No man's land: gender and sexuality in erotic narratives of the Late Ottoman Empire

Özoglu, M.

Introduction

No Man's Land is the quintessential image of the void between two frontlines. For those who bore witness to the First World War (1914-1918), it suggested the experience of marginality, liminality, and the betwixt-and-betweenness that had lasting implications for their lives after the War (Leed 1979: 14-15). Sandra M. Gilbert points out how the First World War also had implications for twentieth-century literature. She writes,

> [f]rom Lawrence's paralyzed Clifford Chatterley to Hemingway's sadly emasculated Jake Barnes to Eliot's mysteriously sterile Fisher King, moreover, the gloomily bruised modernist anti-heroes churned out by the war suffer specifically from sexual wounds, as if, having traveled literally or figuratively through No Man's Land, all have become not just No Men, nobodies, but *not* men, *un*men. That twentieth-century Everyman, the faceless cipher, their authors seem to suggest, is not just publicly powerless, he is privately impotent. [emphasis in the original] (1983: 423)

The Ottoman Empire, as one of the participants in the First World War, brought back its own experience of No Man's Land. In fact, the feelings of powerlessness and impotence came into existence in the Ottoman Empire before the War, and they can be traced back to the eighteenth century when the weakening position of the Empire in world politics began to be felt. Later, these feelings intensified during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and resonated in literature as well. It was not a coincidence then that the Ottoman Turkish novel, which emerged in the second half of the nineteenth

century, often revolved around the feelings of powerlessness and impotence. These feelings were deeply expressed by the fictional male protagonists who had not even been to No Man's Land in the First World War, but belonged to a land in which they were exposed to the burdens of being "*not* men, *un*men" due to the decline of the Ottoman Empire as well as to losing wars and territories [emphasis in the original]. To put it another way, apart from the Empire's publicly overt powerlessness in world politics, the feeling of impotence permeated Ottoman Turkish fiction.

This feeling of impotence was also central stage in erotic literature of that period. An enormous number of erotic narratives, most of which were unconventional and which differed from traditional Ottoman Turkish erotic works, were written and published between 1908 and 1928 in the period from the proclamation of the Second Constitution until the early years of the Turkish Republic when they were banned. My contention is that twentieth-century erotic narratives became the No Man's Land of Ottoman Turkish fiction in several ways. To begin with, these narratives fell outside of the traditional canon and became marginalised. This situation has prevailed to the present day. There is literature on twentieth-century erotic narratives, however it is limited in scope. In addition to their marginalisation, these narratives contained liminalities of desire that were situated betwixt-and-between modern discourses on gender and sexuality on the one hand, and sexual practices and roles prior to modern construction of sexuality on the other. Moreover, the period these narratives were written in – from the proclamation of the Second Constitution until the early years of the Turkish Republic – constituted a political liminality that was a transition from the Empire to the nation-state. This dissertation scrutinises the newly emerging discourses regarding gender and sexuality in twentieth-century erotic narratives, a field that has suffered from a lack of study and which deserves

greater scholarly attention. It aims to answer the following questions: To what extent did the historical, societal context and twentieth-century erotic narratives interact to produce new discourses on gender and sexuality? More specifically, in what ways are representations of masculinities connected to the transition to modernity and the decline of the Empire? What purposes do the reifications of male bodies serve regarding the formation of masculine subjectivities in these narratives? How do the different readings of popular erotic narratives inform our understanding of the Ottoman Empire? Bearing these questions in mind, this dissertation is intended to read Ottoman Turkish erotic narratives of the twentieth century as literary constructions of gender and sexuality with a particular focus on, but not limited to, masculinity.

Zafer Toprak, a pioneer scholar who first drew attention to these narratives, indicates that along with the proclamation of the Second Constitution, "freedom" advanced on almost every front in society (2017: 25). Early twentieth-century erotic narratives became a sort of expression of freedom, and they were unique to such a "chaotic" period (Toprak 2017: 28-29). However, this does not mean that erotic works were found only in twentieth-century Ottoman Turkish literature. They also existed in literature before the period I am discussing. In his article "Print Capitalism and Women's Sexual Agency in the Late Ottoman Empire", İrvin Cemil Schick notes, "from sex manual, through court poetry, to shadow theatre, erotic expression was always present in Ottoman society". Yet, the way eroticism was expressed took a different turn in the twentieth century (2011: 212).[1]

Prior to the twentieth century, among works in prose, *bâhnâme*s (books of libido/intercourse), for instance, were medical and erotic texts, many of which were partially or entirely translated from Arabic or Persian

[1] For an extensive overview of sexuality in Turkish literature see Konur Ertop. *Türk Edebiyatında Seks*. İstanbul: Seçme Kitaplar Yayınevi, 1977.

texts (Schick 2004: 83-84). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, *bâhnâme*s were transformed into books for sexual positions (Bardakçı 1993: 57). Some other prose works were, to a great extent, homoerotic such as *Dâf'ü'l-gumûm ve Râfi'ü'l-humûm* (Expeller of Sorrows and Remover of Worries, 1483-1511) and *Dellaknâme-i Dilküşâ* (Joy-giving Book of the Masseur, 1686) (Schick 2004: 84-85).[2] Moreover, imagery and vocabulary in classical poetry also contained sensuality and sexual themes especially in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries (Schick 2004: 86).[3] There were also *şehrengîz* examples that described beautiful boys of a certain city. Besides, Enderunlu Fazıl Bey's *Hubânnâme* (Book of [Male] Beauties) and *Zenânnâme* (Book of Women) illustrated features of men and women of various nations. In a similar vein, *hammâmiye* or *hammamnâme* (book of bath) exclusively described beautiful boys and young men (Schick 2004: 89-90). Furthermore, folk poetry, dominated by *âşık* (minstrel) poetry, and shadow theatre largely contained erotic themes as well (Schick 2004: 90-94).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a great number of books and articles concerning gender and sexuality were published by privately owned publishing houses. They criticised arranged marriages and polygyny, and upheld monogamous and companionate unions. The significance of living a healthy and satisfying sexual life for women as well as for men was emphasised, while extramarital sexual intimacy was depicted as being fun and worth trying (Schick 2011: 215). Nevertheless, this did not hold for the canon novel, which frequently annihilated sexuality and womanhood, standardised sexual forms and gender, and placed emphasis on

