# Towards a Local Queer Aesthetics: Queer Cultural Productions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Turkey

by

Duygu Ula

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Comparative Literature) in the University of Michigan 2019

# **Doctoral Committee:**

Associate Professor Tatjana Aleksić, Co-Chair Professor Frieda Ekotto, Co-Chair Professor Caryl Flinn Professor Kader Konuk, University of Duisburg-Essen

# Duygu Ula

dula@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-4378-2762

© Duygu Ula 2019

 ${\it To\ my\ grandmothers,\ Mukaddes\ T\"uz\"un\ and\ Ecmel\ Ula}$ 

## Acknowledgements

I am deeply thankful to Tatjana Aleksić who took on this project with me from very early on, and who invested her own labor in it by giving me feedback, helping me articulate my ideas, steering me onwards, and supporting me professionally and personally through the minefield of the academic job market. Frieda Ekotto has been a constant source of personal and intellectual encouragement throughout, and I will forever be indebted to her for making me feel that there is a place for me and for this project in academia and for helping me become the feminist scholar that I am today. I would like to thank Kader Konuk for recruiting me to the University of Michigan and helping me conceptualize the very first stages of this project, as well as for her continued support; Caryl Flinn, whose film historiography course greatly shaped the first chapter of this project; and Candace Moore, for her thoughtful feedback and encouragement throughout my graduate studies. I would not have been able to finish this dissertation without this extraordinary committee.

I would also like to thank Yopie Prins, Peggy McCracken and Elizabeth Wingrove for their intellectual and professional mentorship – I have learned a great deal from them about what it means to be a feminist scholar, teacher and colleague. Both my research and my pedagogy were influenced by Anton Shammas, Christi Merrill, Adela Pinch, Sheila Murphy, Marija Rosić, Antoine Traisnel and LaKisha Simmons and I owe them my deepest thanks.

The following departments and units supported me throughout my Ph.D. and made it possible for me to pursue my academic interests and I owe thanks to all of them: the Department of Comparative Literature for their intellectual, financial and professional support; Institute for the Humanities, for giving me the time and the space to complete my dissertation and for the companionship of my Institute fellows; the Community of Scholars for helping me articulate the intellectual heart of this project; the Departments of Women's Studies and Film, Television and Media; The Institute for Research on Women and Gender; The Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies; and Rackham Graduate School. I would also like to thank Laura Schuyler from the Sweetland Center for Writing, as well as John Sweetland, whose generosity made it possible for me to finish this dissertation, and Scholarspace staff, who helped with the formatting.

The Department of Comparative Literature would not have been my home away from home had it not been for the love and labor of its amazing staff. My warmest thanks go to Nancy Harris and Paula Frank, who first welcomed me to Michigan and whose love and labor have shaped the department for years to come; to Joe Johnston and Katie Horne, who have taken that legacy even further; and to Judy Gray, whose warmth and expertise have been a comforting presence for us all.

This dissertation would not be possible if it weren't for the people who helped me navigate the intellectual, activist and artistic circles of Istanbul, Belgrade and Sarajevo. I owe thanks to Sarajevski Otvoreni Centar, Emina Bošnjak, Vladana Vasić and Marina Jovović in Sarajevo; Labris, Tijana Popivoda, Sanja Pavlović, Sonnet Gabbard and Tatjana Rosić in Belgrade; and the librarians in Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi and Salt GALATA in Istanbul.

My thanks also go to GEO, the graduate student union of the University of Michigan, whose staff and officers work hard to make graduate employees working conditions the best they can possibly be, and my fellow IGSI Caucus leaders: Liz Ratzloff, Dominic Barbato, the 2016-2017 Bargaining Committee, Umang Varma and Sheira Cohen.

I would not have been able to get through the past six years without the generous friendship and support of my kindred spirits. I can never thank them enough, but I will at least try: Basak Candar for welcoming me to Ann Arbor and for being my mama duck; Ido Admon for your unfailing kindness and for that one melancholy afternoon when we sat on your porch; Maayan Eitan for reminding me that sisters need not come from blood and for the countless poems we translated for one another; Vedran Čatović for your sense of humor that lifts me up; Ana Silva Campo for being a wonderful officemate; Jakov Čaušević for getting me through a tough summer so far away from home; Andrea Rottmann for our lesbian movie nights; Leigh Korey for our lunches and all the meaningful eye contact; Nate Gallant for your endless generosity with your friendship and hospitality; Adrienne Jacaruso for the cosmic understanding we have shared from the very beginning; Şahin Açıkgöz for all the laughs and for all the things we did not have to say to one another to understand; Yael Kenan for being my fellow stranger from a strange land; Etienne Charriere for the best bus ride of my life and our passion for teyzes; Tuğçe Kayaal for believing in me even when I did not believe in myself; and Sena Staufer for being my chosen family, my confidante and my best friend and for all the nights we spent looking at the stars in a small town on the edge of the Aegean.

Ann Arbor would not have been a home if it weren't for two people whose impact on my life my words can scarcely be adequate to describe: Neveser Köker, who has been a big sister, best friend and fellow teyze all rolled into one; and Ali, who climbed the mountain, entered the

maze, and solved the sphinx's riddle. I would not exchange all our quiet, happy, nostalgic and rowdy moments for anything. Gözlerimi kapattığımda Neveser direksiyonda hep bizi bir yerlere götürüyor, Ali hep şarkıları seçiyor, ve ben hep acıkıyorum.

There is one person who has been there through the good, the bad, the ugly and the beautiful, and whose love has sustained me endlessly. Begüm, Senin bu ellerinde ne var bilmiyorum göğe bakalım/ Tuttukça güçleniyorum kalabalık oluyorum/ Bu senin eski zaman gözlerin yalnız gibi ağaçlar gibi. Bütün şiirleri hayata döndüren sensin, göğe bakalım. Hayat bizi nereye savurursa savursun, kuzey yıldızım sensin.

Ve son olarak, aileme: Babacığım, hayatım boyunca beni uzaktan yakından destekleyen, kendi başıma bir şeyleri denemeye, kendi ayaklarımın üzerinde durmaya teşvik eden varlığın olmasa bunların hiç birini yapamazdım. Beni böyle güçlü yetiştirdiğin, beni sanatla ve müzikle tanıştırdığın, ve her korktuğumda yanımda olduğun için teşekkür ederim. Anneciğim, sayfalar yetmez. Küçükken beni mutfak tezgahına oturtup yemek yapmayı öğrettiğin, sabahın köründe kaldırıp denize soktuğun, gecenin ortasında bir kadeh rakı koyup beninle dertleştiğin, korkup eve dönmek istediğimde beni cesaretlendirip yolladığın, sevginden bir an bile bana şüphe ettirmediğin, güçlü bir kadın olmanın yüzlerce farklı yolu olduğunu bana gösterdiğin için teşekkür ederim.

