 1922. Ottoman diplomats and travellers going to Europe or America used to change the fez to the hat as soon as their train crossed the border of Bulgaria or Serbia.

For the tourists who arrived in growing numbers in the pre-war Ottoman capital, the Muslim cemeteries were the only place where they could still study the original

diversity of the Ottoman world: ‘The rank and condition of the deceased are distinguished by the size of the turban; and its form often indicates the period at which he lived’, remarks the author of Murray’s *Handbook for Travellers* (1893) correctly. European artists had since long illustrated travelogues with different costumes.

In the late nineteenth century, some members of the Ottoman elite became aware of the rich diversity of local garments. The government proudly produced a luxuriously prepared costume album for the Vienna Exhibition of 1873. The photographs displayed many regional variants among men and women, Muslims and Christians, shepherds, peasants and urban dwellers, almost anticipating Turgut Özal’s (1927–1993) description of Turkey as a mosaic of 72 different ethnic groups.

What made the fez age particularly remarkable is its abrupt introduction and quick acceptance. Compared with the enforcement of the brim hat after 1925, there was no ‘ideological’ justification. Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) on the other hand did introduce practical headgear for officials and soldiers in order to underline that a whole people was on the right track to contemporary civilization.

The introduction of the hat and the persistence of the veil: a cultural revolution?

During the Young Turk decade (1908–1918), the westernization of institutions can be seen as a laboratory of the unborn Republic. Lifestyle was modernized in Istanbul and other great cities of the shrinking empire. Although the way of living of Muslim women was still very different from their Christian and Jewish sisters, their traditional mode of dressing changed rapidly.

After the war, the Sultan tried to preserve the dynasty and fought against the nationalist counter government in Ankara. Between 1919 and 1922, different cabinets in Istanbul enacted laws and orders abolishing the Young Turk legislation. Muslim women were (once again) admonished to “dress modestly” and cover themselves with the *çarşaf*. A special committee was appointed by the government to determine the exact shape and colour of costumes which women could wear when they appeared outside their homes.¹ This was partly a reaction to the inundation of the old Ottoman capital by Russian refugees. The headgear of Russian women (*rusbaşı*) became the fashion of the time. Of particular interest is an order of the Council of Ministers dated 22 June 1920, saying that women were specially forbidden to wear European-style dresses, coats and hats. This formulation seems to echo the *hadith* ‘When a Muslim imitates a non-Muslim, he risks assuming his belief’, although the cabinet did not try to regulate the costume of men.

A republican dress code

Immediately after the Peace Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in Ankara, radical judicial and cultural reforms were instituted; in the eyes of Turkish contemporaries and the majority of foreign observers, too radically and too hastily. But history has proven the sustainability of most measures. The enforcement of a new dress code needed no foreign expertise that was the case of the new European law codes (1926) and the replacement of the Arab alphabet by Latin letters (1928). The new dress code for officials and all Turkish males were enacted soon after the last public procession of the Caliph, the abolition of the office of the Sheykhülislam, and the closing of the *medreses* (all in 1924).

Mustafa Kemal wanted to convince the Turkish population that European headgear and costume were a precondition for entering the path to modernity. At the beginning, he chose a non-authoritarian, persuasive way. During the summer of 1925 he travelled to the provincial towns of Kastamonu and Daday with a sort of panama on his head. The Ghazi praised the hat not only as a civilized and practical thing offering protection from the sun, while at the same time being a cheap commodity. Returning to Ankara he was greeted by Rifat Efendi and this loyal mufti took his wound fez off and accompanied Mustafa Kemal bareheaded.

After an earlier order about the use of the top hat (*silindir*) and the tail-coat (*frak*) by state employees at official occasions, the ‘hat law’ of 1925 was passed by the Great National Assembly. Despite the strict regulations enforced by the Law of Maintenance of Order, two deputies opposed the hat law. Nureddin Pasha, a deputy of Bursa, argued that the dress code was in contradiction to the constitution and did not bind deputies who were not state employees.

It is typical for the political debate of the early Kemalist period that not only opponents but also advocates of the western dress code, referred to Islamic terms or even to the prophet Muhammad himself. For instance, the deputy of Antalya in the National Assembly, Rasih Efendi, cited as justification for the new mode, a *hadith* saying that the prophet had worn a jacket (*ceket*) which was a present from the Roman Emperor.

The law obliged officials in all sorts of public administrations and (vaguely) ‘institutions’ to wear the hat (*şapka*), but its second part was phrased enigmatically: ‘The *şapka* is also the common headgear of the Turkish people, and the government forbids the continuation of any habit opposed to it.’ Thus the Assembly did not explicitly prohibit the turban and the fez. Yet, the hat was only accepted by a small minority, even though at that time the Ghazi was at the peak of his personal and political reputation.