[2] See Selim S. Kuru. "Sex in the Text: Deli Birader's *Dâf'ü'l-gumûm ve Râfi'ü'l-humûm* and the Ottoman Literary Canon." *Middle Eastern Literatures,* 10.2 (2007): 157-174, Selim S. Kuru. "*A Sixteenth Century Scholar: Deli Birader and His Dâf'ü'l-gumûm ve râfi'ü'l-humûm*." Harvard University, 2000.

[3] See Kemal Silay. *Nedim and the Poetics of the Ottoman Court: Medieval Inheritance and the Need for Change*. Bloomington: Indiana University, 1994.

women's fertility and their mothering role. This was because of the regulatory state-produced discourses on gender and sexuality, which noticeably developed during the emergence of nationalism in the last years of the Ottoman Empire as well as the early years of the Turkish Republic. Even when women were represented sexually, sexuality was depicted as 'harmful' and 'evil'. As Deniz Kandiyoti writes, "[…] emancipating and literally unveiling women required compensatory symbolism and a new veil – that of sexual repression" (1988: 47). Thus, sexuality was used as a discursive tool for delineating the boundaries of the cultural exclusion or inclusion of women, and overlaid with a moralistic tone by the authors.

Nevertheless, twentieth-century erotic narratives did not conform to the moralistic tone of the canonised literature. Schick informs us that erotic narratives led to intense debates when they were published; they were accused of being 'mischievous' in intent. On the one hand, the emergence and development of erotic narratives was frequently identified with the decline of the Empire. This decline was not only the result of political failures, but was also believed to be caused by newly emerging social norms and public morality. On the other hand, the emergence of these narratives was regarded as being the cause of social 'breakdowns', and was blamed for the rise of prostitution and other societal "ills". No matter which came first, the erotic narratives or the 'moral decline', these narratives represent the new notions of gender and sexuality that appeared in the late Ottoman Empire (2011: 211-212).

In order to excite readers, publishing houses saw no harm in putting daring cover pictures on these narratives (Toprak 2017: 27). They were often published with a subtitle "*milli roman*" (national novel) or "*milli hikaye*" (national story). Schick considers this subtitle apt, as the growth of the printing press during the Second Constitutional period helped to promote

Turkish national consciousness – as an example of Benedict Anderson's "print capitalism" – and channelled the diffusion of new discourses on gender and sexuality in society. Schick further writes, "[t]he global context in which print capitalism flourished in the Ottoman Empire was that of modernity" (2011: 202-203). Benjamin C. Fortna speaks of the relation between literacy and modernity that functioned on different levels, the individual, groups of individuals – religious, social, economic, familial, cultural, political –, and society as a whole with regard to Anderson's "imagined community" (2011: 2, 5). The rise in literacy provided new social and economic opportunities, reorganised political and cultural influences, and redesigned the interaction between state and society (Fortna 2010: 563). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, competitive publishing houses created content and promoted its distribution with only one goal in mind: profit (Schick 2011: 216). In fact, the production of erotic narratives was a concerted dialogue between the author and the reader; the author was subjected to and then wrote in line with the reader's expectation. Narratives were written quickly and provided their authors' daily bread (Toprak 2017: 28, 30). These narratives were published using pseudonyms or just initials as well as anonymously. Many popular and/or canon authors of the period such as "Şövalye" Hasan Bahri (Özdeniz) (dates unknown), Avanzâde Mehmed Süleyman (1871-1922), Mehmed Rauf (1875-1931), Selahaddin Enis (Atabeyoğlu) (1892-1942), Selami İzzet (Sedes) (1896-1964), wrote such works (Schick 2004: 95, 97).

It is my contention that there are two reasons why twentieth-century narratives were marginalised. The first reason is generic. Erotic literature has almost never been part of any literary canon, but has been regarded as part of the subculture, perhaps apart from the writings of Marquis de Sade. Ottoman Turkish erotic narratives of the twentieth century were not embedded in the

literary canon either. However, numberless erotic stories and novellas, which, Toprak argues, did not have literary value, were in demand, so much so that they surpassed the canonised literature in sales (2017: 30, 26). Toprak considers these narratives a revolt against the canonised literature (2017: 29). He names them *müstehcen avam edebiyatı* (obscene popular literature) and states that some of the narratives could even be counted as "pornographic" – using modern criteria (2017: 31).