# **Table of Contents**

Dedication	ii
To my grandmothers, Mukaddes Tüzün and Ecmel Ula	ii
Acknowledgements	. iii
List of Figures	viii
Abstract	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: A Brief Historiography of Queer and Queer-Coded Films from Turkey	19
Chapter 3 : Deconstructing National Narratives of Gender: Queer Spectatorship and Narratives	ves
of Female Homosexuality in Turkey and the former-Yugoslavia	54
Chapter 4: The Heterosexual Nation: Queerness and Ethnic Belonging in Zenne (2012) and	
Go West (2008)	05
Chapter 5 : Towards a Local Queer Aesthetics: Nilbar Güreş's Photography and Female	
Homoerotic Intimacy	54
Chapter 6: Conclusion	93
Bibliography	201

# **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Nebahat in her father's clothes (left)	31
Figure 2: Nebahat arm wrestling another cab driver (right)	31
Figure 3: Seher and Türkan right before the kiss in Ver Elini İstanbul (left)	34
Figure 4: Ayten and Güler kiss in İki Gemi Yanyana (right)	34
Figure 5: Caniko in the hospital bed and as he has been presented in the film (left)	37
Figure 6: Two Canikos on the beach (right)	37
Figure 7: Adnan and Caniko in their wedding clothes	38
Figure 8: Guests at the twilight zone wedding	38
Figure 9: Adnan in a nightgown	38
Figure 10: Caniko in men's pijamas	38
Figure 11: The protagonist walking down the street with wig on	44
Figure 12: The freeze frame with the wig off	44
Figure 13: Aydanur, Mahmut and the bellydancer (left)	60
Figure 14: Songül approaches the bar (right)	60
Figure 15: Objective POV (left)	61
Figure 16: A tacitly subjective POV (right)	61
Figure 17: The initial distance (left)	62
Figure 18: The intimate hug (right)	62
Figure 19: Aydanur at the top of the stairs (top left)	64
Figure 20: Mahmut looks up to Avdanur (top right)	64

Figure 21: Songül enters the frame (bottom left)	64
Figure 22: Songül and Aydanur locked in their own gaze (bottom right)	64
Figure 23: Aydanur and Songül sing to each other	67
Figure 24: Mahmut's ominous gaze	67
Figure 25: Mahmut gazes at Aydanur and Songül (left)	69
Figure 26: Songül touches Aydanur (right)	69
Figure 27: Aydanur and Songül spooning in bed	71
Figure 28: Songül and Aydanur on the bridge	77
Figure 29: Songül and Aydanur make a promise	77
Figure 30: The final frame of the film in which Aydanur simply stares	82
Figure 31: Pre-flashback scene with Iva and the detective (left)	89
Figure 32: Flashback scene in which Iva and Marija arrive at the apartment (right)	89
Figure 33: Iva and Marija in bed (top left)	92
Figure 34: Olga peeks in (top right)	92
Figure 35: Olga speechless (bottom left)	92
Figure 36: Olga reacts (bottom right)	92
Figure 37: Iva looks at Blaž	99
Figure 38: Blaž looks back at Iva in mutual understanding	99
Figure 39: Can dancing at the gay bar (left)	114
Figure 40: The military sendoff (right)	114
Figure 41: Can dances among the wisterias	115
Figure 42: Can in action (left)	121
Figure 43: Can exhausted (right)	121

Figure 44: Can and Ahmet skip the line	. 127
Figure 45: Military doctors examine draftees for homosexuality	. 127
Figure 46: Ahmet faces the army medical committee	. 128
Figure 47: Can salutes the doctors	. 129
Figure 48: Young Ahmet in dance class (left)	. 137
Figure 49: Can teaching a dance class for children (right)	. 137
Figure 50: The Serbian village (top left)	. 142
Figure 51: The fallen minaret (top right)	. 142
Figure 52: The ritual shoes (bottom left)	. 142
Figure 53: Ranka and Kenan (as Milena) in the Muslim village (bottom right)	. 142
Figure 54: Kenan cannot take his wig off (left)	. 143
Figure 55: Kenan realizes he does not have a penis (right)	. 143
Figure 56: Ranka kneels for her ritual in the graveyard	. 147
Figure 57: Kenan plays the imaginary cello (left)	. 151
Figure 58: Alen rearranges the shoes in the Muslim village (right)	. 151
Figure 59: Ayse Loves Fatma, 2011	. 155
Figure 60: Pattern, 2010	. 168
Figure 61: Worship, 2010	. 171
Figure 62: Women Only Section, 2010	. 176
Figure 63: Living Room, 2010.	. 183
Figure 64: Gathering, 2010	. 185
Figure 65: Breasts, 2010	. 187
Figure 66: A Promise, 2010	. 188

Figure 67: Demand More! 2010	0 19	9(
------------------------------	------	----

#### **Abstract**

Towards a Local Queer Aesthetics: Queer Cultural Productions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Turkey examines how non-normative sexualities are depicted, formulated and negotiated outside of North America and Western Europe through an analysis of queer contemporary art, film and other cultural productions from the Western Balkans. I position these cultural productions both within their historical, political, cultural and religious contexts and within queer studies broadly defined, in order to make explicit the dynamics between nation states and sexual minorities, and between local and global discourses of gender and sexuality. Taking my close readings of individual cultural productions as a starting point, I contend that representations of non-normative sexualities are embroiled in local ethnic, political, religious and cultural dynamics, which shape the ways in which sexual minorities perform and negotiate their identities. I also argue that these cultural productions contribute to the creation of a distinctly "local queer aesthetics," which I propose as a new theoretical framework to disrupt the western-centric formulations of queerness that dominate queer theory.

In my individual chapters, I interrogate the impact of state institutions such as legislature, censorship boards and ministries on Turkish cinema and Turkish contemporary art; analyze the relationship between sexual identity and ethnic and national belonging through my readings of *Zenne* by directors Mehmet Binay and Caner Alper and *Go West* by Ahmed Imamović; investigate how female homoerotic and homosexual intimacies in Balkan and Turkish films like *Fine Dead Girls* and *Vicdan* disrupt national scripts; and propose a new theoretical framework of

a "local queer aesthetics" to interpret the work of queer artists such as Nilbar Güreş working in the region, contribute to the field of queer visual studies more broadly.

I frame these queer cultural productions as a visual archive in conversation with queer of color theory and queer theory from the global south. To that end, I draw on the scholarship of theorists such as Gayatri Gopinath, Jasbir Puar, Anjali Arondekar, Geeta Patel and José Esteban Muñoz to explore the possibilities local archives and area studies afford us for challenging the seemingly universal premises of Western European and North American queer theory and theorizing queerness anew.

This project offers a new comparative perspective in that it brings together countries that are neither completely disconnected from nor informed solely by the academic and public discourses of gender based in Western Europe and North America, and whose discourses of gender and sexuality have been shaped deeply by their individual nation building projects.

Reading queer cultural productions from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Turkey together offers us a transnational and interdisciplinary methodology that eschews binary East/West comparisons and that highlights the theoretical, artistic, cinematic and activist possibilities that arise from sustained and in-depth attention to local and transnational queer contexts.

**Chapter 1: Introduction** 

The place in which I'll fit will not exist until I make it.<sup>1</sup>

James Baldwin

In many ways, this is a project of making that place. As minorities, sexual or otherwise, or as expats, our position is always one of carving out a place for ourselves, a place in which we can exist, write, love and labor, a place that we can fit into without having to whittle ourselves down to whatever our nation states and their heteronormative cultures and dominant ideologies would have us be. This act of survival by carving out a place, whether physical, intellectual, academic or artistic, is what inspired this project and pushed me to think about how non-normative identities fit into or are eschewed by the cultural, political, artistic, religious and intellectual institutions that exist within the framework of a nation state. Not unlike my own country, the academic and cultural institutions I have been a part of in North America have replicated a similar sense of alienation for me, by rarely taking into account experiences, identities, affects and epistemologies from the global south, and by positing paradigms of queerness that often did not make sense within the cultural, political, social and religious discourses I grew up with. It was my experiences in both of these geographical and intellectual

1. Pierpoint, Claudia Roth. "Another Country: James Baldwin's Flight from America." New Yorker, 9 February 2009, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/02/09/ another-country. Accessed 16 March 2018.

