The Politics of Hair: Girls, Secularism and (Not) The Veil in *Mustang* (Ergüven, 2015) and Other Recent French Films

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Introduction: Girlhood as assemblage

According to girlhood studies scholar Catherine Driscoll,

> the girl is an assemblage of cultural and social issues and questions rather than a field of physical facts, however much the girl's empirical materiality is crucial to that assemblage. And the first things to notice about such an assemblage are where and how it appears.[1]

In this article, I attend to the assemblage of social and cultural issues constructed by the girl whose performance of secularism, as demanded by the French state for her right to access free education, is undermined by her association with non-French and especially Muslim culture, through geography and/or race. Following Driscoll's lead, I demonstrate how the girl's material body, and especially her hair, is made to support a binary approach toward questions of religion and modernity, so that she becomes the prime figure through which the relation between Islam and the West, tradition and modernity, patriarchy and feminism is articulated. In particular, I argue that long, straight hair is made to signify a racialized body that is idealized as white, secular, agentic and empowered but also girlish and feminine. This article aims to demonstrate how the specifically national French debate about the place of the veil sheds light on how global modern girlhood is constructed as antithetical to Islamic religious belief, how religious affiliation for girls is located in an attention to their relation to modernity, and how this impacts their bodies. I use the term 'veil' following American historian Joan Wallach Scott's usage in her discussion of the veil in France. More properly,

this object of debate is the headscarf (called in French le foulard, hijab in Arabic); it was however referred to almost exclusively as the veil (le voile) in public discourse on Muslim girls within the French secular state, and this is the term I adopt.[2]

In *Mustang* (Deniz Ergüven, 2015), a film set in a small village on the Black Sea in Turkey and which features five girls who are marked as Muslim through geography, if not race, these girls prove their right to access modern, urban feminist empowerment through their rejection of veils and demure dresses, and their embrace of objects of (white, Western) girl culture such as pink, glitter, and above all, their long, flowing hair. The film's predominantly young female cast and narrative of girls' entrapment and despair drew comparisons to the films of Sofia Coppola, especially her own debut feature *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), which also featured five sisters who all have long, straight hair.[3] This links *Mustang* to images of girlhood developed within Western indie/arthouse cinema and certainly there are some similarities in terms of pacing (time spent simply with girls, observing them and their behaviour) and aesthetics (an attention to luminous white skin, long hair, and entangled bodies). However, Coppola's film uses the device of an unnamed middle-aged man's voiceover to offer nostalgic and fantastical recollections of the Lisbon sisters. This strongly suggests the association of idealized girlhood with long straight hair that dazzles and shimmers is part of a harmful objectification of the Lisbon girls by their boy neighbours. In contrast, Ergüven's film's voiceover belongs to one of her girls, Lale, and thus lacks the ironic and distancing devices of Coppola's film. Long, straight hair, whiteness, and attendant luminosity become part of an idealising discourse of girl culture from a girl character herself. These items and looks are of course objects and appearances that, ironically, in other situations would be read as acquiescent to patriarchal interests, trivial, and demeaning. Here, however, long hair becomes a positive material proof of the girl as agent of secularism,

integration, and feminist modernity within a framework that idealizes a vision of glowing girlhood.

While *Mustang* may seem to present us with progressive images of active, agentic girlhood, it does so within a framework that embraces a white Western girl culture marked by claims of postfeminist success and modern empowerment. Religion and secularism become a series of material facts to be read off the girls' bodies, rather than an internal matter of faith and belief. The film takes the empirical fact of the girl's body and creates it as an object that can only be read in one of two ways: as either liberated or oppressed, modern or traditional, secular or Muslim. In this way, it offers an attractive, entertaining and persuasive image of girlhood that resonates with neo-colonial development strategies and programmes which treat girls as subjects to be empowered in order to save themselves from oppressive (frequently Muslim) regimes and become modern girls.

At the end of the article, I shall turn to a feminist documentary, *Je ne suis pas féministe, mais* (Florence and Sylvie Tissot, 2015). A biography of Christine Delphy, it uses its audiovisual form to represent Delphy's desire to carve out a figure of the veiled girl which associates her with freedom and feminism rather than oppression and defeat, and thus undoes the binary thinking that bedevils anything approaching a mainstream representation of Muslim girlhood in France. This binarism serves to codify veiled girls and girls with visibly long hair as internally cohesive and mutually exclusive categories. One is irremediably traditional, religious and oppressed; the other always modern, secular and free. Through noticing where and how the Muslim/potentially Muslim girl appears, we can see how hair, as well as the veil, has come to take on meanings inflected with religious significance and symbolism in contemporary French cinematic representations that reflect and project broader social and political ideas about girls, religion, education and empowerment.