The way Toprak distinguishes obscene literature from pornography evokes Steven Marcus' comparison of pornography to literature in his famous work *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* in which he comes to the conclusion that unlike literature that has "a multiplicity of intentions", pornography is preoccupied with gratification (1966: 278). In her essay "The Pornographic Imagination", Susan Sontag, on the other hand, opposes the rigid idea that pornography and literature are "antithetical" (1969: 44). She writes,

> [r]elatively uncommon as they may be, there are writings which it seems reasonable to call pornographic – assuming that the stale label has any use at all – which, at the same time, cannot be refused accreditation as serious literature. (1969: 36)

It is rather difficult, if not impossible, to designate the limits and definitions of sexual material and determine to what extent its content obstructs the literariness of a certain work. This dissertation is neither concerned with such definitions nor the literariness of these works. The definitions of "erotic", "pornographic", and "obscene" are historically and culturally contingent, and further depend on individual judgement. In his essay "Pornography and Obscenity", D.H. Lawrence, for instance, underlines the way in which

pornography and obscenity very much depend on one's personal view; as he famously puts it "[w]hat is pornography to one man is the laughter of genius to another" (1929: 5). Along the same line, Alain Robbe-Grillet writes, "[p]ornography is the eroticism of others" (*La pornographie, c'est l'érotisme des autres*) (Charney 1981: 1). Nevertheless, there is broad consensus on the emergence of pornography, which came to be a discrete category only after the development of print culture and the increase in literacy in the nineteenth century. Lynn Hunt states that the regulation of printed works became significant for categorising whether a work is pornographic or not (1993: 19). In her discussion on the female nude in paintings, Lynda Nead remarks that the regulation of pornography is not solely about controlling the sexual materials, but also about regulating audiences of these materials (1992: 3). Thus, the context of the consumption of sexual material as well as its consumer also becomes important vis-à-vis its content.

Regarding "obscenity", Nead points to the covert, suggestive nature of "obscenity" when she writes that the etymology of "obscene" may be an alteration of "scena" in Latin meaning "beyond representation" (1992: 25). In her doctoral dissertation, Düriye Fatma Türe also uses the name *müstehcen avam edebiyatı* as Toprak when analysing erotic fiction published in the 1920s in Turkey. In addition to the Western definition of the word obscene, Türe concentrates on the Arabic sense of the word "*müstehcen*", meaning "immodest" or "shameless". This word is related to "*hücnet*", which can be translated as "bawdy" or "obscene". Ultimately, similar to Nead, Türe justifies her choice for "obscene" due to suggestive linguistic references that hint at sexual relations as opposed to "pornography", which describes sexual relations with the intent to arouse the reader (2007: 201).

In *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England*, Ian Frederick Moulton points out that "erotic writing", as an analytical tool, has

the advantage over "pornography" because it is "relatively free of moral judgement". He is not concerned with categories but uses "erotic writing" to bring together a variety of texts that are concerned with sex, though the texts are not necessarily "sexy" (2000: 6). Moreover, Murat Bardakçı underlines the difference between works that contain sexual elements and works that are only about sexuality (1993: 10). As Schick puts it, "the mere presence of a sexual dimension does not qualify a literary work as erotic […]" (2004: 81). I suggest reading the narratives within the scope of this dissertation as literary works, ones that represent new discourses on gender and sexuality that became available in the late Ottoman society. Hence, I refer to the corpus of these works as "popular erotic literature" precisely because the word "obscene" connotes the 'unrepresentability' of discourses on gender and sexuality that permeated Ottoman society.

Before the printing press, Ottoman erotic manuscripts were limited and reached only a restricted number of people. Orally transmitted erotica reached a broader audience. But their content changed during oral transmission. The printing press fixed and stabilised erotic literature and made it accessible to a broader audience. However, erotic narratives also became more open to government intervention, and secular or religious authorities restrained them at times (Schick 2011: 211). In the United Kingdom, Lord Campbell introduced his Obscene Publications Bill to the House of Lords in 1857. The legislation proposed preventing the exposure of obscenity to the public to provide and preserve public hygiene and morals, since the effects of pornography influenced public social life in general and everyday individuals in particular (Nead 1992: 99). Similar concerns about erotic narratives were raised in the late Ottoman society. Although there was political censorship in the Second Constitutional period, it did not interfere with popular erotic literature too much (Toprak 2017: 27). Also in the very

early years of the Turkish Republic, the government did not have the time to pay attention to popular erotic literature, because the rapid social and cultural transformations were its top priorities (Toprak 2017: 29). Ultimately, the general assembly of the Republican People's Party in 1927 was the turning point for these sorts of publications, publications that reflected "the dirtiest and the most intriguing" phases of life under the name of "*milli roman*" (Toprak 1987: 26). *Maarif Vekaleti* (the Board of Education) drafted a law in order to prohibit these "publications undermining the morale of youth". The draft of the law was based on a law that was used in Germany. Its purview was to protect children under the age of eighteen. The law went into effect as *Küçükleri Muzır Neşriyattan Koruma Kanunu* (the Law of Protection of Minors Against Obscene Publications) on the 7th of July 1927 by being published in the official gazette (Toprak 2017: 36). Popular erotic literature gradually disappeared from the market.

The publication of these erotic works was halted around the same time as the reform of the alphabet in the Turkish language – in the early years of the Turkish Republic (1928).[4] This is the second, and more specific, reason for the marginalisation and exclusion of these works from the literary canon. Jale Parla remarks that the abolition of the Arabo-Persian alphabet and the adoption of the Latin alphabet made the Ottoman past inaccessible to those born after 1925. She further states that the alphabet reform would have failed in breaking ties with the past, if it had not been followed by the language reform of 1936, the purpose of which was to cleanse the Ottoman vocabulary and syntax from Turkish (2008: 28). After the alphabet reform, only certain literary works were Latinised and became accessible to those who were not schooled in Ottoman Turkish. The deliberate choice to Latinise

[4] See Geoffrey Lewis. *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

some works rather than others led to the formation of the Ottoman Turkish literary canon, which mostly took shape under the influence of the early Republican politics and the desired construction of national identity. Kemalist nationalists worked with determination to break Turkey's cultural ties with its Ottoman past through the exclusion of certain publications from the canon. In this way, the Turkish state used language reforms to systematically limit access to the Ottoman past.