1

domains that steered me towards this project, which aims to trace the connections between global and local discourses of non-normative genders and sexualities in cultural productions from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey, and to advocate for a local queer aesthetics and theory that take their bearings from the historical, social, cultural, and religious particularities of the places these cultural productions emerge from.

I take as my primary materials visual cultural productions, predominantly feature films and contemporary art, from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serba and Turkey that represent non-normative sexualities. I focus on these countries primarily because of the similarities between their nation building projects that feature both demographic engineering and gendered and heterosexed discourses of the nation. I position these visual texts within their historical, sociopolitical, religious and cultural contexts, and use them as a starting point to map out the intricate dynamics between sexual minorities and the nation state, and how gender, sexuality and ethnicity are oftentimes mutually constitutive. This means paying attention to how sexual minorities are managed through official narratives, whether state narratives, religious customs or local traditions, and how they, in turn, speak back to these conservative ideologies. In order to create a comprehensive picture of what these relationships look like in each national context, I make use of a range of different kinds of archives such as secondary materials such as scholarly articles on the cultural and political history of these countries; laws and legislation that pertain to the film industry and the contemporary arts including production laws, distribution permits and state and self-censorship; the archival materials from the Women's Library in Istanbul which has a rich collection of feminist and queer zines and magazines; the collections of the lesbian NGO Labris in Belgrade.

Bringing all of these primary and secondary materials together allows me to do a number of things simultaneously: First, my close readings of these works tell us how gender and sexuality are represented and formulated outside of the global north, and help us theorize what I refer to as a "local queer aesthetics" that takes its bearings from local particularities rather than globalized and universalizing discourses of gender and sexuality. Local queer aesthetics focuses on the possibilities of the various cultural, linguistic and artistic contexts of the global south can afford us to rethink hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality. Second, my positioning of these works within their national and transnational contexts make explicit legal and sociopolitical dynamics that bear upon artistic and cinematic productions, such as censorship, funding and distribution mechanisms. This allows us to see the pressure points that elicit disciplinary actions from state and other institutions, and delineate the limits of cinematic and artistic expression when it comes to sexual and ethnic minorities. Finally, I utilize my close readings of these cultural productions and my analysis of their contexts and their position as cultural objects to critique the heteronormative discourses of gender and sexuality espoused by the nation state and its inhabitants within each specific contexts, as well as to critique the universality of western definitions and formulations of gender and sexuality within the context of queer studies as a field.

# Why Transnational Gender and Sexuality Studies? Why Now?

Some questions that arise (perhaps quite justly) from this introduction are the following:
Why situate such a project under the auspices of comparative literature? What tools can
comparative literature as a discipline provide the scholars of gender and sexuality that their

disciplinary fields already do not? Why these specific countries, which are neither wholly part of Western Europe proper nor within what scholars traditionally think of as the global south?

Queer studies as a field, created as it were within a specifically North American and Western European tradition, has to a large extent replicated the discursive and real-life blind-spots of these geographices and been shamefully white, Euro-centric, cissexist and androcentric. Only in the past two decades or so has queer of color critique become a potent force of theoretical dissent, dismantling systematically the assumptions of queer studies and creating a body of knowledge that takes into account various intersections of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, class, nationality, citizenship and disability. Scholars such as José Esteban Muñoz, Roderick Ferguson, Gayatri Gopinath, Andrea Smith and Fatima El-Tayeb have investigated how these intersections play out for minoritized subject both within and outside of the global north and focused specifically on communities of color that are often neglected by previous scholarship in the area of queer studies. My work, too, aims to theorize queerness from heretofore un(der)studied regions, not as an addendum to queer studies to make it more inclusive in its geographic scope, but rather as a way of challenging the supposed universality of the very terminology and methodologies the field employs.

What comparative literature as a discipline affords me as a scholar of transnational gender and sexuality studies, is a commitment to close reading as a metholodogy that inherently advocates for attention to the particularities of each cultural production and for analyzing each work on its own terms and within its own cultural, linguistic, sociopolitical and national context. Paying close attention to the visual language of these cultural productions and to the nuances of the way they express non-normative sexualities in their original languages provides us with an invaluable opportunity to explore how queerness can be theorized anew. By privileging

micronarratives over metanarratives, close reading creates an intimate connection between the text and its reader – a connection that echoes the kinds of intimacies we must implicate ourselves in if we are to do a genuine, ground-up queer studies. Moreover, comparative literature's investment in translation studies, and in the politics of translation and comparison, provides a fruitful terrain from which to consider how images, terminologies and theories of gender and sexuality move across national, linguistic, cultural, political and religious borders. For a project such as this one, which is deeply invested in local queer visual productions as a new archive from which to theorize queerness and as traveling cultural objects that function both as local and transnational texts, comparative literature's methodologies and its commitment to working outside of national traditions are uniquely suitable.

This comparative lens is precisely what I believe the field of queer studies currently lacks – comparisons, or rather, concurrent readings of queer cultural productions that critically approach and that do not reenact binaries of the civilized and homophilic west and a backwards and homophobic east; that do not simply bring non-western texts under scrutiny of a theoretical lens manufactured in the west, and with little attention to the complexities of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion and citizenship. Rather, I argue for more "lateral" comparisons – not between constructed yet still discursively effective and dangerous categories of "East" and "West," but between historical, social, national and cultural contexts that have hitherto always been in the margins. A combination of queer texts from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey gives us a glimpse into modes of queerness that, while at the margins of Europe and therefore discursively influenced by it, still embody a resistance to the modes and definitions of queerness that we have become accustomed to as a result of out consumption of queer materials from the global north.

Queer cultural productions have become part of an active scholarly field relatively recently in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Turkey in the 1990s and 2000s, after the inception of their respective local LGBTI movements. While there has been considerable research done on the LGBTI movements and discourses of gender and sexuality in these countries, in particular in sociology and gender studies departments both locally and across Western Europe and North America,<sup>2</sup> portrayals of non-normative sexualities in art, film and literature from these countries have not been examined to the same extent. There are a number of scholars such as Cüneyt Çakırlar, Evren Savcı and Özlem Güçlü in Turkey, Mima Simić in Croatia, and Branka Arsić in Serbia who have approached this topic from a humanities perspective, but with the exception of the 2012 volume Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye'de Queer Kültür ve Muhalefet (Queer Culture and Dissidence in Turkey) by Cüneyt Çakırlar and Serkan Delice, there has not been a comprehensive scholarly work that deals with queer artistic, literary and cinematic productions comparatively within a national and cultural tradition, much less across national boundaries that is not limited to east/west comparisons. Moreover, most of these scholarly works have focused on the experiences and representations of gay and queer men and trans\* women, with relatively less attention being paid to lesbians, queer women, nonbinary individuals and trans\* men. One aim of this project is to begin the work of filling these gaps in the local scholarly archives, and bring to our attention the understudied queer communities in these regions.