'Girls Like Us'

On 13 June 2015, Ergüven was invited onto the French late-night chat show *On n'est pas couché* to discuss her new film, *Mustang*, which had just premiered in the Director's Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival. The political and cultural commentator and TV journalist Léa Salamé congratulated Ergüven on the success of her film, and then commented that,

> Your film relies a lot on your actresses; their sensuality, their Mediterranean side, their laughter, their hair, they're unbelievably natural […] I think what's really interesting about your film is its location in Turkey. Because we identify with it. You could have made the same film in Afghanistan or in Saudia Arabia, and we would have identified less. Because Turkey is really close to the EU, and we see it, the women aren't veiled, so, you denounce the situation of women in Turkey, the patriarchal ideas that reign in certain segments of society, and at the same time, we see that these girls are like us, so there's a real identification.[4]

Salamé's praise provides a fascinating insight into the complex role that hair and veils play both in the film and more broadly in contemporary France, and how this relates to political, (post)colonial, racial and religious discourses that attempt to regulate girls and girlhood. She mentions the presence of the actresses' hair as vital to their contribution to the film, and links this notably to laughter. The combination of hair and laughter recalls the mythic figure of the Medusa as interpreted by Hélène Cixous, joining the hair style of the five actresses – long, loose, abundant locks – to a feminist gesture of survival.[5]

Laughter and hair are interwoven as contestation and subversion and Salamé is correct to identify them as key to *Mustang*'s feminist aesthetic. Ergüven sought out actresses with

long hair in her casting process and their long, luxuriant hair draws an extended commentary in a *Vogue* article released after the film's Best Foreign Film Oscar nomination where the actresses are even asked what brand of shampoo and conditioner they use.[6] The title of the film, *Mustang*, also evokes their hair, imagining it as a long, silky mane. The display of hair is associated with progressive, liberal and secular elements in Turkish society, the veil having been banned by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk when he established the Turkish Republic in 1923. The ruling Justice and Development party (AKP), co-founded by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has worked to lift this ban, allowing women to wear the veil in schools, universities, parliament, and even the military (traditionally regarded as a bastion of the secular).[7] Just as Cixous identifies a connection between female laughter and female hair, so this government's desire to cover women's hair is joined to a desire to quieten their laughter. In July 2014, Turkish deputy prime minister Bülent Artnç gave a speech on moral decline where he argued that 'women should not laugh loudly in front of all the world.' As Jonathan Romney comments, 'It's presumably his voice that is heard on TV in *Mustang* insisting that "women should be chaste and pure and know their limits."'[8] Artnç's diatribe inspired thousands of Turkish women to upload photos and videos of themselves laughing, adding further political meaning to *Mustang*'s celebration of female laughter.

The mythical force of female hair, underlined by the implicit recollection of Medusa, is, however, given a new impetus and meaning that connects it with the complex religious politics of contemporary France when Salamé turns her attention to the geographical setting of the film. On the one hand, she clearly sees the film's story of five girls oppressed through patriarchal values and threatened with forced marriage as a narrative that requires setting in a majority Muslim country, naming Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia as potential alternatives to Turkey. Both these countries are governed by Islamic regimes notorious for their policing of women's activities and thus cement a perceived connection between Muslim belief and

patriarchal oppression, a connection regularly reinforced in the French media.[9] On the other hand, Salamé argues that the visibility of the girls' hair – the fact they aren't wearing veils – makes this story one that has greater resonance for a French audience, so that the girls no longer look like Muslim others but can be welcomed into a Europe keen to embrace a modern version of girlhood as probably secular and definitely not Muslim. This is a version of girlhood that proclaims its secularism, its equality, and its freedom precisely through its *visible* performance of long hair. Hair is the visible sign of a girlish version of modernity.

Salamé's discussion is useful, because it underlines some of the ideas about girlhood, religion, and feminism that are mobilized in contemporary France and the strategies French films adopt to talk about these things within a popular idiom. *Mustang*'s representational politics make sense within a French context, for all that the film is set in Turkey, and indeed they reveal to us the French perspective of the film. Its funding came primarily from French sources, its director trained at French film school La Fémis, and the film was developed through various initiatives based at the Cannes Film Festival. Its funding sources and the production values that result create a film designed to appeal to a film-festival audience made up of a cosmopolitan cinéphile constituency of distributors, judges and critics. Ergüven herself, as the daughter of a diplomat who travelled extensively, grew up between Paris and Ankara, and was educated in Paris, symbolizes an image of Turkish femininity that is at odds with Erdoğan's regime. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the film received a hostile reception in certain Turkish quarters. The film's version of Muslim girlhood is fashioned within a broadly European imaginary and thus speaks to how European discourses construct the notion of girlhood, feminism and modernity as in conflict with religious belief. Furthermore, the girls' location within a rural context ('a thousand kilometres from Istanbul', the voiceover informs us) creates another binary, where the two younger girls' escape to the city is also an escape from oppressive religious and rural rituals into a liberal urban world associated with

education, literacy, and literal and metaphorical enlightenment, as the girls cross a twinkling bridge at dawn to Istanbul and their former teacher. This article does not so much consider the reality of the Muslim girl, then, as how as a representational assemblage within Europe she is constructed through a binary (as either liberated, urban and modern or oppressed, rural and religious) and such readings are rendered visible via her veil or lack thereof.

