January 2024

Professor Mali Romantic-Longhair and the Girl

Fatma Fulya Tepe
İstanbul Aydın University, Turkey

Per Bauhn
Linnaeus University, Sweden

Follow this and additional works at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws

Part of the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol26/iss1/26

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts. This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.
Professor Mali Romantic-Longhair and the Girl

By Fatma Fulya Tepe\(^1\) and Per Bauhn\(^2\)

There was this professor, called Mali. Actually, his name was Ali, a common enough name for a Turkish man. However, during his time as a student in France, he had gotten used to being formally addressed as *Monsieur* Ali. In writing, the French would shorten this to “M. Ali.” When he returned to Turkey, his students, tired of how he all too often tried to impress them with his French experiences, responded by renaming him “Mali.” Some even called him “Mali Romantic-Longhair,” knowing how much he liked to pose for photographs in an unbuttoned white shirt with his long dark hair falling from the top of his head to the bottom of his chin and so framing his face. Mali certainly loved himself.

He was 50 years old and short with a small watermelon belly which used to protrude when he sat down. Despite his age, he gave the impression of being young and dynamic, with an air of promise. He would come to the university wearing jeans, white sneakers, and a backpack. He seemed to know everything. He had experienced various excitements while studying in France. From the very beginning of his career, he felt a great urgency to make the things he had learned available to a Turkish audience. So most, if not all, of his work was spent summarizing and publishing what he had learned abroad. Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe him as a professor of summaries. He had not done much research himself and so he lived on recycling the work of other academics. He loved himself with great enthusiasm. He also had big dreams about himself as the one destined to bring new literature, a new way of thinking, and new perspectives to Turkey. Everything was going to change now. And he was the god, bringing about this change.

Now, Mali prided himself on having good relations with his students, especially his women students. He couldn’t pass by beautiful young women without complimenting them and giving them his most approving look. Like that young girl with big beautifully shaped eyes who wanted to be a TV anchorwoman. For the sake of simplicity, we will call her the “Girl.” That day, when the Girl put green contact lenses onto her brown eyes, applying a matching eyeliner, Mali couldn’t help but express his approval of her new look by nodding his head and smiling as he gave her a long and searching gaze. Mali felt it part of his professorial duty to direct his gaze to the Girl, as some kind of feedback. Beauty must be encouraged.

When she became aware of Mali’s gaze, the Girl remembered something she had once read: that men are in the habit of surveying women, reducing them to objects of their desire in the process, and that women only too often allow this to happen. The Girl understood that she was indeed being surveyed by Mali and that this was part of a more far-reaching ambition on his part—

---

1 Fatma Fulya Tepe is Associate Professor of Sociology with a focus on Turkish women’s studies at Istanbul Aydın University, Turkey. Dr. Tepe has published articles and conference papers relating to gender studies, motherhood studies, girlhood studies, oral history, and hybridity in Turkish journals as well as in international journals such as *Migration Letters, Journal of International Women’s Studies,* and *Feminist Formations.* She has had two research projects on Turkish women financed by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (Tübitak) in 2014 and 2023, respectively.

2 Per Bauhn is Emeritus Professor of Practical Philosophy at the School of Cultural Sciences, Linnaeus University, Sweden. He has published books and articles on topics such as human rights, political terrorism, nationalism, the virtue of courage, the value of beauty, and the duty to rescue. His philosophical work is inspired by Alan Gewirth’s agency-based theory of rights. Among Per Bauhn’s publications are *The Value of Courage* (Nordic Academic Press, 2003), *Normative Identity* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), and *Animal Suffering, Human Rights, and the Virtue of Justice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

Published by Virtual Commons - Bridgewater State University, 2024
to take possession of her. She was on display and Mali was summing up her body, just as he had in the past summed up the ideas of other scholars.

By now, Mali’s flirtation with college female students was already commonplace. It could hardly escape anyone’s notice. Perhaps his education in France had convinced him that it was all right to use his sexuality, or at least his sexual preferences, as a tool for teaching values? Such an interpretation would certainly be welcomed by Mali, freeing him of any suspicion of inappropriate behavior. The alternative interpretation, which Mali certainly would not approve of, would be that he was simply just another dirty old man with a professor’s name, a sexual predator refusing to respect the border between private desire and public career and treating women students as potential members of his private harem.