Nergis Ertürk writes, "the language reforms did succeed in producing what in effect was an amnesiac majority of modern Turkish speakers and writers" (2011: 103).[5] Both Erich Auerbach and Jacques Derrida sorrowfully refer to the linguistic and cultural amnesia that occurred in Turkey due to these reforms. Auerbach wrote a letter to Walter Benjamin from Istanbul on the 3rd of January 1937:

> No one under 25 can any longer understand any sort of religious, literary, or philosophical text more than ten years old and . . . the specific properties of the language are rapidly decaying. (Ertürk 2011: 103)

Derrida's letter of the 10th of May 1997 – also written in Istanbul exactly sixty years after Auerbach's letter – contains similar remarks about the alphabet reform. He finds the alphabet changes "traumatic" and further writes,

[5] For Ottoman and Turkish literary modernity, see also Nergis Ertürk. "Modernity and Its Fallen Languages: Tanpınar's 'Hasret', Benjamin's Melancholy." *PMLA,* 123.1 (2008): 41-56.

> I only think of that, I mean of her, of it, of the letter. In this case, of that of the Turks, of the transliteration that befell them, striking them full in their history, of their lost letters, of the alphabet they were forced so brutally to change, a short time ago, from one day to the next […] But perhaps this *coup de la lettre*, this chance or blow is struck against us every time something happens: one has not only to undress but to leave, to set out again naked, change bodies, convert the flesh of the words, of signs, of every manifestation, while pretending to stay the same and to remain master of one's own language. […] I am therefore trying to take upon myself, and with me, as it were in me, to comprehend or relieve what, I imagine, here in Turkey, to have been an extermination of the letter, a voyage one never comes back from. [emphasis in the original] (2004: 9, 11, 15)

Derrida regards the alphabet reform of 1928 as an interruption in history for the peoples of the Turkish Republic. One consequence of this reform – which he describes as "a voyage one never comes back from" – is that the Ottoman past became inaccessible. Here, the loss of letters, the so-called "*coup de la lettre*", signifies the loss of the comprehensive collective memory of the Ottoman Empire [emphasis in the original].

Andreas Huyssen evokes the Freudian relationship between memory and forgetting, when he says that "memory is but another form of forgetting, and forgetting a form of hidden memory" (2000: 27). Memory is by definition selective. That is to say, the formation of the Ottoman Turkish literary canon in which twentieth-century popular erotic narratives did not take part was a result of a selection concerning the construction of the collective memory of the Ottoman Empire. This selection was, of course, compatible with the interests of the Turkish Republic. Schick writes,

> [c]ertainly, the republican regime also aimed at reconstructing gender, but it wished to do so on its own terms, from above; the liberal relativism that erotic literature entailed would have been considered a threat to the revolutionary puritanism ushered in by the new order. (2004: 97)

On the other hand, it is their opponents, the Islamist elites and intellectuals who nurture those ties with the Ottoman past as part of their identity practices in current Turkish politics. Given the fact that the current politics in Turkey persists and takes pride in the Ottoman Empire, the neglected position of erotic works poses a dilemma. Ignoring erotic works in discussions about the Ottoman Empire results in an image of the Empire that mostly embodies its Islamic morality and conservative cultural values. In both ways, the works in question have been lost to the comprehensive collective memory of the Ottoman Empire, which has been reconstructed by different political historiographies depending on the self-interest of the existing power.

As mentioned above, I contend that twentieth-century popular erotic narratives can be considered the No Man's Land of Ottoman Turkish fiction, since they have not had their due attention up to the present. In addition to their marginalisation then and now, these narratives were produced in a politically and sexually liminal period from the Empire to the nation-state, a period during which changes in and new discourses on gender and sexuality occurred. This dissertation, therefore, concerns itself with the multiple ways in which these changes and new discourses – particularly concerning masculinities – were represented in popular erotic narratives.

Revisiting Ottoman Turkish Fiction Through Popular Erotic Narratives

In his article entitled "Conjectures on World Literature", Franco Moretti forms a literary system that is "one and unequal", and has a centre and a periphery as in world-system theory (2000: 55-56). He suggests a "*law of literary evolution*" [emphasis in the original]:

> in cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system (which means almost all cultures, inside and outside Europe), the modern novel first arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials. (2000: 58)

As Francesca Orsini rephrases Moretti, "[the] peripheral version of the novel […] will turn out to be the rule in world literature, while the Anglo-French original is really the exception" (2002: 79). Moretti aims to systematise the "structural compromise" that occurs when "peripheral" literatures encounter Western literary forms. Yet, he also indicates, such a compromise took different forms in various literatures such as Turkish, Chinese and Arabic novels (2000: 62). Moretti further explains in detail that by means of the term "compromise" he initially predicates on Fredric Jameson's formal compromise between form and content when discussing the modern Japanese novel. He carries Jameson's compromise a step further and suggests a triangular relation consisting of foreign form, local material – *and local form* [emphasis in the original]. According to Moretti, this third dimension makes novels "seem to be most unstable", because local form as represented by the narrative voice gives expression to unease when foreign form and local material are at odds (2000: 64-65). As for the Ottoman Turkish novel, he engages Parla who also indicates a similar conclusion regarding the

emergence of the Ottoman Turkish novel and the way in which internal tensions and conflicts influenced the narrative voice and made it unstable as in Jameson's reading of the early Japanese novel (2004a: 120). Nevertheless, Parla takes issue with "the law of formal compromise" indicating, "the rise of the novel necessitated a formal compromise everywhere" including the rise of the novel in England and France (2004a: 117, 121).