The film was nevertheless promoted through the BFI Film Audience Network initiative to audiences in the UK as an authentic account of contemporary Turkish village life. Marketing materials provided to the BFI's regional cinema network to promote the film encouraged a reading of it as resembling documentary, inviting Turkish and feminist networks to discuss the film and backed up by enthusiastic audience members from an INTO preview screening at Home, Manchester, describing it as 'a new look into an older culture' and 'an inspiring insight into other people's lives.'[10] This marketing and the recorded audience response suggests how such attractive and luminous images of girlhood can thus be used to authenticate discourses that are mythical and imaginary, so that this image of Turkish village life and the vision of Islamic culture it portrays comes to seem documentary rather than fictional, whatever the director's intentions may have been. Monica Swindle explains that 'girls' bodies and the objects of girldom are used to secure attention in affective economies';[11] in the affective economy of international art-cinema, the spectacle and luminosity of girls secures attention for white Western European feminism and European liberalism that excludes Muslim girlhood.

For the French, Salamé implies, a Muslim girl can be either religiously observant or French, she can't be both, and this divide between religion and nation is visualized through the presence or not of hair/the veil. 'A girl like us', who can be identified with, is one whose hair is on display as a guarantor that religion will not overwhelm and absorb her identity. This discussion of *Mustang* allows us to see how films that show us Muslim girls, or girls

who are implicitly Muslim, or girls who are somehow other to France and thus could be Muslim, create a politics of hair that is in dialectical relation to the politics of the veil. Few films show us girls wearing the veil, but many films show us girls displaying their hair as an index of their modernity, integration, and participation in a globalising girl culture. Sometimes they draw attention to the significance of hair styles, such as when Illyaal, the illegal immigrant fake daughter of Dheepan in the eponymous film *Dheepan* (Audiard, 2015) goes to school for the first time. Nervous as she is, Illyaal's desire to integrate, and the implication such integration will be possible, is signalled by her long dark hair tied into a plait and the outsized pink jogging bottoms she wears.

Similarly, Marième/Vic's changes of identity in *Bande de filles/Girlhood* (Sciamma, 2015) are demonstrated by her changing hairstyles, as she moves from corn rows to long straight hair, to a blonde wig. Most notably, she styles her hair in a Dutch braid to resemble Katniss Everdeen's hairstyle in *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012) when she fights another girl on the estate. As Kobena Mercer explains, black culture in the twentieth century expended a good deal of creative energy in hairstyles, especially the Afro and dreadlocks. These were hairstyles that were imagined as a cultural and political statement reclaiming the natural 'napped' characteristics of black hair, which have been historically devalued as the most visible stigmata of blackness, second only to skin.[12] Indeed, Marième's shifting hairstyles are part of a performance of specifically black girlhood. However, her imitation of Katniss, played by the white and frequently blonde Jennifer Lawrence, also indicates how hairstyles are part of a global cinematic construction of aggressive, agentic powerful postfeminist and postracial ideas of girlhood, able to be shared online (there are plenty of youtube tutorials explaining how to achieve the Katniss look). Long hair and its malleability places the girl into a transnational and transracial culture of girl style; empowered modern girls display their hair. Furthermore, as Mercer explains, 'nobody's hair is ever just natural, but is always

shaped and reshaped by social convention and symbolic intervention.'[13] Nevertheless, whereas Sciamma's and to a lesser extent Audiard's black girls actively style and change their hair, the *Mustang* girls have a hair style which indicates naturalness, girlishness, and whiteness and remains unchanged through the film. Long, loose, and straight, this is a hairstyle which seems not to need the intervention of a hairdresser or styling products (despite the question about conditioner quoted above), but is authentic and pure, an expression of girl culture shot through with racial assumptions about the desirability of long straight hair. Nor is this hair even ever plaited or tied up in a bun, such as the Turkish village women wear in *Mustang*, and that signals an older, more womanly and traditional femininity. In this culture, the veil denies the girl access to a modern way of being, whereas a luxuriant head of glowing straight long hair guarantees 'a girl like us' – one that is feminist and secular, while also being natural and authentic. Despite empowerment rhetoric and ethnic pride movements used to counter the primacy of European hair styling, the ideal hair of magazine covers and other popular forms is long and flowing. Caroline Ferris Leader's work on the Disney Princess franchise demonstrates how CGI animation favours this fairy-princess ideal. Traditionally, hair-modelling technologies privilege straighter hair, not necessarily because this kind of hair is easier to animate, but because the language built up around smooth and malleable hair associates its free-flowing tresses with beauty and desirability. In the case of *Tangled* (Howard and Greno, 2010) and *Brave* (Andrews and Chapman, 2012), Disney developed princess characters whose hair enabled them to reconcile traditional feminine values with increased independence and autonomy, as their hair was both unruly and glamorous, empowering and girly. These films draw attention to light scattering and bouncing through shimmering hair, which creates an aura of natural feminine grace and beauty, even while the princesses engage in active pursuits. Strong, independent heroines with excessively weighty and large heads of hair that frame slender shoulders, perky chests,

and tiny waists, offer the hair ideal for girls.[14] Long, flowing locks are posited by Disney as allowing girls to reconcile power and beauty, independence and femininity, and *Mustang* develops this rhetoric of hair in its arthouse, film festival context.

