



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

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

Özoglu, M.

Citation

Özoglu, M. (2018, December 5). *No man's land: gender and sexuality in erotic narratives of the Late Ottoman Empire*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/67375>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/67375>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/67375> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Özoglu, M.

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

Issue Date: 2018-12-05

Conclusion

The Ottoman Empire's decline, originating in the eighteenth century, escalated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This decline and the modernisation attempts to prevent the Empire's fall often corresponded to questions of masculinity in Ottoman Turkish literature. Historically contingent and socially constructed definitions of masculinities carried specific meanings concerning the imperial power and domination, which echoed in fiction during and after the conflicts and struggles the Ottoman Empire experienced at the time. Representations of masculinities found their way not only into the Ottoman Turkish literary canon, but also into popular erotic narratives of the twentieth century. Therefore, these narratives are significant historical and cultural artefacts that inform us about the ways in which the Empire's decline and transition to modernity prompted social and political anxieties in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the narratives that I have read as part of this dissertation, these anxieties were reified through male bodies ranging from the body of a 'sexually wounded' eunuch to the body of a hypersexual man, who struggles for an excessive compensation for his masculinity. In either way, the endeavour to prevent the Empire's fall by means of modernisation turned into an endeavour to 'make a diagnosis' of masculinities and deal with social and political anxieties via writing/narrating about masculinity. Therefore, this dissertation has unfolded the social, political, and cultural anxieties with regard to the Empire's decline and transition to modernity by taking notice of the formation of masculine subjectivities in twentieth-century Ottoman Turkish popular erotic narratives.

As mentioned in the introduction, these narratives can be regarded as the No Man's Land of Ottoman Turkish fiction on several accounts. They reflect the experience of marginality, liminality, and the betwixt-and-betweenness of the period in which they were written. Twentieth-century popular erotic narratives were marginalised from the Ottoman Turkish literary canon; they became unavailable to those without access to Ottoman Turkish after the alphabet reform of 1928. In addition to their marginalisation from the literary canon, these narratives also embody a liminal terrain that is both betwixt-and-between and transcending historical boundaries concerning sexual practices and roles, and the construction of sexuality as an identity in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the liminalities contained in the corpus of popular erotic narratives are not limited to sexual liminalities, but they also reflect a political liminality of a transformation from the Empire to the nation-state. In this dissertation, drawing on their marginality, liminality, and betwixt-and-betweenness, I have read twentieth-century Ottoman Turkish popular erotic narratives in relation to the historical context in which they were produced. Accordingly, my reading of the narratives within the scope of this dissertation has been shaped by their historical context and relies on cultural materialism.

I have contended that masculinity as well as the political and literary representations thereof become allegories that signify the conflicts and struggles of the twentieth-century Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, popular erotic narratives facilitate interrogation of the representations of masculinities and their politicisation with regard to the changes occurred in the Empire and the implications of modernisation. On the other hand, these narratives do not passively reflect the historical and societal context in which they were written, but they demonstrate how social and political developments were perceived and represented in literature at the time. Furthermore, popular

erotic narratives played an active role in the formation of new discourses on gender and sexuality. That is to say, these narratives do not only demonstrate representations of new and comprehensive discourses on gender and sexuality, but they also, in turn, shape these discourses. In other words, reading twentieth-century popular erotic narratives is significant not only because of the social and political realities they illustrate, but also because of their potential in moulding discourses on gender and sexuality, and implicitly challenging social norms and cultural formations of masculinities. Newly emerging discourses on, and various constructions of, gender and sexuality lie at the heart of this dissertation. In this respect, popular erotic narratives offer dissident readings through which discourses on gender and sexuality reveal new manifestations of masculine subjectivities.

The narratives within the scope of this dissertation provide different reflections of issues concerning the Ottoman Empire's decline and modernisation attempts in relation to masculinities. For instance, modernity is fetishised in *Kesik Bıyık* and *Zifaf Gecesi: Bir Haremağasının Muâşakası*. Both narratives allegorically represent the Empire's social and political frustrations as the frustrations of masculinity. On that note, the loss of imperial power turned into the loss of protagonists' masculinities. The Empire's encounter with modernity and modernisation attempts dispute and alter masculinities from hegemonic Ottoman masculinity to the eunuch's liminal masculinity. *Anahtar Deliğinde* and *Kaymak Tabağı*, on the other hand, tell the stories of the sexual development of adolescent protagonists in their passage to adulthood. Given that the period of adolescence is a transitional period in one's life, I have contended that it might closely be associated with the late Ottoman period, a period that is as transitional as adolescence due to the Empire's modernisation. Last but not least, *Bir Zanbağın Hikayesi* exhibits the changes in sexual practices and the

permeation of modern discourses on gender and sexuality in late Ottoman society. Hostility towards lesbianism and foregrounding heterosexuality, on the one hand and the indulgence in female same-sex practices as long as these practices are not part of one's identity on the other prove the fluidity between sexual practices and construction of sexual identities. I have discussed the extent to which representations of masculinities are changing, unfixed and variable. These representations take different shapes and allegorically embody the social and political developments of the period. It is my contention that masculinity became a domain of contestation in fiction during the Empire's decline and modernisation. Thus, this dissertation has demonstrated the extent to which sexual, social, and political developments were intertwined in the twentieth-century Ottoman Empire.

Reading works outside of the literary canon – such as popular erotic narratives – offers a chance to look at Ottoman Turkish fiction in a different light. For this reason, instead of focusing on the canonised works, I have looked at marginalised narratives that have the potential to challenge the Ottoman Turkish literary canon, especially the suppositions with regard to gender and sexuality in the Ottoman Empire. Hence, popular erotic narratives of the twentieth century are of capital importance to scrutinise the Ottoman Empire and its literature from an unconventional angle that makes room for reconsideration of the collective memory thereof. Thus, this dissertation is a pioneering work that extensively reads the examples of twentieth-century Ottoman Turkish popular erotic narratives with a specific focus on the formation of masculinities, which is rare compared to the number of studies on women in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, this dissertation contributes not only to the study of Ottoman Turkish fiction, but also refines the understanding of gender and sexuality in the Ottoman Empire.