The "formal compromise" of the Ottoman Turkish novel has often been scrutinised in relation to the Empire's modernisation attempts. For Ottoman society, participation in the process of modernity was primarily a shift in the cultural paradigm, characterised by attempts to compromise tradition with modernity at political, institutional, ideological and cultural levels at the time. It led to epistemological alterations in daily practices such as lifestyles and identity politics, and reshaped the discourses regarding gender and sexuality. These discourses were constructed by examining the new cultural codes and the existing cultural heritage, which had a strong impact on society as well as on literature. In *Babalar ve Oğullar: Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri* (Fathers and Sons: The Epistemological Foundations of the Tanzimat Novel), Jale Parla reads the early Ottoman Turkish novel with a metaphorical father-son relation in mind. In her reading, "fatherlessness" in the process of modernisation is the backbone of the early novels whose content mostly consisted of an intensive search for a father (2004b: 15). Parla's "fatherlessness" turns into a "missed ideal" in Orhan Koçak, who tries to establish a framework to understand the mental dimension of a cultural contradiction generated by Ottoman modernisation (1996: 95). Koçak draws attention to reforms in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, which introduced "Western culture as an ideal to be embraced, thereby first reducing the 'local ego' to a state of infant-like helplessness before the foreign ideal" (1996: 151). Nurdan Gürbilek expands

on Koçak's argument and writes; "the local self will cause the foreign ideal to appear as a deformed one, while the foreign ideal has already deformed that local self" (2003: 603).

Furthermore, in her *Kör Ayna, Kayıp Şark: Edebiyat ve Endişe* (Blind Mirror, Lost Orient: Literature and Anxiety), Gürbilek demonstrates the ways in which socio-cultural and political anxieties felt over against modernity were situated at the centre of the Ottoman Turkish novel and emerged as Oedipal anxieties.[6] She addresses Harold Bloom's seminal work *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* and transforms the Bloomian anxiety of influence into the anxiety of feminisation, a fear of loss – losing virility; that is to say, losing masculinity. According to Gürbilek, the fear of losing masculinity almost always contained the fear of giving maturity away to someone, remaining a child forever (2014: 30, 10). She further writes that the idea of being "defeated" by a modern West was often experienced as the fear of losing self-reliance, the feeling of inadequacy and the anxiety of being stuck in destituteness by the early novelists. It was experienced as a "narcissistic scar" (2014: 13-14). In short, the anxiety of feminisation, emasculation, or childisation settled in the centre of the Ottoman Turkish novel. Accordingly, writing novels started a war concerning masculinity and maturity in the inner world of novelists (2014: 165).

As Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne write, "[m]asculinity appears as an essence or commodity, which can be measured, possessed or lost" in its conventional use (2003: 11-12). Along these lines, with reference to the Lacanian account of anxiety, Drucilla Cornell states that what makes the little boy a man can always be detracted from him. This "leaves him in a

[6] Similar or related anxieties occurred in different contexts in the Middle East. See Wilson Chacko Jacob. *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870-1940*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, Afsaneh Najmabadi. *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

constant state of anxiety and terror" (1998: 143). Whether Ottoman authors treated masculinity as something that can be possessed or lost depending on the imperial power and/or the limits of modernity, many of them certainly presented anxieties derived from the idea of losing one's masculinity in fiction. It is quite significant to note that masculinity is not a single, rigid entity; it cannot be measured or lost. Judith Butler argues that definitions of masculinity and femininity are socially constructed and regulated by various political, legal, religious, and linguistic factors. These social constructions are acted out performatively. She writes,

> [t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results. (2010: 34)

This dissertation examines various social constructions of gender and sexuality in a corpus of popular erotic narratives, with special attention being paid to implied judgements and opinions regarding Ottoman masculinities. It therefore concerns itself with contradictions, transgressions, and interruptions in the formation of modern masculine subjectivities that flowed from social, cultural, and political anxieties due to the social and cultural transition to modernity in the Ottoman Empire.

Kaja Silverman's seminal work *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* offers a useful way to look at different sexual subjectivities in relation to masculinity. She introduces the term "dominant fiction" that refers to "more than the ideological system through which the normative subject lives its *imaginary* relation to the symbolic order" [emphasis in the original]. Here, "fiction" is used to emphasise the imaginary, while "dominant" brings the conventional subject in psychological alignment with the symbolic order.

Dominant fiction secures the continued sense of unity and identity in social formations (1992: 54). Silverman writes about the interruption of social formation in terms of "historical trauma", or,

> any historical event, whether socially engineered or of natural occurrence, which brings a large group of male subjects into such an intimate relation with lack that they are at least for the moment unable to sustain an imaginary relation with the phallus, and so withdraw their belief from the dominant fiction. (1992: 55)

The widespread acceptance of the alignment between penis and phallus means that the phallus signifies more than sexual difference. Indeed, it is such an essential symbol in dominant fiction of the West, argues Silverman, that collective belief in ideology is threatened when prototypical male subjects are not able to identify with the image of male adequacy that is produced by the equation of penis and phallus. Because the phallus is always the artefact of the dominant fiction, historical trauma results in a collapse of the penis/phallus equation. Thus, when the prototypical male subject is not able to "recognize 'himself' within its conjuration of masculine sufficiency", he suffers from an intense feeling of "ideological fatigue" (1992: 15-16).