As is well known, the veil has come to be highly controversial in contemporary France, and I shall not rehearse the details of the legislation banning it in French public schools here as they are widely available.[15] The 'burkini ban' of summer 2016 and its widespread reporting beyond France – for example, it was discussed by Neil McGregor on BBC Radio 4 as the prime contemporary example of conflict between religious identity and the state – crystallizes France's recurrent and ongoing discussion about the legality of female clothing specifically related to Islam.[16] Such a concentration on the body and how it performs its relation to religion has been demonstrated by Naomi Davidson to be typical of the understanding of Islam in twentieth and twenty-first century France. Davidson demonstrates that while Muslim theology does explore the importance of the body, its religious rituals involve both inner (mental or emotional) and external (physical) ones. Yet the French colonial ethnographers, such as Arnold Van Gennep who travelled to Algeria in 1911 and 1912, concentrated on the body, with critics and admirers alike drawn to Islam's embodied rituals. As Davidson concludes

> In focusing so intently, even admiringly, on the physical gestures of French Islam, the rhetorical arguments about the philosophical common ground between Islam and French society tended to fade into the background […] What marked Islam as irrevocably different from secular French civilization in the imaginations of French Islam's proponents was their belief in Islam's immutable physicality and in the embodied nature of the Muslim everyday experience […] Furthermore these practices were said to be so integral to Muslims' everyday lives that they could not possibly accommodate the distinction between private and public lives

> that twentieth century laïcité required. Unlike the bodily practices of Jews and Catholics, then, those of Muslims were indissociable from their very being and could not be confined to the private sphere.[17]

Following Davidson's argument, Islam as it is constructed through the French imaginary is understood as a public and embodied faith, rather than a private and internal one. Through the concentration on the veil as the most obvious symbol of this public and embodied notion of faith, the girl's hair – its visibility or concealment – becomes a key site for reading her meaning in relation to faith and secularism. The girl's hair thus becomes the vehicle of competing ideals, where national and religious identity are mutually exclusive. It is in France, then, that a particular manifestation of an anxiety about the power of religion to create a potential counter-society is forcefully expressed; and this struggle between French identity on the one hand and religious belief on the other is rendered highly visually appealing in film through an attention to girls' hair.

The irony in painting the girl with the veil as outside of modernity and the feminist gains it promises young women is that this struggle between national and religious identity is a thoroughly contemporary debate, and the wearing of the veil/uncovering of the hair gains its meaning and traction within contemporary ideas about religion and identity. While presented as a struggle between tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, oppression and freedom, as French sociologist Olivier Roy explains, the Islamic headscarf is itself a modern rather than a traditional phenomenon. The current religiosity of Muslim populations in Europe is both a product of and a reaction to westernization. For Roy, 'Islam cannot escape the New Age of religion or choose the form of its own modernity';[18] rather the return of the religious 'is taking place strictly within the context of modern Western societies.'[19] Joan Wallach Scott adds that 'while present-day Islam is undeniably "modern", there is no one universalising form of its modernity, and it is especially the differences that matter […] There

is not […] a single "Muslim" culture.'[20] Unlike, for example, Catholicism, which has its headquarters in Rome and a single figure of authority at its head, Islamic theology is subject to continuous debate and interpretation. Ironically, what serves to render Muslims as a single community is specific legislation such as decrees banning headscarves, which, as Roy argues, have the effect of objectifying Muslim women. Furthermore, Scott explains, such objectification and policing of Muslim populations has as its counterpart French mythmaking about the Republic and the insistence that it realizes the principles of the Enlightenment in their highest, most enduring form. The mythologization of Islam as a fixed culture and of France as an enduring Republic places both outside history. Roy and Scott demonstrate how this understanding of the relationship between religion and secularism, and between Muslim and non-Muslim populations in France, is resolutely contemporary. It is produced, they suggest, through an inflammatory discourse that casts differences between systems of belief as a conflict of civilizations. Muslim girls who wear the veil are as modern as girls who show their hair, but their performance of modernity does not conform to the model promoted in a postfeminist society in which girls are understood as free agents able to format their own life choices.