Despite the obvious historical connections between these countries due to the Ottoman Empire's centuries long occupation of the Balkans, the primary reason I am bringing these countries together is not their shared past, but rather the similarities in the way in which they

<sup>2.</sup> See Bereket and Adam (2006, 2008), Mutluer (2008), Özbay (2010), Özyeğin (2012), Arsić (2002), Mikus (2011) and Kajinić (2010).

construct their respective nationhoods – Turkey in the 1920s onwards, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s onwards. The politics of gender and sexuality are central to the nation-building projects of all of these countries. In Turkey, a plethora of laws and regulations regarding public morality, the public discourse that regards the nuclear family as a core foundational component of the state, and the militarist and masculinist culture all determine what kinds of gendered and sexual experiences are possible under the purview of the Turkish state. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is still the most multi-ethnic of the formerly Yugoslav republics, issues of ethnicity and religion often come into play when social and legal rights are in question. In Serbia and Croatia, where the population is more ethnically and religiously homogenous, the conditions of belonging to the nation are often defined through heterosexist discourses that mandate adherence to not only the ethnic majority but to the heterosexual one as well.

These national discourses of gender, sexuality and citizenship set the stage for the cultural, religious, political and social contexts from which emerge the cultural productions I look at in this dissertation. Transnational in scope as my project is, I still pay attention to the nation state as a relevant category of analysis, as it is the primary organizing force both for the characters depicted in these cultural productions, and for the cultural productions themselves as they navigate the heavily regulated landscape of production, distribution and exhibition. Whether they adhere to the written and unwritten rules of the nation state, or purposefully deviate from them in an act of resistance, these cultural productions help us see how non-normative sexualities in these locales are situated within a complicated intersection of race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, political affiliation and class that are particular to the local conditions. Thus, by paying attention to the particularities of each context, I aim to create a narrative of queer cultural

productions that positions them not as token texts from a strange land, but rather as texts that can serve as starting points for theorizing queerness differently.

For many scholars whose work focuses on regions outside of the privileged spaces of the global north, the urgency of doing transnational gender and sexuality studies is clear. It is only by insisting on these regions' significance, not as case studies but as rich cultural traditions that can help us formulate new ways of thinking about and theorizing gender and sexuality, that we can challenge the discursive dominance of gender and sexuality studies from the global north. Moreover, by working regionally, across national boundaries and in-between contexts beyond the East/West binary, we can start thinking about difference not only in terms of power dynamics and global hierarchies, but in terms of complex relationalities that germinate alongside, in response to and in support of, as well as in opposition to one another. In my own project, I bring together two contexts, Turkey and former Yugoslavia, which have not been studied together under the rubric of queer studies before. In addition I predominantly focus on female homoerotic intimacies in film and contemporary art in an effort to center women in my analysis of a local queer aesthetics. In so doing, my work attends to the gaps in the fields of transnational gender and sexuality studies, queer visual studies and queer theory at large by deliberately focusing on figures, intimacies, regions and cultural productions that remain mostly in the margins, either due to global power dynamics and hierarchies or patriarchal and androcentric tendencies within the local and regional contexts.

### Global Queer, Local Queer

In "Queer Theory and Permanent War," Maya Mikdashi and Jasbir Puar wonder "what queer theory may look like when it is not routed through Euro-American histories, sexualities,

locations or bodies" (215). To rethink queer theory and queer aesthetics, we must first consider what "queerness" looks like when it is not located in a Euro-American setting. As theory comes from practice, from the facts, images and affinities we see on the ground, we must first lay out all the cultural products, political and social formations, modes of being and loving and expressing these that make up the fabric of what "queer" is in any given context. This dissertation, in part, aims to contribute to the laying out of such a field through close readings of queer cultural productions and artifacts from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey. As many scholars whose works I reference in this dissertation demonstrate in their own contexts, close reading local queer cultural productions, formations and communities allows us to reconfigure the field of queer studies from a radically different position, and works to "provincialize the United States" as Mikdashi and Puar put it (218). As much as the following chapters, and works by other scholars working in non-western queer studies, have dealt with the tension between the local and the (westernized) global, the goal of all such work is to ultimately dismantle the very binary it is positioned against – in short, pushing for a local queer aesthetics and a local queer theory is not a move towards replacing the global queer, but to remind us all that it was once simply local too. As Mikdashi and Puar point out at the end of their remarks on area studies and queer theory, the relationship between them is "multiple, invigorating, and potentially groundbreaking – both only to the extent that both fields allow their archives, theoretical presumptions, key terms, and areas of inquiry to suffuse, confuse and destabilize each other" (221). That is, if local queer studies cease to be token case studies and instead become producers of theoretical knowledge themselves, and if area studies departments open themselves up to the transnational and interdisciplinary turn in gender and queer studies.

Much like Mikdashi and Puar, Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel call for less ethnographic sensationalism that treats non-western locations as mere case studies, and more efforts to "reinvent, from the are(n)as of the stories told, new queer idioms of the geopolitical" (166). Teleological models that flaunt the US and western Europe as an idealized "arrival point" for other countries who are deemed backwards, or universalizing moves that mandate similar arcs of progress for non-normative sexualities everywhere, work to erase differences that might complicate western views of sexuality and the narratives they espouse, which are often enmeshed in neocolonial, culturally imperialist, and unreservedly nationalist tendencies.

However, it is rarely the case in the countries and regions that I work with that local expressions of queerness will emerge isolated from global and western modes of expressing queerness. More often, instead of a straightforward adoption of western sexual terminology, or an adherence to a distinct local one, a combination or a hybrid of both lexicons emerges within any given location. This interaction between local and global discourses of queerness, and an intermingling of local and transnational queer cultural productions determines the national, ethnic, racial, cultural, religious and political discourses of queerness. Sahar Amer's "Naming to Empower: Lesbianism in the Arab Islamicate World Today," for instance, attends to the way in which Arab and Muslim gay and lesbian community (her formulation) adopt and appropriate terminology modeled on the western LGBTQIA vocabulary, only to effectively exclude working-class Arab gays and lesbians who may not be as familiar with foreign terminology. In a similarly conceptualized article titled "Who speaks the language of queer politics?" Evren Savcı offers an analysis of the way in which queer terminology from the west is used as a cultural and intellectual capital within the activist LGBTQ circles in Istanbul, which alienates the workingclass women in the lesbian bar she bartended at as part of her fieldwork. Savcı asks, "what

(political) normativities are not captured by an exclusive focus on 'homonormativity'?" (370) and interrogates both how adoption of a specific set of categories effaces other possibilities and how local groups adapt the western terminology and load it with new meanings.

All of the work done by these scholars serves to interrogate the situatedness of our academic training and our assumptions regarding gender and sexuality. In "Rethinking Homonationalism," Jasbir Puar argues that "the gay and lesbian human rights industry continues to proliferate European/American constructs of identity (not to mention the notion of a sexual identity itself) that privilege identity politics, "coming out," public visibility, and legislative measures as the dominant barometers of social progress" (338) – an issue that comprises one of the key themes of Zenne, which I focus on in one of my chapters. As such, visibility, and visibility in a specific manner, becomes the markers of progress. This tendency towards a singular idea of queer identity effaces the social, political and religious parameters unique to each specific context. In addition, the privileging of identity politics over other modes of existence erase subjectivities and intimacies that do not fit into these categories – those like the ones depicted by Nilbar Güreş in Chapter 5, for instance. The privileging of a western framework over others, of course, means also a privileging of a certain set of terminology over other. In the next section, I will briefly outline how I am approaching the issue of terminology in this dissertation.