Such an "ideological fatigue" occurred in Ottoman society due to the decline of the Empire, modernisation, and social change. Scholars like Şerif Mardin and Ahmet Ö. Evin implicitly trace this fatigue in their studies of fiction. Mardin reads early Ottoman Turkish novels as sources for ways to investigate Turkish modernisation and social change (1974: 403). Likewise, in *Origins and Development of the Turkish Novel*, Evin explores the Ottoman Turkish novel in relation to socio-cultural and political developments in the Empire. He establishes a connection between political ideas and literary

works both of which were produced by the same people who acted as intellectuals trained in government service and authors well exposed to French literature (1983: 10). Because Ottoman intellectuals and authors often acted as reformers, it is important to pay attention to what Deniz Kandiyoti notes regarding male reformers in Muslim societies. She writes,

> quite often, male reformers were not speaking from the position of the dominating patriarch, but from the perspective of the young son of the repudiated or repudiable mother, powerless in the face of an aloof, unpredictable and seemingly all-powerful father. (2003: 197)

Kandiyoti speaks of a probable crisis in socially dominant masculinity stemming from the social change that "involved, among other things, a rejection of the life-styles implied by their fathers' domestic arrangements" (2003: 198). Here, dissenting from paternal arrangements is in accord with Parla's reading of the Ottoman Turkish novel that suggests a feeling of "fatherlessness" or Gürbilek's anxiety of feminisation, emasculation or childisation because of changes that have occurred in society.

Ottoman modernisation was a phallocentric project stemming from Oedipal anxieties. Yet, Kandiyoti emphasises that psychoanalytic criticism does not elucidate culturally specific forms of masculine subjectivity (2003: 199). In addition to studying external forces such as colonialism and Western hegemony regarding masculinities, she suggests paying particular attention to historically and culturally specific institutional contexts that "inform and shape gendered subjectivity and yet are subject to constant change and transformation" (2003: 211). Although psychoanalytic criticism has often been criticised due to its privileging of the heterosexual male attitude, it is useful to challenge and resist patriarchal domination from within that very

attitude. Thus, it is important to consider masculinity as a cultural production that contains personal and generic power relations and domination in itself.

Whether psychoanalysis is a useful tool in the study of masculinity depends, according to R. W. Connell, on our understanding of "the structuring of personality and the complexities of desire" as well as "the structuring of social relations". In other words, the significance of psychoanalysis stems from an understanding of both the individual and social relations (1996: 20-21). Speaking of the sexual relation as a social relation of domination, Pierre Bourdiue writes that penetration, when performed on a man, manifests power and domination. It is considered to be a humiliation because "the worst humiliation for a man is to be turned into a woman" (2001: 21). In John Boswell's words,

> [In premodern Europe,] [p]enetration and power were associated with the prerogatives of the ruling male elite; surrendering to penetration was a symbolic abrogation of power and authority – but in a way that posed a polarity of domination-subjection rather than of homosexual-heterosexual (1990: 17).

As Butler notes, gender becomes the product of power relations, because subjects do not choose their gender, but gender creates subjects (1993: x). The Freudian Oedipus complex is "a map of *one* historically possible pattern, and it is necessary to think about this particular pattern in relation to the others" [emphasis in the original] (Connell 1996: 18). Besides, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, for example, "masculinity is rather, the occupant of a *place* in symbolic and social relations" [emphasis in the original]. In this respect, especially Lacanian feminism in Europe points to "a political, symbolic reading of masculinity" (Connell 1996: 19-20). This dissertation benefits

from psychoanalytic literary criticism drawing on the works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan regarding the conditions under which popular erotic narratives were produced, as well as the redefinition of sexuality and gender roles via the medium of these narratives.

Toprak states that popular erotic literature can be seen as synonymous with the literature of social transformation (2017: 28). With reference to Toprak's statement, Schick elsewhere specifies that what we see in popular erotic literature is not a simple projection of social disintegration, but it rather expresses the idea, or the consciousness, of social disintegration. On that note, the corpus of Ottoman Turkish popular erotic literature is not a passive reflection, but it is an active agent that constitutes and forms social reality (2005: 14, 16). Schick's consideration of the popular erotic literature evokes Foucauldian discourse analysis that suggests, "literature can work in a social formation, as opposed to simply reflecting it" (Colebrook 1997: 40). Such an approach prevents treating these narratives as social and cultural documents that mirror reality. As Raymond Williams argues, literature is not a "mute mirror" (Colebrook 1997: 145). Williams' idea that the novel does not reflect but tries to attain a sense of social totality sows the seeds of cultural materialism, which considers literature not merely a representation or reflection, but "an active cultural event" (Colebrook 1997: 147). This dissertation, therefore, analyses the interactions between social transformation and popular erotic literature.

Schick points out that popular erotic narratives of the twentieth century are significant because they symbolise the collective imagination and aspiration of a certain group of people who lived at a certain time and in a certain place (2011: 202). Along the same line, Toprak states that aspirations engraved in the subconscious were expressed between the lines in the narratives (2017: 28). Moreover, the emergence and development of popular

erotic narratives, to a certain extent, developed into a new and comprehensive public discourse. They were particularly significant due to their original and subversive construction of sexuality, which transformed gender relations in late Ottoman society. In other words, they were ground breaking in that they changed fiction into public discourse via their inundation and sophistication of gender relations and sexuality in the period they were written. Thus, I read these narratives as historical and cultural artefacts that were produced in specific historical conditions and functioned as components of certain social, cultural, and political formations. Hence, there is a reciprocal relationship between history as a determining force in literary works and literary works in making sense of history come into prominence throughout this dissertation.