In her analysis of the politics of the veil, Scott does not comment on one of the aspects of the veil controversies that particularly strikes me. While all women are banned from wearing the niqab and the burka as these are thought to be a threat to public safety, the veil is only banned for girls attending school. While, for example, female Muslim university students are free to wear the veil, this is a freedom not extended to girls within the French Republican school system. It was teen girls, not adult women, who were specifically targeted by this law. The argument from some quarters, such as the feminist Elisabeth Badinter, was that it was the duty of the French state to protect vulnerable girls from older brothers and fathers who force them to wear the veil.[21] Such a notion of girls from Muslim communities as

especially vulnerable to their own older brothers and fathers as repositories of patriarchal attitudes is reinforced in films where we see girls as victims of older male relatives' abuse, even when in other ways the films may offer subtle and nuanced narratives: *Mustang,* where the sisters' abusive uncle organizes forced marriages, *Bande de filles,* where Marième's older brother hurls abuse at her because she slept with her boyfriend, *La Squale* (Génestal, 2000), where Leila and Yasmine are raped, and *Samia* (Faucon, 2000), where Yacine beats up his younger sister Amel for having a white French boyfriend. As Carrie Tarr neatly summarizes of *La Squale* and *Samia*, 'both films depict the empowerment of ethnic minority teenage girls through self-assertion, female solidarity and geographical displacement […] But the principle obstacles to their protagonists' achievement of freedom and justice are the supposedly aberrant black or beur banlieue youths.'[22] While Muslim girls themselves may argue that the veil represents an individual expression of religious conviction, the lawmakers insisted that this could not logically be the case, as the veil was an endorsement of submission and an abandonment of individuality. The French schoolgirl becomes the figure where politics, religion, individuality and oppression collide.

Muslim Girl Power: A Contradiction in Terms?

It is in this figure we see the connections between what seems a highly localized example – France's banning of the veil in public schools – and other neoliberal discourses that focus on (pre)-adolescent females as the targets for promotion of a certain vision of globalisation. The knots in which France ties herself over the visibility of religiousness in the secular space of the school resonates with a widespread deployment of the figure of the girl within postcolonial contexts, in which she is positioned as the agent of progress against patriarchal structures, many of which may be embodied by her male relations and be within her cultural contexts. The girl is targeted by a kind of neo-colonialism which co-opts the language of

feminism and offers the girl opportunities for education and employment. Girls are envisaged in neoliberal doctrines of development and their associated NGOs, multi-national corporations, charities and government representatives as the most desirable targets of development aid; the alleged significance and importance of girls as the ideal, flexible, entrepreneurial citizens of the future is coined as The Girl Effect by the Nike Foundation. In 2007, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nation's Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and World Health Organization (WHO) established the UN Interagency Task Force on Girls. In 2008, the World Bank founded its Adolescent Girls Initiative. By 2009, girls' roles in development were being discussed at Davos, and in 2010 the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) launched 'Girl Hub', in collaboration with the Nike Foundation. In October 2012, the UN designated its first Day of the Girl Child. While issues of gender in relation to development have been on the table since the 1970s, this policy turn towards girls is marked by explicit borrowing and mobilisation of discourses of girl power.[23]

As scholars such as Catherine Driscoll, Angela McRobbie and Sarah Projansky have demonstrated, girls have become hypervisible in contemporary Western media cultures.[24] Girls are understood as beneficiaries of a sort of neoliberal feminism which frees them to become authors of their own 'choice biographies'. On the other hand, girls are also represented as vulnerable. Anita Harris analyses how discussions of girlhood are structured by movement between discourses of 'can-do' and 'at-risk' girls.[25] While this constitutes the discursive field for *all* girls, attending to this unstable category of girlhood within a critical framework informed by contemporary debates on religious affiliations shows how, in the case of Muslim girls, this oscillation maps neatly onto the issue of whether or not one wears the veil. As Ofra Koffman and Rosalind Gill point out, it is perhaps no coincidence that this

girl-powering of development strategies has emerged post 9/11, following the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. They go on to comment:

> Its [girl-power's] continued prominence is maintained as Western forces withdraw from Afghanistan amid fears that any gains for girls and women will be undone by the Taliban. The social transformations occurring in the Middle East following the events of the 'Arab Spring' have also highlighted the complex dynamics linking gender, religion and the relationship between the Global North and South in the years ahead. [26]

Female emancipation is welcomed in this development discourse as long as it is figured through a girl culture in which girls can (only) be permitted religious beliefs as long as these do not interfere with their performance of Westernized modernity. Visible hair, preferably long, functions to reinforce the notion that they are 'girls like us'. Girls in the Global North are encouraged to identify as feminist through participating in campaigns which stress the 'oneness' of girls, as in for example, the 2010 UN Foundation's 'Girl Up' campaign which targeted American girls through a celebrity-led promotion of girls' rights in the developing world; American girls could participate through donating, purchasing a 'Girlafesto' bag, water bottle or sticker, and downloading the poster. Celebrity endorsers include Queen Rania of Jordan, Judy McGrath, CEO of MTV networks, and Ivanka Trump, real estate developer, fashion designer, and (currently) first daughter. Ivanka Trump is probably the most visible and powerful of various female entrepreneurs promoting popular feminism, such as Sheryl Sandberg, Beyoncé Knowles, and Victoria Beckham, all of whom showcase aspirational family lives and business acumen on social media and in print, and we may wish to note in passing here that Ivanka Trump's polished image includes having flowing, luminous blonde hair, as on the cover of *Kushner, Inc.*[27] Her involvement demonstrates how closely this neo-colonial version of girlpower ties into a neoliberal,