### **Queer: A Question of Terminology**

In his introduction to *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, Khaled El-Rouayheb criticizes the way in which most (in particular white, western) scholars use terms like homosexuality, homophobia, gay and lesbian universally, making a rather erroneous assumption that that these terms are stable across cultures and time periods. While El-Rouayheb's work focuses on early modern Middle East, his point about the rather haphazard way in which non-western sexualities are talked and written about stands. Aside from being a blatant reenactment of east/west binaries, the misuse of or the insistence on this terminology results in a loss of meaning and nuance. In Desiring Arabs, Joseph Massad goes even further and argues that, "the categories gay and lesbian are not universal at all and can only be universalized by the epistemic, ethical, and political violence unleashed on the rest of the world by the very international human rights advocates whose aim is to defend the very people their intervention is creating" (41). While I disagree with Massad's implication that there is a clear demarcation between western and indigenous modes of expressing sexuality – my theoretical framework incorporates hybrid modes of expression that local communities produce by resignifying western terminology not as an evidence of epistemic violence by the Gay International as Massad posits, but as an act of speaking back and reconfiguring the axes of power – I find that his argument rings true for western academic discourse on queer studies in non-western contexts where the exclusive use of western terminology often obscures local iterations of this terminology and vocabulary for non-normative sexualities in an act of epistemic and discursive erasure.

It is interventions like El-Rouayheb's and Massad's that inform my project – while the globalization of gay identities has inadvertently created a queer culture and cultural artifacts that circulate globally, this does not necessarily translate into neither a progress narrative wherein every country is moving towards a "gay liberation," nor a homogeneity in terms of the verbal and visual vocabularies we employ. In "Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities," Dennis Altman remarks that a global gay identity means a commodified gay identity, that is, an export of western-style gay identities to the rest of the world – in other words cultural

imperialism and colonization. Indeed, this trend of globalization is visibly present in a number of the texts that I am working with – particularly with regards to issues of target audience and circulation, which informs my discussion of Zenne and Go West in Chapter 4. Altman remarks that "modern forms of homosexuality often exist side-by-side with older traditional ones, and the boundaries can appear either blurred or distinct depending on one's vantage point and ideology." (82) While I find his specific formulation of this coexistence along the "modern" versus "traditional" line rather unfortunate due to the binary it enacts, I am deeply interested in the ways in which queer individuals in non-western parts of the world approach the dissonances between local versus global modes of expressing, conceptualizing and experiencing non-heterosexual sexuality. In "Who speaks the language of queer politics?" for example, Evren Savcı remarks how the butch/femme dynamics in the US do not neatly map onto Istanbul's bac/feminen scene, in which the words, while derived from their English counterparts, take on connotations about education level and intellectual capital, in addition to socio-economic class and articulation of one's gender identity which takes precedence in the US context. Likewise in "The Emergence of Gay Identities in Contemporary Turkey," Bereket and Adam unpack the differences between the English gay and Turkish gey, pointing out that gey is a social and at times political identity that signifies a stepping away from Turkish formulations of male homosexuality, and often denotes a higher education level.

As is evident from Savcı's and Bereket and Adam's examples, local communities do not simply adopt western terminology for non-normative sexualities, but *adapt* it and imbue it with new meanings based on the particularities of the political, cultural, social and religious context. In addition to adapting western terminology, queer communities in the region often also have their own indigenous terminology to refer to various sexual identities and orientations. Thus the

landscape for terminology regarding non-normative sexualities is far from reflecting a singular local or global perspective, but rather develops in unexpected ways as communities consume both local and global products and reshape their language accordingly. This linguistic diversity, of course, poses challenges to academics who write about non-normative sexualities in Turkey and the Balkans in English. For the purposes of this dissertation, I only use western-derived terms such as "gay," "lesbian," and "bisexual" when characters refer to themselves as such or when I am connoting a specifically western-centric perspective. I use the term "LGBT" or "LGBTI" exclusively, as I have done earlier in this introduction, when referring to the various movements in the region, primarily because these organizations refer to themselves as "LGBT" or "LGBTI" and conform, by and large, to the epistemologies invoked by Western European and North American LGBTQ rights movements. More often, I will use the terms "homoerotic" and "non-normative sexualities" in order to refer to relationships, energies, affects, positionalities and orientations that fall outside of the heteronormative realm.

And finally, while I am apprehensive about adopting the term "queer" whose ideological and national history is simply not applicable in many ways to my chosen region, I am heartened by how it has been adapted in Turkey (*kuir*) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia (*kvir*), which reminds us that queer was never meant to be monolithic and grounded in a single intellectual tradition. One might argue (quite justifiably) that queer, like its older sibling LGBT(I), is intertwined with a western intellectual history from which it can scarcely be severed. I would argue, however, that that western intellectual history could be diluted by a scholarly focus on the *kuir* or the *kvirs* of the world, so that it is no longer the sole proprietor of this term. My work joins a tradition of non-western scholars and scholars of color in adopting queer not as a blanket term that travels without issues, but rather as an indeterminate oppositional force

whose definition can be molded and multiplied in productive ways the more it travels.

Oftentimes "queer" in this dissertation signals an implicit or explicit departure from the heteronormative and conventional norms of the societies, cultures and political regimes my texts are situated in. This is not so much a move towards ignoring queer's robust history in the field of Western European and North American gender and sexuality studies. Instead, I intend to utilize the term's versatility in order to talk about a hitherto underwritten and under-theorized territory (geographical and otherwise) in gender and sexuality studies.

# **Chapter Overviews**

In my second chapter, "A Brief Historiography of Queer and Queer-Coded Films from Turkey," I consider the depictions of queer and queer-coded characters from popular and mainstream culture in Turkey from the 1950s to present. This chapter serves as an entry point into the hegemonic discourses regarding sexual minorities in the Turkish nation state, as well as introducing the reader to the mainstream images against which later and more radical representations of sexual minorities are pitted. In this chapter I provide a survey of queer or queer-coded cultural films, which serve as case studies of the ways in which artistic representations of non-normative sexualities are regulated, permitted or banned by the Turkish state. Depending on the cultural and political regimes in power, the films deal in a number of modes of depiction, ranging from subtexts to stereotypes, from homosexuality as the monstrous to homosexuality as the pathological, as well as a few outliers that step outside of these tropes. In addition to the films which function as my primary sources, I draw on other archives such as laws and legislation regarding cinema, and interviews with the directors in order to position these films vis-à-vis the contemporaneous discourses on gender and sexuality within their national,

religious, cultural and political contexts. I argue that representations of queerness in Turkey do not conform to a teleological progress narrative of increased tolerance and positive representation, but rather form a nonlinear history full of ruptures, influenced deeply by the political, social and cultural priorities of the administration in power, which through direct and indirect mechanisms of censorship and oppression, determines what is representable at any given moment in time.

My third chapter, "Deconstructing National Narratives of Gender: Queer Spectatorship and Narratives of Female Homosexuality in Turkey and the former Yugoslavia," offers an indepth analysis of two feature films, Vicdan (Turkey, 2008) by Erden Kıral and Fine Dead Girls (Croatia, 2002) by Dalibor Matanić, which deal with female homosexuality and homoeroticism within the constraints of national, traditional and ethnic scripts. Taking the triangular love/lust relationships and the distinctive cinematography in each film as my starting point, I consider the function of the gaze in its various forms (loving, lusting, violent, inquisitive) and queer spectatorship in creating equivocal narratives that simultaneously adhere to hegemonic homophobic scripts of the nation and dismantle their legitimacy and validity. I argue that a queer reading of these homoerotic yet homophobic films brings forth alternative narratives that disrupt the discourses of female "honor" in the case of the Turkish film, and of nationalism and ethnic belonging in the case of the Croatian one. In terms of their depictions of non-normative sexualities, these films both partake in the tropes of subtextual representation and stereotypes I outline in the first chapter, and gesture towards the possibility of non-normative sexualities outside of these representations permitted by the ideologies of the nation state. Thus, I argue that these films signal a move from the stereotypical representations of female homosexuality and homoeroticism towards potentially subversive narratives of gender and sexuality.