Because my reading of twentieth-century popular erotic narratives is historically motivated, it avails itself of cultural materialism. Through interpreting literary works, often by placing them in historical contexts, cultural materialism constructs "alternative and radically different perspectives" (Brannigan 1998: 119). It displaces formalist readings of literary works and offers more historically and politically engaged readings that bring representations of oppressed and marginalised groups into the literary and cultural debate. Accordingly, cultural materialism reveals the question of representing the "other" regarding race, gender, and sexuality in literary texts (Brannigan 1998: 116). Just as there is no single political dynamic concerning class, race, sexuality, literary works do not have a single reading that waits to be uncovered. Instead, each reading is positioned within a political horizon (Colebrook 1997: 192)

In *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*, Alan Sinfield also draws attention to the importance of reading literary works through the lenses of cultural materialism that demonstrate controversial aspects of our ideological formation with respect to class, race,

gender, and sexual orientation (1992: 47). Sinfield speaks of "dissident reading", a reading that counters conventional readings. He writes,

> dissident potential derives […] from conflict and contradiction that the social order inevitably produces within itself, even as it attempts to sustain itself. (1992: 41)

For Sinfield, dissident reading is a form of political opposition towards the dominant ideology that has to be taken as a point of reference in order to expose contradictions. When dominant ideology fails at concealing contradictions, "faultlines" occur. Faultline stories cover "the awkward, unresolved issues, the ones in which the conditions of plausibility are in dispute". Therefore, they have the most potential for political criticism when examining the process of contestation in the production and interpretation of literary texts (1992: 47).

In *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, Jonathan Dollimore is particularly interested in how language, ideologies, and cultures of domination as well as the kinds of resistance to those contain conceptions such as self, desire, and transgression (1991: 21). Like Sinfield, he also engages in representations of oppressed and marginalised groups that challenge the contempt of the "other". Besides, Dollimore concerns himself with the dominant ideology that is unsettled by means of the plurality of the others. He suggests that even though the "other" is actually used to illustrate superiority of the dominant ideology, it in fact challenges the constructed centrality of the dominant ideology. He writes, "the marginal returns to the centre in a way which disarticulates the centre/margin binary itself" (1991: 331). Thus, the reciprocal relation between centre and margins becomes a ground for contestation.

My contention is that challenges to the dominant ideology by Sinfield and Dollimore inversely evoke Moretti's "*law of literary evolution*" which, as mentioned above, ultimately decentralises the centre, namely the Anglo-French literatures, in world literature [emphasis in the original]. Nevertheless, the way Moretti looks at the non-Anglo-French literatures reinforces the historical hegemony of the Anglo-French novel. In addition to the hegemonic relation or central/peripheral positioning *between* literatures, literary works might have similar relations and positioning *within* the same literature [my emphasis]. On that note, John Brannigan draws attention to a problematic aspect of cultural materialism, which almost always focuses on 'canon' texts and/or authors. He suggests reading the works of "marginalised and neglected" authors. In fact, their works could significantly contribute to a challenge of authority (1998: 115). Here, the works of Sinfield and Dollimore can help reverse the dominant ideology by looking at marginalised and neglected works.

I suggest that narratives within the scope of this dissertation have the potential for dissident reading and may be seen as "faultline" stories. Dissident readings of popular erotic narratives disclose especially the anxieties they contain within the context of social and cultural tensions brought about by modernity. In this dissertation, I make use of the marginality, liminality, and betwixt-and-betweenness of popular erotic literature and aim to challenge the suppositions regarding gender and sexuality in the Ottoman Empire constructed by and judged through political historiographies and canonical works. Therefore, it is intended to look at the Ottoman Turkish literature from an angle that has been ignored due to the marginal position of twentieth-century popular erotic narratives.

Furthermore, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan have often been positioned in discussions about the desiring subject in cultural materialism

(Colebrook 1997: 175). One of the important questions in these discussions concerns the various modes of difference, which can operate in desire. Both Foucault and Lacan rule out desire as natural or pre-given. Desire is constituted by means of a series of prohibitions, regulations and exclusions. In other words, it is produced with regard to "historically-specific textual procedures" (Colebrook 1997: 182-184). In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault underlines the multiplicity of resistances concerning sexuality, which varies depending on historical context and sometimes gives rise to "a 'reverse' discourse". Such a reverse discourse uses the same categories and conceptions as the dominant discourse and disqualifies it (Sinfield 1992: 47-48).

Since the categories and conceptions are not inherent in the literary work, their reading is determined by historical conditions. Conflict between competing ideologies is reproduced in aesthetic and artistic principles of a work, which manifests social, political and moral values and beliefs (Brannigan 1998: 111). In Claire Colebrook's words, "[m]eaning and culture are mutually constitutive: cultures are the effects of stories and narrative production" (1997: 192). Reading twentieth-century Ottoman popular erotic narratives from a cultural materialist angle enables us to demonstrate that they are significant in terms of establishing a literary and ideological history of the new and unconventional representations of sexuality and gender relations. A study of popular erotic narratives, therefore, is of essential importance not simply because of the social and political reality they represent, but also because these narratives have, in turn, epistemologically challenged the existent socio-cultural norms and moral values with regard to the new social practices. Hence, the popular erotic narratives can be seen as a psychohistory, or as Schick suggests a "history of mentalities" of twentieth-century Ottoman society (2005: 15). Accordingly, it contributes to our

understanding of the collective memory of the Ottoman Empire.

Chapter Overview

Lynn Hunt suggests that political structures can be thought of as a body, an idea that allows for erotic connotations. In European history, for example, the body of the king represented the foundation of a legitimate government. The queen's body also had great political significance together with the body of the king, because the hereditary monarchical form was contingent on their erotic functioning (1991: 1). Similar to the bodies of kings in Europe, the Ottoman sultan's body was the symbol of absolute power until the second half of the nineteenth century. Not only does the body of the king or the sultan function to symbolise political structures, but subjects' bodies are also shaped by political structures through body politics. Nevertheless, discussions on body politics have often been focused on women's bodies, which have become representative of social, cultural, and political tensions concerning Islam and/or the Middle East.[7] This dissertation, however, gives prominence to issues of male bodies vis-à-vis representations of masculinities in the early twentieth century when the body of the sultan was not indicative of absolute power any longer.