competitive and perfectionist form of feminism that Diane Negra associates with a plutocratic elite.[28] Notably, the Girlafesto envisages girls' freedoms and power through a narrow range of choices: 'I am me. I follow. I lead. I learn. I teach. I change my clothes, my hair, my music and my mind.'[29] Girls in America are exhorted to fundraise so girls elsewhere may also choose their freedom – the freedom to change their hair!

Long hair is the symbol par excellence of a modern girl's freedom, precisely because it is not Muslim; it is not religious; it is mutable and expressive; nor does its owner reject feminine attributes and ideals. Lale, the bright, assertive, forceful heroine of *Mustang* is a poster girl for this vision of girl emancipation and idealisation (as I discuss above, it is her voiceover that guides us through the luminous images of girls). Long, modest dresses are rejected as 'shit-coloured sacks'. Her uncle is an odious child-abusing monster who locks up Lale and her sisters, and her grandmother and the other women in the village are limited in their ability to help the girls. As befits Lale's rejection of Muslim identity and patriarchal values, inseparable in this discourse, so her hair and its styling become as central to a narrative of freedom, transformation, and empowerment as her education or learning to drive. Her messy long hair becomes (sometimes literally) entwined with other objects of Western girl culture, so that Lale performs rebellious girlhood through such devices as wielding a bright pink fly swatter, wearing pink rabbit socks while doing the hoovering, and wearing her older sister's pink bikini top while flouncing through the hallway as if it were a catwalk, swinging her head from side to side so that her brown curls fly. What is crucial to the film's rhetoric is how Lale's long hair authenticates her contemporary secular girlhood, shown alongside other elements of contemporary girl culture such as pink, glitter, sassiness and giggles. This makes her worthy of the opportunities the film hands her once she makes her daring escape in order to find her teacher in Istanbul.

Hair – its covering and its styling – accompanies key moments in the film. The first action which kick-starts the film's narrative is the complaint Mrs. Petek makes to the girls' grandmother that they have been playing with boys in the sea. The girls return to Mrs. Petek's house to remonstrate with her. Informed she is coming back from the market, they run onto the road. Lale breaks away from the group to confront Mrs. Petek, her speed emphasized by the jerkiness of the handheld camera. 'Do your shit-coloured clothes give you the right to stand in moral judgement?' she demands, confronting an older woman in a long brown dress, whose head is covered. Her grandmother pulls her away and slaps her, then apologizes to Mrs. Petek. As she does so, she lifts a scarf from around her shoulders over her head, tying it around her neck. The implication is clear: covering her hair is essential to the efficacy of her apology for having offended Mrs Petek. From now on the grandmother will wear a veil in public. Shortly afterwards, the three oldest girls, Selma, Sonay and Ece are subjected to a virginity test. On the way home, Lale questions her older sisters about what it was like and if they were naked. Long, loose, in several shades of brown and gently ruffled by the wind, the hair of different girls becomes enlaced as they lean against each other in the confined space of the car. As they tease each other about their bodies, and their uncle polices their blossoming sexuality, they become identified by their hair.

The decision is taken to protect the girls from anything which might 'pervert' them, and we see telephones being removed from drawers, computers put into locked cupboards and chewing gum and make-up being cleared away. Most notable however in this purging sequence is a shot where we see a hand removing a postcard tucked into the bottom edge of a mirror. The postcard, most strikingly, is a reproduction of Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Guiding the People.* This painting from 1830 is one of the most famous images of French Republicanism, produced to commemorate the July Revolution of that year. A young woman personifies the concept of freedom, leading the people over the barricades, her breasts naked

and her hair flying beneath her Phrygian bonnet. She holds the tricolour in one hand and a bayonetted musket in the other. The figure of Liberty is commonly interpreted as the symbol of France and the French Republic known as Marianne. While the likelihood of five girls in a Turkish village owning this image is remote, its presence in the film speaks volumes in terms of the significance of these girls' long flowing hair.