Now what could the Girl do in this situation? What would be a fitting reaction to Mali’s approving gestures, his inviting smile, his penetrating gaze? On the one hand, she could take Mali’s admiration seriously and reciprocate, and then they might begin an intimate relationship. Intimate or intimidating—which word would most correctly describe such a relationship? Should one think of it in terms of a close friendship or as the brutal and violent exercise of power? Shouldn’t intimacy require equality? Can a relationship between unequals ever be intimate for both participants? On the other hand, the Girl could ignore what Mali did. But that would take some strength and courage. Would she have enough strength and courage?

There was an old woman professor who had witnessed the gaze that Mali gave the Girl, but she chose to turn a blind eye. Perhaps she did not see anything unusual in what had happened. Perhaps she was used to Mali’s ways and believed that this is what one should expect from someone who has been to France. But then this old woman professor was not herself the object of Mali’s gaze; nor was she likely to be targeted by Mali’s predatory attention, as his gaze is always directed at younger women. It was easy for her to ignore what was going on. It was not her war to fight.

But the Girl’s situation was different. She was the one who felt penetrated by Mali’s eyes. And now it was up to her to deal with this experience on her own. She could not count on the old woman professor to do anything. This was not a case in which one woman could automatically rely on the support of another woman. The old woman professor’s age and position made her relation to Mali different from the Girl’s. If the Girl could find it in herself just to ignore Mali’s inviting (and invading) eyes, she might be able to go on with her studies as if nothing had happened. But would this be possible for her?

Here something extraordinary happened, dear reader. Time opened up and divided itself in two parallel tracks, and both of them are now available to the Girl. She can choose either of these two tracks but not both of them at the same time. Depending on her choice, our story will develop in different directions.

First Track

The Girl lets herself be persuaded by Mali’s invitation to intimacy, believing that since he is superior and powerful in the university context of which she is also a part, she has to go along with what he has to offer (although she cannot deny that she finds his watermelon-shaped belly disgusting). She accepts Mali’s invitation and lets herself be invaded by him. Invitation followed by invasion. His power paired with her powerlessness. “The price of being human, when you’re poor enough to pay,” as the singer-songwriter Kris Kristofferson once quipped. The Girl trades her future in academia for the approval of the professor who had been to France and learned how to sharpen his gaze into a weapon of conquest. Now, she cannot both be his student and his
mistress. To sit in his class, being surveyed not only by him but also by her fellow students, who in all probability know about the affair, would simply be unbearable. She is now reduced to whatever position Mali’s imagination designs for her—his Muse, his toy, his plaything, the living proof of his masculinity. Whatever power she can have, she will from now on derive it from him, not from her own achievement. Her only pride is to be found in the pleasure that she can give him, the satisfaction of his ego, the conquering professor’s steadily swelling ego. The Girl allows herself to be that object that Mali once created in his gaze. But what a price she has to pay for his satisfaction! She gives up her academic studies, her expectations of a future in academia, and the prospects of a secure and decently paid employment.

And, most importantly, she gives up herself. What she thinks, wants, and needs for herself is now second to what Mali thinks, wants, and needs for himself. Her voice is silenced; his voice is everywhere. However, as often happens in these kinds of unequal relationships, Mali gets tired of her and decides to get rid of her. “Let’s not see each other for some time,” he tells her.

She cannot understand this. Why, all of a sudden, has the fire gone out of his gaze? He still surveys her body, but his eyes seem less hungry now. He has tasted the forbidden fruit, and it no longer has any secrets for him to reveal. She feels herself unwanted. She tries to assert herself by once more coming to his class, only to find herself being openly scorned by Mali. In front of the whole class, he asks her questions she has not been able to prepare for, and when she cannot answer, he makes a dismissive gesture with his hand and tells her (and the rest of the class), “No, of course you do not know the answer. Why would you? After all, they do not read that many books in the village you come from, do they?”

She feels his words as nails being driven into her throat and chest. She cannot speak but feels how tears burn behind her eyelids. Never before has she been so humiliated. She tries to defend herself: “My family does not come from a village, and you know it.”

But Mali just turns on her once again: “Oh, so you think you are superior because you were born in the city? But there are illiterate people and dark mules in the city, too.”

