



PUBLISHING

THE STATE OF ATA

The tension in Western Europe surrounding burqas—the black, full body- and face-covering garment worn by some Muslim women—has come to a painful head in recent months, particularly in France: disregarding tenants of freedom of expression, too threatened by their insecurities as institutions of power and control, governments have begun to ban the burqa, a performative act with very real consequences that attempts to reconcile secular society with contemporary political and religious realities. These extreme decisions reflect the murkiness of control and the fear of rising political religiosity, particularly as it pertains to Islam. On the other side of this controversy is the westernization of the headscarf, an observation made by

Mike Mandel and Chantal Zakari in their book project *The State of Ata*, in which the artist-authors note via photo essay the recent transformation of the headscarf into an erotically-infused accessory. This phenomenon is particularly apparent in Turkey, which stands as a geographic, ideological and religious bridge between East and West, and is the subject of *The State of Ata*. Using the founder and first president of the Turkish Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as the main actor in their play, Mandel and Zakari have spent the past twelve years investigating the ways in which this political and social cult figure, and the relationship the nation of Turkey has to him (as leader, hero, patriarch, teacher), has come to define contemporary Turkish society. Following the First World War, Atatürk transformed the country into a secular nation, though it remains ninety-nine percent Muslim. Experimenting with the symbolic force of his portrait—an image that is omnipresent in both the public and private sphere in Turkey—Mandel and Zakari’s research and interventions come together as a “collection of books within a book”: archival images, travelogues, interviews, photo essays and texts that act as the culmination of years’ worth of active dialogue. The two authors make it clear that reconciliation is not contingent on congruency and that, however veiled, harmony in a religiously and politically divided world is a powerful aesthetic ambition.

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