This is an image that too has become caught up in debates about religion, freedom, and girls. In August 2016, then French Prime Minister Manuel Valls declared at a Parti Socialiste meeting that 'Marianne has a naked breast because she nourishes the people, she's not veiled because she's free! That's the Republic!' While Valls's interpretation of Marianne was quickly disputed on Twitter by an expert, historian Mathilde Larrière, what is useful to remember here is not the accuracy or otherwise of his statement, but the potent linkage of a bare-breasted unveiled woman to Republican values of equality.[30] The film would seem then to endorse a similar view of femininity, its audacious and rebellious girls rejecting Islam and its strictures in favour of the Republican values of freedom and education. They offer us an image of how girl-power works in Muslim culture as imagined from Europe by a well-educated and cosmopolitan international cinéphile audience. Girls are encouraged to be free, as long as the freedom they choose shows them conforming to the demands of Western girl culture. Their long hair offers the perfect balance of both desirable femininity and rejection of Islamic strictures. Muslim-identified girl power is impossible. By the end of the film, the hair has taken on quasi-magical qualities, as Lale cuts her hair and sews it to a dummy in order to fool her relatives into thinking that she is in bed asleep, and thus aid her in her escape, like a latter-day Rapunzel, recalling the power of hair in the Disney Princess franchise.

It is worth turning briefly in conclusion to a film that does attempt to radically reimagine veiled Muslim girlhood. In Florence and Sylvie Tissot's documentary on Christine Delphy, *Je ne suis pas feministe mais* (2015), the section of the film which introduces

Delphy's increasing attention to neo-colonial discourses in France and why she thinks this is part of a feminist struggle begins with a striking montage of young, glamorous girls. These girls wear designer clothes that the camera tracks up and down admiringly, or we have close-ups on their beautifully made-up faces, or we see them in striking longshot posing in parks, on fire escapes, or by a river. These girls have all covered their hair with varieties of veil. The images are accompanied by M.I.A.'s 'Bad Girls' on the soundtrack, so the images of girls function as if they are from a pop video. The official video to the song showed women in veils driving cars and was shot in solidarity with the Women To Drive movement in Saudia Arabia, the most literal interpretation of the lyrics' reference to dashboards, changing lanes, and gasoline. The lyrics also could be interpreted as being about the pleasures of rebellion, of sex, of escape. In these images, teen girls enjoy fashion, make-up and the sites of the city, reworking M.I.A.'s 'Bad Girls' from a Middle-Eastern to a Western context and placing their veils in a thoroughly modern version of girl culture.

The inclusion of M.I.A.'s 'Bad Girl' with images of girls in veils is crucial to the impact and significance of the sequence. As Lisa Weems explains, M.I.A is a self-identified Tamil Sri Lankan refugee girl living in England whose music can be read as a symbolic resource to help theorize post-colonial girlhood. For Weems, M.I.A.'s work openly wrestles with the 'tensions between complicity and possibility in post-colonial girlhood'.[31] While the identities of Third World Girls are overdetermined as innocent yet hypersexualized exotic Others in the service, or at the mercy, of First World men and women, M.I.A. carves out a space that critiques economic injustice, patriarchy and violence yet acknowledges the skill and chutzpah of the girl involved in the hustle of survival. Furthermore, Weems notes, studying M.I.A's music and its transnational resonance and success enables an appreciation of girlhood as simultaneously locally situated and formatted within the crucible of global networks of culture. She concludes that

> global capitalist and imperialist dynamics operate within and among the discursive and material practices and representations of 'girlhood' or 'the girl child'. In other words, 'girlhood' becomes a site that consolidates assumptions and practices regarding difference, colonial power, and economic relations between and among gendered subjects in transnational contexts. What is at stake in this cultural politics is the extent to which girls can create, inhabit, and transgress the discursive positions to which they are subject.[32]

M.I.A.'s music leaves the questions of agency, resistance and complicity open. It allows us to escape from the binary logic in which the veil is constructed only as either the representative of an oppressive patriarchal culture or of an authentic religious expression into a more ambiguous reading which understands choices girls make about their hairstyles to be both individual agentic choices and framed within broader cultural contexts. In other words, it is possible for the veil to be simultaneously transgressive and limiting; enabling, fashionable, and dynamic; oppressive, problematic and traditional. Religion itself becomes part of a broader identity process rather than a static subject position.

The film cuts from this dynamic and attractive video montage to something far more typical of documentary: archive footage of Delphy at a demonstration against the 2004 law banning girls with the veil from attending school in France, then a talking-head interview with Delphy explaining the attack on the veil as a piece of neo-colonial logic. Returning to the more conventional documentary aesthetics embeds these images and sounds of veil-wearing girls into a complex and multi-vocal account of Muslim girlhood.

Both Ergüven and the Tissot sisters' films render visible the issue of the difference of the Muslim girl within contemporary France and the complexity of how gender, age and religion intersect. Ergüven's film endorses integration and assimilation; a literal return to metropolitan Enlightenment values as Lale and her sister Nur cross the Bosporus at dawn.