This is just too much for her. Mali’s words about dark mules have hit her hard. Obviously, he wants to alert the class to the color of her skin, implying that the Girl has a mixed Turkish-Kurdish background, and that this is reason enough to question her general social and cultural standing. As if this was not bad enough, Mali likens her to an animal known for being stubborn rather than clever. She cannot just sit there and take all the abuse he is heaping on her. With tears running down her cheeks, she collects her books and hurriedly leaves the lecture room. There is not much the Girl can do in the face of all these humiliations. She understands that Mali is trying to reduce her to an object of ridicule, but she cannot understand why. Slowly she comes to see that she has always been an object to Mali, first as an object of his sexual desire, then as an object of his scorn. She notices that Mali now has turned his gaze to other young female students. The Girl tells her family about what Mali has done, and together with them she goes to the dean’s office to make a complaint about Mali’s behavior, but they are not taken seriously.

“It is your word against Professor Mali,” the dean tells her, “and he has an outstanding reputation for being a good teacher, while you, on the other hand, have not been a very good student here.”

The Girl asks the dean if he has confronted Mali with her complaint. “Yes,” the dean replies, “but Mali has given a perfectly plausible explanation: You had a crush on him, as many female students do, and when he turned down your advances, you wanted to get back at him by making a formal complaint. Now, young lady, I must say I am surprised that you want to continue your studies here after having made such baseless accusations against one of our best professors.”
The Girl looks bewildered at the dean. “Do you want me to quit the university?” she asks. The dean does not answer, but just looks down in his papers, indicating that the interview is over.

Completely broken down, hopeless, and with feelings of defeat and shame that she cannot fully understand—after all, it is Mali, not she, who is guilty of abusive behavior here—she leaves the dean’s office with her parents. She feels she has let not only herself but also her family down. It is as if her encounter with Mali condemns those close to her. She comes to think of this some time later, when one of her female cousins is made a victim of sexual harassment at her university. The cousin decides not to tell anyone and instead leaves her research assistant position. “Is this because I could not defend myself? Is she afraid of just having to repeat my experience?” the Girl asks herself.

Confusing feelings of guilt invade her mind, just as Mali previously had invaded her body. Why is it the victim who has to live with the guilt while the perpetrator walks free? The Girl finds it impossible to hope for a bright future, whether in academia or elsewhere. Having given up on herself, the Girl thinks her only way forward is to look for another Mali, another man who would invite and invade her, make her his instrument, his toy, his plaything.

However, dear reader, as we already know, the story about Mali and the Girl does not have to unfold in this way. It all depends on how she chooses to respond to his advances in the first place. What if she had rejected him instead of giving in to his desires?

Second Track

The Girl observes Mali’s approach with contempt. How could this potbellied semi-old man with his long greasy hair seriously believe that she or any other woman of her age would take him seriously? Is this what happens to men who go to France for studies? There they feed on cheese and wine and women who are too easily taken in by them, and as a result, their heads grow too big for their hats. They believe that the world is a smorgasbord of women just there for them to taste, chew, and spit out. The Girl decides to teach Mali a lesson.

She smiles back at him, making him feel safe and confident in his advances toward her. When he asks her out for a picnic in the nearby park, she says yes. Mali is excited. Sitting next to her on the grass, with a glass of wine in his hand, he talks about the things he could teach her if she chooses to have him as the instructor of her doctoral dissertation. At the same time, he moves his other hand slowly towards her leg and places it on her naked thigh, just below the skirt line. The Girl freezes despite the hot weather. Without Mali noticing, she activates the camera of her phone and starts recording. She is quite certain that the camera will capture Mali’s face and his hand on her thigh. And it does. Later, when she has managed to disentangle herself from an increasingly inebriated Mali and his sweaty hands, she checks her phone and finds a perfect video of their picnic. She saves the video on her laptop but also makes a few still images that she later has developed at the university.