I contend that representations of male bodies through masculine identities in popular erotic literature inform us about changes and tensions that occurred due to the Ottoman Empire's decline and modernisation attempts. In other words, the reification of masculinities with regard to male

[7] See Ebru Boyar, and Kate Fleet, eds. *Ottoman Women in Public Space*. Leiden: Brill, 2016. Duygu Köksal, and Anastasia Falierou, eds. *A Social History of Late Ottoman Women New Perspectives*. Leiden: Brill, 2013, Madeline C. Zilfi. *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era*. Leiden: Brill, 1997, Leslie P. Peirce. *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

bodies has a great potential for eroticising the Empire's social, cultural, and political tensions and power struggles. In order to provide an accurate understanding of these tensions and struggles, my selection of works is based on the arguments and discussions that are relevant to different masculinities and male bodies, from the body of a eunuch to a 'hyperheterosexual' man. The chapters in this dissertation are thematically organised along the lines of a psychological and physical development of a male body, which moves from castration anxiety through the adolescent years, and ultimately to maturity. While the chapters follow the development of a male body, their content covers more than male subjectivities alone. In other words, although masculine subjectivities are at the heart of this dissertation, they are positioned in a wider context of gender and sexuality in Ottoman Turkish popular erotic narratives.

The chapter organisation is based on themes rather than on particular authors or the oeuvre of an individual author. I restrict my corpus to short stories and novellas published between 1908 and 1922 – beginning from the proclamation of the Second Constitution until the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The corpus of this dissertation includes two canonical authors Ömer Seyfeddin (1884-1920) and Mehmed Rauf whose works were already Latinised. Works I read for this dissertation are the following: *Kesik Bıyık* (Trimmed Moustache, 1918) by Ömer Seyfeddin, *Zifaf Gecesi: Bir Haremağasının Muâşakası* (The Wedding Night: A Eunuch's Lovemaking, 1913) by M.S, *Anahtar Deliğinde* (Through the Keyhole, 1914) by A. Ali Bey, *Kaymak Tabağı* (The Plate of Cream, n.d.) published anonymously, and *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* (The Story of a Lily, 1910) by Mehmed Rauf. This dissertation does not intend to describe 'currents' or 'sub-genres' in popular erotic narratives of the twentieth century, if there are any. Neither my selection nor my reading of the narratives within the scope of this dissertation

pretends to make general claims. Instead, it abstains itself from such reductionist generalisations. I read the selected narratives pursuant to newly emerging discourses on gender and sexuality and against a backdrop of social and political transformations in the twentieth-century Ottoman Empire.

Because my readings of these works are historically contextualised, to demonstrate the overlap of the reciprocal interactions between social transformation and popular erotic literature, Chapter One is devoted to clarifying the ways in which modernity was combined with or was in conflict with Ottoman traditions, with particular reference to discourses concerning gender and sexuality. Here, my focus is on three significant domains; education, the press, and urban change in the Empire's capital, Istanbul, all of which are relevant to contextualise the further discussions and analyses. This chapter therefore serves as an introduction to the socio-cultural context of the late Ottoman period during which twentieth-century popular erotic literature emerged.

Chapter Two focuses on two works, *Kesik Bıyık* and *Zifaf Gecesi: Bir Harem Ağasının Muâşakası,* that were published in times of war: the First World War (1914-1918) and the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) respectively. Although *Kesik Bıyık* was published almost a month after the end of the First World War, its destructive impact was still acutely resonating. Among all the narratives in this dissertation, *Kesik Bıyık* is the only narrative that does not belong to the corpus of twentieth-century popular erotic literature. The reason I include this short story is to show a correspondence between popular erotic literature and the literary canon. This chapter reads both narratives allegorically – by applying psychoanalytic literary criticism. In addition, it can be seen as a postcolonial reading, underlining the entanglement between hegemonic Ottoman masculinity and imperial power. Both narratives reveal the concept of Ottoman manhood under threat as a result of the loss of

imperial power and/or the loss of wars. I look at how these losses are represented as castration anxiety by using symbolic and literal castration motifs. Moreover, in this chapter, I explore the ways in which modernity is fetishised in *Kesik Bıyık* and *Zifaf Gecesi: Bir Harem Ağasının Muâşakası.*

Chapter Three focuses on two narratives, *Anahtar Deliğinde* and *Kaymak Tabağı*, both of which are examples of the *Bildungsroman*. These narratives are concerned with the sexual developments of the adolescent protagonists in their passage into adulthood. Accordingly, this chapter underscores the transitional feature of adolescence vis-à-vis modernity. In these examples, the notion of adolescence plays along with the Empire's modernisation so much so that they become allegories for the late Ottoman period. The protagonists' sexual developments are also read psychoanalytically and in relation to their gender difference. The male protagonist in *Anahtar Deliğinde* leads a 'freer' life by using the privilege of being a man compared to the female protagonist of *Kaymak Tabağı*. This chapter demonstrates how Ottoman society still prioritised manhood and male sexual liberation to a greater extent than it did its female counterpart.

Chapter Four develops a reading of Mehmed Rauf's *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi*, the most well-known work within the entire corpus of popular erotic literature. It actually is an adaptation of the French novel *Le Roman de Violette*. The beginning of the chapter presents the changes that occurred in sexual practices and construction of sexual identities in the nineteenth century. Then, together with the compelling story of the course of Mehmed Rauf's writing the narrative itself, I frame my reading of *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* based on his reading and literary appropriation of *Le Roman de Violette*. By using the themes he tackles in his work – such as virginity and lesbianism – this chapter demonstrates the extent to which modern discourses on gender and sexuality permeated Ottoman society. Thus, it scrutinises the

way in which marginalisation of non-normative sexualities appeared for the benefit of discourses on heterosexuality not only in the literary canon but also in popular erotic literature.