My fourth chapter, "The Heterosexual Nation: Queerness and Ethnic Belonging in Zenne (2012) and Go West (2008)," focuses on the intimate connection between sexuality, and ethnic and national belonging through close readings of two feature films, Zenne (Turkey, 2012) by Caner Alper and Mehmet Binay, and Go West (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2008) by Ahmed Imamović, both of which examine how non-normative masculinities are negotiated within militarist societies, and how narratives of east and west play into discourses of gender and sexuality. In each film, sexual, religious and ethnic identities are presented as drag performances, which are at times genuine, and at times dictated by state apparatuses. Taking these plotlines that feature characters who fail spectacularly in following western LGBTQ trajectories (such as coming out, marriage equality etc.) as a starting point, I explore the tension between culturally and politically western-centric narratives that permeate LGBTQ media, and local experiences that point at the invalidity of western narratives outside of their own national contexts. I argue that various performances of these characters' identities (ethnic, religious, sexual etc.) are always informed and shaped by one another and the particularities of their immediate situation, such that the privileges afforded and disadvantages posed by each are always in a flux that these characters must continually negotiate. I then consider the films themselves as transnational cinematic objects, which travel outside of their own national and socio-political contexts and argue that their contradictory position as local texts written with a global audience in mind serves to embody the tensions already outlined within their plots.

In the fifth chapter of my dissertation, "Towards a Local Queer Aesthetics: Nilbar Güreş's Photography and Female Homoerotic Intimacy," I take close readings of Güreş's photographs, which feature rural, middle-aged and working-class women acting out homoerotic scripts, as a starting point for theorizing what queerness looks like when it does not fit into the

categories, terminologies, or the visual lexicon afforded to us by western gender and queer studies. Güreş's images use a distinctly local and rural visual vocabulary, which provide a contrast to the westernized LGBTQ milieu or urban centers like Istanbul and Ankara. Drawing upon queer of color theory, I read her images as part of a creation of a local queer visual archive, which is informed by the tensions between local and global iterations of gender and sexual identities. Güreş's work, I argue, embodies what I refer to as a local queer aesthetics that takes its bearings from local historical, political, cultural and religious particularities, and which serves to decentralize western images and conceptualizations of non-normative sexualities.

Despite their various methodologies of alternative historiography, reading against the grain, cultural studies and queer theory, all of my chapters deal with the relationship between the nation state and sexual minorities, the creation of a local queer visual and artistic archive, and the implications of these for both area studies and gender and sexuality studies. I interrogate the conditions of belonging to the nation as they are configured through ethnicity, race, religion, sexuality and class, I call into question the universality of western terminology regarding non-normative sexualities, and I investigate the ways in which a local visual archive can help create a local queer aesthetics that imagines queerness differently than the narratives and representations that dominate global queer culture today.

# Chapter 2: A Brief Historiography of Queer and Queer-Coded Films from Turkey

In 2007, two articles appeared within months of each other in Kaos GL, the oldest and the most circulated LGBT magazine in Turkey, titled, respectively, "Lesbians in Film History in Turkey" and "Homosexuality in Film from Turkey." In these articles, Hülya Gürler and Aydın Öztek sought to provide their readers with a brief history of films that deal with lesbianism or homosexuality. What is perhaps most striking about these two relatively informal articles is the gaps and ruptures in the "film histories" that these two authors provide. Gürler, for instance, acknowledges what she calls the "implied" lesbian relationships and homoerotic tensions in Yeşilçam<sup>3</sup>, the film industry of Turkey, and cites two films, *Haremde 4 Kadın* (4 Women in the Harem, 1965) and *Gramofon Avrat* (The Gramophone Woman, 1987) as examples. She then skips ahead to the more consciously woman-centered films of the 1990s by directors such as Atıf Yılmaz, who was dubbed a "women's director" and ends with Kutluğ Ataman's 2 Genç Kız [2 Girls, 2000] leaving the last 7 years untouched. Öztek disregards pre-1960 films entirely, saying "because our society is so closed-minded, there have been no films that deal with female or male homosexuality before 1960." Despite his neglect of pre-1960 films, however, he cites a number of films that Gürler fails to note (Ver Elini İstanbul, 1962; 2 Gemi Yanyana, 1963; İhtiras Firtinasi 1983; Dul Bir Kadın 1985 just to name a few), though his film history stops just shy of 2000 as well.

-

<sup>3.</sup> Yeşilçam (Green Pine) is the metonym for Turkey's classical film industry, which experienced its peak from the 1950s to the 1970s. Yeşilçam films were most famously characterized for their emotional plotlines, and hundreds of melodramas, tragedies, slapstick comedies and tearjerkers were produced annually in this time period.

What I have described is fairly typical of various articles, film histories, and timelines that deal with representations of non-normative sexualities in Turkey. In the absence of an institutional and, until recently, academic interest, queer film histories in Turkey are fragmented, discontinuous and seemingly random in their methodology. In this chapter, I will attend to LGBT and queer characters in Turkish cinema, and the ways in which these characters and narratives set the stage for the more nuanced or in-depth representations of queerness in the films I analyze in the following chapters. This chapter also serves as a model for creating an alternative queer historiography of national cinemas.<sup>4</sup>

My chronological trajectory in this chapter is not to say that there exists a clear linear progress narrative in which older films prove more homophobic while the more recent ones offer positive representations of LGBT and queer characters. Indeed, not only are representations of non-normative sexualities mediated by the directors' own preoccupations, but by laws and legislations, political events, social changes, and discourses which directly impact what kinds of stories are possible to tell in the first place. By representation, I do not mean to imply that the texts I attend to are representative of LGBT and queer individuals in these countries, or that the presence of LGBT and queer individuals in these narratives translate to representation in the political and social sense. Rather, my analysis pays attention to how and why LGBT and queer characters figure into these cinematic and artistic narratives, and how they affect and alter cultural, social, political, religious and national narratives they are positioned in.

In terms of my approach, I highlight a nonlinear and complex model of historiography that takes into account the ups and downs, and ebbs and flows of rights discourses, local and

\_

<sup>4.</sup> I have chosen here to focus only on the Turkish case to demonstrate what a film historiography that goes against traditional national film historiographies might look like. I intend to expand this to include post-Yugoslav queer film historiographies as well in my future work.

global politics and changing regimes. In Turkey, the narrative of the state regarding nonnormative sexualities and their representations oscillates between a progress narrative that
aspires towards EU rules and regulations, and a more nostalgic one that cites morality clauses
and Ottoman history<sup>5</sup> as essential touchstones for the Turkish nation. Similarly, the writings on
queer cinema in Turkey also go back and forth between a desire to demonstrate *some* progress in
the representation of queer individuals, and the undeniable instances of censorship within the
past few years. In the presence of such conflicting impulses within one nation and within one
area of film history in Turkey, it is clear that no neat and easy narrative will emerge regarding
queer and queer-coded films in Turkey. The historiography I offer in this chapter reflects this
complexity, where the interventions of the state, public discourses and transnational interactions
lead to a constantly shifting landscape in terms of how and if non-normative sexualities are
depicted on the silver screen.