The next day Mali is full of excitement and greedy for another close encounter with the Girl. He has expectations. He has hopes. That is, he has expectations and hopes until he approaches his office door. There he finds two large photos attached with adhesive tape, showing his red face, flushed with desire and lust, and his big, wet hand firmly placed on a woman’s thigh. One cannot see the woman’s face, but Mali’s face is only too visible. He immediately understands that the photos must be from yesterday’s picnic. He hears the giggling voices of two female students who have been studying the photos for some time. “Look at his hair,” one of them says, “Does he put food oil in it or how come it looks so greasy?”
“And look at his hand,” the other one says, “do you see the dirt under his nails?”
And they laugh.
Mali, who has been petrified by fear and bewilderment, now wakes up. With an angry
growl, he throws himself forward and tears down the photos. By now many students have gathered
in front of his office. Mali does not look into their faces. He feels himself judged and he does not
like it at all. In fact, he hates it. He is no longer in control. Then he sees the Girl down the corridor.
Infuriated, he runs toward her. “You bitch!” he screams, “I will kill you for this.”
By now, even more people are gathering, wondering about the screaming and noise. Mali’s
faculty colleagues watch him in astonishment as he rushes down the corridor. They are even more
astonished to see him grab the Girl forcefully by the hand, screaming, “Give me your phone! I
want that damned video of yours!”
The Girl now has him where she wants him. She screams out, “What are you doing? Let
go of me! Help! Can anyone help me? I am being assaulted!”
Two heavily built students and one professor grab Mali by the shoulders and pull him away
from the Girl. “Behave yourself, man!” says Mali’s professor colleague, who adds, “This must be
reported. We cannot have violence on campus.”
Mali is taken to the Rector’s office. He still holds the photos from his door in his hand.
“What is this, Mali?” asks the Rector. “Have you taken leave of your senses? Physically attacking
a female student—what kind of madness is this? And what are those photos you have there?”
In spite of Mali’s protest that they have nothing to do with anything, the Rector makes him
hand over the photos. The Rector gives them a quick glance and immediately understands the
situation. “What have you done, Mali? You have scandalized our university by taking part in an
orgy and on the top of this you have physically assaulted a female student. Was that the student
who took these photos? Let us just hope, for the university’s sake, that she does not take them to
a newspaper too. But you are finished here, Mali. I will give you a month’s salary as severance
pay, but you have to leave today and never show your face here again.”
Devastated, empty, and still not fully understanding what has hit him, Mali stumbles out
of the Rector’s office. His academic career has come to an end. The Girl has finished him. He
leaves the campus area and steps into the street, feeling utterly shaken. From a distance, he thinks
he sees the back of the Girl. He feels an uncontrollable rage building up within him. He looks
around, sees an iron bar on the ground, picks it up, and starts to run down the street. This time he
is going to have his revenge. He does not care about the consequences. He is going to kill the Girl
who in one blow has deprived him of all that superiority a French education can give you. He is
almost within hitting distance now. He raises the iron bar, aiming for the back of the Girl’s neck.

Here, dear reader, our story takes an unexpected turn, involving a middle-aged woman
called Selma living in a house on the street where Mali is chasing the Girl. Selma never goes out
after dark as she is afraid of the gangs that operate in the neighborhood. However, she very much
enjoys taking a midday walk, as she feels safe when the street is crowded with academics from the
nearby university who are out to grab lunch. This particular day Selma’s trust in the safety of a
university neighborhood turns out to be badly misplaced. It so happens that she steps out in the
street in front of Mali just as he swings his iron bar against the Girl. Instead of hitting the Girl, he
hits Selma over her head. She gives out a sharp scream and falls to the ground. As so oft
when a man lashes out, it is a woman who gets hurt, whether or not she is his intended target.
The Girl turns around and sees Mali standing there, the iron bar still in his hand. She looks
coldly at him. “Yes, you are certainly not an ordinary man, Mali,” she says, before quickly taking
out her phone and calling for police and an ambulance.
The next day’s newspapers carry Mali’s photo all over their front pages. His university declares that they are now going to establish a special committee to prevent sexual harassment. The Girl is to be a student representative on this committee. She is also provided with special funding by the university to write a doctoral dissertation on the topic of female students, male professors, and sexual abuse. Everyone predicts a brilliant academic future for her.

So, dear reader, do you believe in the first track or in the second track? Which track will the Girl choose? Which track can she choose? Maybe the answer will tell us something not only about the Girl, but also about you, dear reader. Do you believe in facing challenges with courage and defiance, or are you more inclined to believe that we are all caught up in structures that we cannot do very much about? But then how does it happen that structures are modified and eventually abolished? Must the Girl be only a passive recipient of circumstances that she cannot control, or can she be an agent of her own destiny, taking control of the situation in which she finds herself? Read the story again, reflect, and decide for yourself.