The documentary outlines Delphy's struggle to incorporate a postcolonial consciousness into French feminism, carving out a space that pairs veil-wearing girls with rebel Tamil refugee girl M.I.A. and thus attempts to find a way of picturing Muslim girls outside binary representational logic. The Tissots' film gestures beyond Delphy's own material feminist position that reads banning the veil as neo-colonial, to offer a more expansive take in which girls' religious affiliations are understood as occurring within a dynamic cultural network (of music, of fashion, of global urban cultures) that girls negotiate within a field of resistance and conformity. As long as girl culture continues to imagine all girls as a homogenous group ready to embrace a progressive politics, it will create exclusions rather than openings to a more dynamic understanding of religion, gender and identity.

[1] Catherine Driscoll, 'Girls Today: Girls, Girl Culture and Girl Studies', *Girlhood Studies* 1: 1 (2008), 13–32 (14).

[2] Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[3] See for example Shelley Farmer, 'A Look at *Mustang*, a Turkish Coming-of-Age Film Drawing Comparisons to *The Virgin Suicides*', *Paper*, 20 November 2015, http://www.papermag.com/mustang-virgin-suicides-turkey-deniz-gamze-erguven-1466579941.html, consulted 25 June 2019.

[4] Lea Salamé to Ergüven, available on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0EnAFDekqc, consulted 4 January 2018.

[5] Hélène Cixous, *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* (Paris: Galilée, 2010 [1975]).

[6] Mackenzie Wagoner, '*Mustang* Beauty: The Cast of the Oscar-Nominated Movie on Long Hair and the Best Chanel Lipsticks', *Vogue*, February 2016, https://www.vogue.com/article/mustang-cast-beauty-hair-lipstick-chanel, consulted 25 June 2019.

[7] Anon, 'Turkey Lifts Military Ban on Islamic Headscarf', *The Guardian*, 22 February 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/22/turkey-lifts-military-ban-on-islamic-headscarf, consulted 25 June 2019.

[8] Jonathan Romney, 'Film of the Week: Mustang', *Film Comment*, 20 November 2015, https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/film-of-the-week-mustang/, consulted 25 June 2019.

[9] See for example Christine Delphy, *Un universalisme si particulier: féminisme et exception française [1980-2010]* (Paris: Syllepse, 2010), 233–76.

[10] Mustang Marketing pack, kindly provided by Tara Judah. INTO conversations available at http://www.conversationsaboutcinema.co.uk/nrs/1234/video-how-did-mustang-make-you-feel/, consulted 4 January 2018.

[11] Monica Swindle, 'Feeling Girl, Girling Feeling: An Examination of Girl as Affect', *Rhizomes* 22 (2011), http://www.rhizomes.net/issue22/swindle.html, consulted 26 June 2019.

[12] Kobena Mercer, 'Black Hair/Style Politics', in Kwesi Owusu, *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), 111–20.

[13] Mercer, 'Black Hair/Style Politics', 116.

[14] Caroline Ferris Leader, 'Magical Manes and Untameable Tresses: (En)coding Computer-Animated Hair for the Postfeminist Disney Princess', *Feminist Media Studies* (2017), 1–16.

[15] See for example Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*, 21–41; Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2006), 163–74.

[16] Neil McGregor, (2017), 'Living with the Gods' available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09gh9d0, consulted 4 January 2018.

[17] Naomi Davidson, *Only Islam: Embodying Islam in Twentieth Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 18–19.

[18] Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 15.

[19] Roy, foreword, in Laurence and Vaisse, *Integrating Islam*, xiv.

[20] Elisabeth Badinter, cited in Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*, 5.

[21] Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil*, 85.

[22] Carrie Tarr, *Reframing Difference: Beur and Banlieue Filmmaking in France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 122.

[23] Ofra Koffman and Rosalind Gill, '"The Revolution will be led by a 12-year-old-girl": Girl Power and Global Biopolitics', *Feminist Review* 105 (2013), 83–102.

[24] Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of*

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[26] Kofman and Gill, 'The Revolution', 85.

[27] Susan Hopkins, 'Girl Power-Dressing: Fashion, Feminism and Neoliberalism with Beckham, Beyoncé, and Trump', *Celebrity Studies* 9: 1 (2018), 99–104 and Vicky Ward, *Kushner Inc: Greed, Ambition, Corruption: The Extraordinary Story of Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2019).

[28] Diane Negra, 'Ivanka Trump and the New Plutocratic (Post)feminism', Unpublished paper given at *Desecrating Celebrity: 4th Celebrity Studies Conference*, La Sapienza Università di Roma, June 2018.

[29] Kofman and Gill, 'The Revolution', 92–3.

[30] Etienne Baldit, 'Manuel Valls invoque le "sein nu" de Marianne pour s'opposer au voile (et se fait fact-checker par une historienne', *Europe 1* website, 2016, available at http://lelab.europe1.fr/voile-burkini-et-sein-nu-de-marianne-valls-fait-polemique-2832985.

[31] Lisa Weems, 'M.I.A. in the Global Youthscape: Rethinking Girls' Resistance and Agency in Postcolonial Contexts', *Girlhood Studies* 2: 2 (2009), 55–75 (57).

[32] Weems, 'M.I.A.' 59.