Rather than aspiring towards an unattainable goal of a clear and progressive narrative of queer film historiography, this chapter seeks to trace the dynamics between queer films and their social and political context, namely by looking at relevant legislation, instances of censorship, modes of marketing and conditions of circulation, as well as the increasingly visible LGBT activism. I also aim to set the stage for the following chapters, which feature close readings of films from each country. As my archive, I take into consideration laws and legislation regarding the film industry and public morality to attend to the legal and political context of queer films. In addition, I attend to the ways in which these films represent LGBT or queer characters, by bringing in newspaper articles and film reviews to attest to the social and cultural context and impact of the films' release; interviews with the directors, cast or crew, and when applicable,

<sup>5.</sup> It is worth noting that in the state's formulation, the more homoerotic elements of Ottoman culture are often ignored.

funding and circulation approvals or rejections by state institutions. I also use a number of secondary sources that deal with queer culture and LGBTQ activism, as well as academic works that deal with issues of censorship in the art world on a more general level. Through this combination of sources, I make explicit the dynamics between the nation state, the general public, and early representations of queer or queer-coded characters in films from Turkey. I start in the 1960s when the earliest films to feature explicitly or implicitly queer characters emerge and extend to the present.

The history of Turkish cinema reveals that the stark changes in the political parties in power and their ideologies lead to jarring changes of heart from one decade to the next. For example, the relatively permissive 1990s for representation of various sexualities<sup>6</sup> on screen are followed by an increasingly conservative 2000s, despite the rising visibility and influence of the LGBT rights movement in Turkey<sup>7</sup> in the second half of the 2000s. A number of 1960s and 1970s films from Turkey with homoerotic themes have at times more "progressive" narratives than their 1990s and 2000s counterparts. Even within the relatively limited timeframe of 1990s and 2000s, there is little to support a progress narrative – Atıf Yılmaz's early 1990s films, for instance, offer a more explicit and candid representation of female (homo)sexuality than more recent films such as Erden Kıral's 2008 *Vicdan* (Conscience), or Kutluğ Ataman's 2005 *2 Genç Kız* (2 Girls). Since my analysis takes into account social and political changes in Turkey, my timeframe extends back to the creation of various laws regarding cinema and/or public morality;

\_

<sup>6.</sup> For more on the ebbs and flows of trends and censorship in Turkish cinema, see Savaş Arslan's *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History* (2011) and Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy's "Deep Nation: The national question and Turkish cinema culture" (2000).

<sup>7.</sup> While an official and comprehensive history of the LGBT rights movement in Turkey has not yet been published, more information on this topic can be found on the websites of various organizations such as *Kaos GL*, *Lambda Istanbul*, *Kırmızı Şemsiye* and on various queer blogs from the region.

and frequently refers back to films of the Yesilçam era, whose images form a repository and reference point for queer and homoerotic narratives in more recent films.

As with any project that deals with an un(der)written or an alternative history, the ideological underpinnings of the state and official histories are crucial to acknowledge. In *Rethinking History*, Keith Jenkins points at the instability of history insofar as it is an ideological construct:

The fact that history *per se* is an ideological construct means that it is constantly being reworked and re-ordered by all those who are variously affected by power relationships; because the dominated as well as the dominant also have their versions of the past to legitimate their practices, versions which have to be excluded as improper from any place on the agenda of the dominant discourse. In that sense re-orderings of the messages to be delivered (often many such re-orderings are referred to academically as 'controversies') just have to be constructed continuously because the needs of the dominant/subordinate are constantly being re-worked in the real world as they seek to mobilise people(s) in support of their interests (21).

Within the context of a relatively young nation state with a history of demographic engineering, the creation of alternative histories takes on particular significance. The Turkish state's record with various forms of demographic engineering speaks for itself: in the early years of the republic, it committed ethnic cleansing of Armenian and Kurdish populations<sup>8</sup> and topographical renaming of villages<sup>9</sup> that stood testimony to their existence; in the 1920s it organized a large scale population exchange<sup>10</sup> with Greece, later in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s it implemented Kemalist policies that imagined an ethnically Turkish, secular, Sunni-Muslim and heterosexual

<sup>8.</sup> For more on the Armenian Genocide see Taner Akçam's From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide (2004), Ugur Ungor's "Confiscation and Colonization: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property" (2011), Fatma Müge Göçek's Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present and Collective Violence Against the Armenians, 1789-2009 (2015), Ronald Grigor Suny's "They Can Live In the Desert But Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide (2015) and Raymond Kévorkian's The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History (2011).

<sup>9.</sup> See Kerem Öktem's "The nation's imprint: demographic engineering and the change of toponymes in Republican Turkey" (2008) for a detailed account of this renaming project.

<sup>10.</sup> For more on the Greek-Turkish population exchange, see Aslı Iğsız's *Humanism in Ruins: Entangled Legacies of the Greek-Turkish Population Exchange* (2018).

ideal citizen<sup>11</sup>; and now with the neo-Ottoman turn of recent politics, it hearkens back to a more religious (and just as heterosexual) model of ideal citizenship. These official histories of the republic have been contested and "re-ordered," to borrow from Jenkins, by academics, especially with regard to the Armenian and Kurdish populations of Turkey. What has been late to come is an interest in non-normative sexualities and the way they have also been shaped, negated, and managed by similar policies. Writing a historiography of queer representation in cinema from Turkey, then, is a way of talking back to the official histories of the state, which at best ignore, and at worst condemn non-normative sexualities. Thus the stories of these queer and queer-coded characters are embroiled in ethnic, religious, and cultural anxieties of an emerging nation state, and serve as ways of addressing these issues either by standing in for other markers of identity, or by serving as specters of corrupting western influence.

What this investigation begs, of course, is the question of how we define LGBT and queer characters or films. How do we go about putting together an archive of films that might fall under this rather vague category? This categorization raises two crucial questions — what exactly do we mean by LGBT or queer? And how do we define "Turkish film" in a time of transnational productions that span multiple countries, funding processes from international foundations and rights and sovereignty movements by ethnic minorities? In her introduction to *The Queer German Cinema*, Alice A. Kuzniar tackles a similar methodological issue regarding categorization of gay and lesbian films. She asks:

For instance, bracketing for the moment the categories of bisexual and transgender, does gay and lesbian cinema require that gays or lesbians be depicted in it, and by what criteria does one identify or prove a character's sexuality? Must it restrict itself to so-called positive or accurate images of gays and lesbians? Is there a gay aesthetic that such films develop or adhere to? Does such a cinema require that its director be gay, not to mention

<sup>11.</sup> Many scholars have addressed this issue of the presumed "ideal citizen" of the Turkish nation state. See Yeğen (2009), Zeydanlıoğlu (2008), Rüstem Altınay (2008), Ayşe Gül Altınay (2004) and Stokes (2010) for scholarship that approaches this topic within the context of ethnic, religious, linguistic and sexual minorities.

its actors, producer, and so on? And if a director does not self-identify as gay, does that inhibit one from deriving queer visual pleasure from his or her work? (16)

This series of questions points at the difficulties of demarcating both the categories of "gay" and "lesbian," and the categories of "gay cinema" and "lesbian cinema." For non-western contexts, where these terms are not indigenous, the difficulty is twofold. For the purposes of this chapter and for this dissertation, I consider films and images that range from explicitly "queer cinema" to ones that depict homoerotic moments without always labeling them as such. If history can be (re)written with an eye towards its gaps and silences, if these gaps and silences tell us more than what official histories might tell us regarding erased histories, then focusing solely on films marketed and received as "gay" or "lesbian" cinema, and allowing these terms to be dictated by popular or institutional discourse, would be a double-erasure. In his book Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema, Raz Yosef argues that locating "positive" or "negative" images of queers, criticizing the fetishization or stereotyping of queer subjects or their lack of representation bears the risk of producing an essentialized queer subject (405). Instead of offering us a historiography of queer filmmaking in Israel, he chooses his films with an eye towards what they disrupt in Israel's national(ist) imaginary, and what they reveal through these disruptions. This is precisely the kind of approach I take in the cinematic and artistic works I attend to in this dissertation.