On the other hand, it is certain that hats and caps were available soon in all provincial towns. State propaganda was anxious to combine a ‘Buy Turkish’

campaign with the propaganda for European style headgear and suits.² Incidentally some nationalist papers in Istanbul used the occasion to blame ‘non-Turkish’ shop-owners for unjustified profiteering. The pro-Kemalist *Cumhuriyet* calculated the demand for turbans and came to the conclusion that the number of religious office holders who could claim a turban did not exceed 1100 persons in Istanbul. Former makers of dervish caps could earn their living as hatters.

Application and resistance

A major difficulty of the requirement of the hat was the necessity to uncover the head for salutation. In 1925 the Anatolian–Baghdad railway printed a small booklet on ‘Greeting with the hat’. The prominent publicist and westernizer Ahmed Cevdet, who had written a pamphlet against the fez as early as 1912, published ‘Rules of Good Manners’ as an introduction to European etiquettes in 1928.³ Illustrations showed the right way of salutation. A diplomatic incident was created by the Egyptian envoy who was asked to take off his *tarbush* at a reception in Ankara in 1931.

Serious resistance against western mimicry was raised by Mehmed Atif Efendi of Iskilip, who had supported the Istanbul government during the War of Independence. He wrote a slim volume on the application of the hadith mentioned above, which argued that it was permissible to adopt objects deriving from western science and technology. Whoever dons a hat, though, declares that he does not belong to the Muslims and he concluded that anyone wearing a hat was not only an enemy of Islam but also an enemy of the nation and traitor to his fatherland. Atif Hoca was condemned to death by a so-called Independence Court and executed in 1926, although his text had preceded the hat decree by over a year. Since 1975, this pamphlet and an earlier one on the ‘Canonical veiling of women’ were reprinted with great success in Latin script. A particular success in the process of Islamic revival was the film of the Islamist director Mesut Uçakan on the martyrdom of Atif Hoca (1993).

A less known chapter in the history of Turkish dress code is that Edeb Servet (Tör), a devoted fellow combatant, was sent by Mustafa Kemal during the pilgrimage period of 1926 to Mecca. Edib Servet acted there as the president of the Turkish delegation at the Islamic World Congress, which King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud had convened. Atatürk insisted that his delegate should appear in the holy city with a European hat. One contemporary pretends that by this, the Ankara’s envoy had gained respect and authority.⁴ Many Turkish Muslims outside Turkey, for instance in Cyprus, where the fez was replaced in 1934 by ‘slouch hats’, followed voluntarily Ankara’s modernization measures. The influential politician Şükrü Kaya summarized the Kemalist point of view declaring that

different societies with different national feelings could wear the same attire without risking losing their identity.

Exceptions for the religious servants of all confessions do not mean that they were *exempted* from a special legislation. The *Imams* and *Hatips* (prayer-leaders and preachers) were allowed to wear their gown in office. Yet the Kemalist state was careful to standardize the ‘clerical’ dress. Small variations are possible and, in 2003, the newly appointed President of Religious Affairs, Ali Bardakoğlu said to a journalist that he wanted to revive the robe worn by the Sheykhülislams and commissioned a garment in the ivory colour of his Ottoman predecessors.

It is curious that Atatürk who enforced the replacement of fez and turban by law, did not wear the hat at every turn. There are many photographs showing him with a European brim hat, but in most instances without any headgear. The official iconography, which started one year after the hat reform with the erection of monuments, preferred standing figures or equestrian statues in military dress. After the death of the saviour and ghazi (*halaskar gazi*) a Turkish sculptor represented Atatürk with his hat on his breast in a saluting gesture. The statue was erected in 1944 in the central Anatolian town of Çankırı, which had been visited by Mustafa Kemal shortly after the Kastamonu-Daday tour. Later examples of Atatürk greeting with a hat from a pedestal are rare.

The female dress

Did the Kemalists impose rules and regulations on the female dress? The answer is ‘yes and no’. There was no national law prohibiting the veil or any other traditional costume, but a month before the inauguration of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal declared at a speech in Konya (March 1923) that ‘it is out of question to make reforms in the way of women’s clothing’. Even though other declarations are less strict, it is nearly impossible to find support of European dress in the first years of the Republic. The radical atmosphere of the one-party period (1925–1946) changed things.

A proposal by the journalist Hakkı Tarık Us at the IVth Congress of the Republican People’s Party (1935) for a legal prohibition of the scarf was not followed up, but there were a number of prohibitions registered against the *çarşaf*. Istanbul papers published notices from towns such as Adana, Afyon, Konya, Sungurlu and Zile in 1935 – one year after Turkish women had been granted the right to vote. As in other symbolic reform measures, such as concerts and dancing parties, the wives of provincial officials had to play the role of an avant-garde. In early 1937, in the south-eastern Anatolian town of Maraş, all spouses of officials discarded the veil. For the overwhelming majority of women things did not change much; being illiterate and without access to radio they stayed out of touch with new ideas from Ankara. Period photographs depict bourgeois families from the

bigger cities in European costume but were not representative for the majority of the female population.

While the headscarf was widely tolerated, the face veil (*peçe*) had been a negative symbol and target of the reformers since the middle of the 1920s. The simple headscarf did not always cover the hair completely like the modern *türban*. When one of the most famous monuments of the early Republic was unveiled on Taksim square in 1928, the spectators could see on two sides medallions with female heads, the Turkish committee had commissioned these reliefs as another illustration of the Old:New opposition. The western side of the Taksim monument shows a woman whose face is hidden behind a veil, the other side displays a cheerful young woman without a veil but whose hair is covered by a head-scarf. The message is simple, the liberation of women is connected with the removal of the veil.

Kemalism after Mustafa Kemal

The laws and orders enacted between 1925 and 1935 remain unchanged until the present time. But there were some important additions to the Turkish dress code after the *coup d'état* of 1980. The new regime intended to bring the educational system under complete state control and, in 1981, the Ministry of National Education and the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) prescribed, in a 23-paragraph by-law, the principles of the dress code for students of all levels. There was only one concession made to Islamic sensitivity: female students of the *Imam-Hatip liseleri* were allowed to cover their heads during Koran lessons. The Presidency of Religious Affairs restricts its service of legal opinions on the Internet to 'frequently asked questions' in Turkish, Arabic, German and English without touching on the critical issues of women's clothing (<http://www.diyenet.gov.tr>).

What happened to the Act 1925 'on the Wearing of Hats'? It is still part of the 'Reform Laws', a sort of unchangeable annex to the Turkish Constitution (article 174), which had been left untouched by the important amendments made in 2001/2002. Consistently, the 'hat code' also survived the alteration of the Penal Code. The former article 526/2 reappears as article 222 and prosecutes persons who 'disobey an order issued for the protection of public order, provided that the order in question is given in a manner in conformity with laws and regulations' with between two and six months imprisonment, which in most cases is turned into a petty fine.

Despite the constitutional norms and the clear prohibition of the Penal Code, thousands of turban wearers are visible in the streets and squares of the country, in particular at the funerals of prominent sheikhs of sufi brotherhoods and

neo-islamic communities; the pictures of the burial of Sheik Ustaosmanoğlu's daughter in 2004 shocked the readers of the Kemalist press.

In 2000, Professor Zekeriya Beyaz, dean of the Faculty of Divinity at the State University in Istanbul, published a book on 'Islam and dress' with the subtitle 'A Religious Solution for the Head Scarf Problem'. His analysis was a combination of religious, political and socio-psychological arguments culminating in a paragraph expressing that, in Islam, hair is neither holy nor cursed. Beyaz finished with the conciliatory message that he is not against the headscarf as such, but against its political misuse. He sees in the encouragement of the Anatolian embroidered folk costumes a remedy against religious reaction; in January 2001 he was seriously wounded by the knife of a student during a conference on this topic.

In contrast to the extremely politicized *türban* issue, there seem to be no remarkable incidents concerning the violation of the hat law. But it must be remembered that the reaction of state officials is still very sharp when people try to enter official rooms, courthouses and school buildings in an outfit that does not conform with the republican traditions. Within these confines the state has won, but efforts to discipline and regulate in the public space has been in vain.

Summary

Like real archaeologists, costume historians have to be prudent with hasty conclusions: Süleyman Demirel's distinguishing accessory is the *fötr*. In contrast to his provincial, popular background he was never seen without tie and jacket, whereas the only important 'leftist' PM during the history of the Turkish Republic, Bülent Ecevit, preferred the *kasket*, although his support in rural Turkey was always restricted.

Atatürk has not systematically developed a political ideology, but one cannot deny that there is such a thing as Kemalism or Atatürkçülük, in which a bundle of Western juridical norms, educational measures and symbolic innovations have been successfully tied up. The Kemalist revolutionaries did not fight only against headgear and costumes, they also opposed street dogs, blind alleys, and wooden houses. They did not want to replace minarets by smokestacks, but rather concentrated on symbolic measures like replacing turbans by hats. Sartorial modernity *and* homogeneity of the whole country was an unspoken element of their political programme. The contemporary conflict revolving around the 'political' symbol of the headscarf could not have been predicted back in the 1930s. Female participation and the freedom of movement in the public space were more important achievements than dress regulations for women. The Kemalists were convinced that sooner or later the last traces of Ottoman backwardness would disappear. It is curious that we have today a coexistence in

one family of the universal baseball cap for men and the *türban*, which seems to be a candidate for the new index fossil for the Third Republic (1982–).

Further reading

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Notes

1. St. Shaw (2000) *From Empire to Republic. The Turkish War of National Liberation 1918–1923. A Documentary Study*, 5 Vols, Vol. 2, 832.
2. Compare the law on the use of local textiles for costumes (9.12.1925).
3. Obviously translated from a French book.
4. Semih Tezcan (Bamberg University) draw my attention to the anecdotic recollections of Behçet Kemal Çağlar (1967) *Atatürk Denizinden Damlalar* (Istanbul: Ak).

About the Author

Klaus Kreiser was Professor of Turkish Language, History and Civilization at Bamberg University. He is the author of numerous articles and books on Ottoman and modern Turkish history. His current research interest is in public monuments and memorials in the modern Islamic World. Since 2004 he is a sectional editor for the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.