To that end, I include in this chapter films that depict explicitly homosexual characters, films that have helped shape the queer imaginary in their depictions of gender transgression, as well as films in which queerness remains strictly on the level of the subtext. In *The Mass Ornament*, Siegfried Kracauer posits, "the surface level expressions [of an epoch] ... by virtue of their unconscious nature, provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things" (75). Much like the films that Yosef takes as his archive, the ones that I will be

addressing here can be thought of as those "surface level expressions" that are telling not only about queer identities and depictions, but also about the cultural, social and political tendencies of the national context from which they emerge and in which they are embedded. They not only demonstrate the legal sanctions or the censorship of the state, they also hint at the unwritten rules and regulations (either legal, or public) that come into play during their production and circulation. In that sense, these films are not simply part of a "Turkish queer film history" but also a part of the history of state intervention and censorship, of changing public discourses about homosexuality, and of the development of LGBTQ activism in these countries. Inspired by similar projects of multifaceted film historiographies such as Ruby Rich's positioning of Mädchen in Uniform both as part of anti-fascist film history and lesbian film history, I aim to pay attention to the multiple histories these films are part of and speak to by taking into account the legal, political, and social discourses around them.

One of the very first regulations regarding film in Turkey, "Ordinance regarding the control of films and film scenarios," was signed into law by the then-president İsmet İnönü on July 19th, 1939. Among the committee members who constituted the other signatories were the Minister of Justice, Minister of Internal Affairs, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Education, Minister of Public Health and Welfare, and Minister of National Defense. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, under whose jurisdiction any cinematic works produced in Turkey would now fall, was not yet founded. According to this regulation, all films would have to be screened and approved by a Censorship Board, whose members consisted of "two [officials] from the Ministry of the Interior, one from the Ministry of Tourism, one from the

Ministry of Education, one from the police.<sup>12</sup> Depending on the content of the film, other members coming from the General Staff of the Army, the ministry of commerce and so on might join the Board, albeit on a temporary basis (Erdoğan and Göktürk 540). Article 7 of this law bans the exhibition of films that fall under the following criteria:

- 1. Films that include propaganda of another state,
- 2. Films that humiliate other races and nations,
- 3. Films that provoke ally states and nations,
- 4. Films that proselytize,
- 5. Films that include propaganda of economic and social ideologies that go against the national state regime,
- 6. Films that are contrary to public decency and morality, and our national sentiments,
- 7. Films that include propaganda against the military, that hurt the honor and dignity of soldiers,
- 8. Films that are detrimental to the discipline and security of the homeland,
- 9. Films that incite forming gangs and groups to commit crimes,
- 10. Films that include scenes that may be deemed propaganda against Turkey.

This law alone can give us a general idea of the ideology of the Turkish state in the first years of its foundation: the clauses cover political, religious, military and moral concerns, each banning the exhibition of films that can be considered dangerous for these areas. Clause 7, for instance, points at a deeply military nation, for which the dignity of soldiers and military institutions supersedes freedom of (artistic) expression. Clauses 1, 4 and 5 are clear precautions against nationalist sentiments of various ethnic, racial, and religious groups in Turkey, as well as the communist ideologies of USSR. Clause 2 seems most benign, though from its wording, we can glean the assumption of a single race and a single nation within Turkey, which is set apart from the "other races and other nations" outside of Turkey's borders. In short, we see the echoes of the ideology of a nationalist, ethnically Turkish, Sunni-Muslim and military-oriented state inscribed

27

<sup>12.</sup> For more on early republican era censorship in Turkish cinema, see Agâh Özgüç's *Türk Sineması Sansür Dosyası: Sinema* (1976). For a more comprehensive history of censorship in Turkish film industry, see Gönül Dönmez-Colin's *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging* (2008).

within the law<sup>13</sup>. Clause 6, which bears the most relevance to this project, and clause 10, then, become highly problematic. The wording of these two clauses are vague at best, and they serve as deliberate catch-all legal bases for banning virtually any film that enters Turkey. "Public decency and morality" of course is a notion that takes its meaning entirely from the dominant ideology and groups of any given context – it's a majoritarian imposition rather than a protection for all minorities of the state. The term "national sentiments" echoes this – clearly in the minds of these ministers and lawmakers, it is entirely possible to determine a unified and unifying "sentiment" shared by all citizens of the Turkish Republic. Clause 10 may well substitute all the preceding clauses – the "may be deemed" (by whom? by what authority? and why?) is so flexible and could conceivably be applied to any film, that they need not have written the preceding 9 clauses. This, then, was the starting point for all future laws and legislation regarding filmmaking in Turkey, and remained in effect, with minor amendments, until 1977, when Article 7 was rephrased as films must not threaten "public order, public morality and the mental health of the children and the youth." This formulation was retained in the post-coup, 1986 "Law Regarding Works of Cinema, Video and Music."

On September 12, 1980, the General Chief of Staff, Kenan Evren headed Turkey's third coup d'état, citing the escalating violence between the right- and left-wing groups as the reason<sup>14</sup>. For the next three years, Turkey was under military rule – 650,000 were taken into custody; of these 50 were hanged, and an unknown number were disappeared by the state; over 900 films were banned; 400 journalists were prosecuted; over 40 tonnes of books and newspapers were

<sup>13.</sup> See Ayşe Gül Altınay's *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey* (2004) for a detailed account of how ethnic, religious and gender identities intersect with militarism in Turkey.

14. For a more detailed account of the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey, see Erik Zürcher's *Turkey: A Modern History* (1993) and Taha Parla's *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Rejimi, 1980-1989* (1993).

burned, and 800 laws were passed to accommodate the military rule. <sup>15</sup> In 1982, a new constitution was drafted by Evren's "government" and was accepted by a referendum in which it garnered 92% of the votes. Turkey then ostensibly transitioned back into a democracy, though Kenan Evren was appointed the president for the next 7 years, until 1989. It should be apparent, even from this rather sketchy outline of the 1980s coup, that it had a lasting impact on Turkish legal, social, and political spheres.

While the post-coup, 1986 law abolishes the itemized clauses I have quoted above, it still states that films must not include elements threatening "the indivisible integrity of the state and the nation, national sovereignty, national security, public order, public welfare, public morality and health," and that they should be regulated by officials regarding their compliance with national culture, traditions and customs" (Article 3). This rather vague terminology, of course, allows for a very flexible use of this law to suppress films that deal with subjects as diverse as the Kurdish population, the Armenian Genocide, female sexuality and, unsurprisingly, homosexuality. The enactment of this law, however, does not mean a clear-cut and blatant censorship of all subjects that pertain to the areas cited in the law. In fact, many film history texts regarding Turkey characterize the 1986 law as a positive development, citing the abolishment of the Censorship Board, which was largely ruled by the police, and the transference of all censorship decisions to the Ministry of Culture as a move towards "considerable relaxation" (Erdoğan and Göktürk 540). But if the Censorship Board decisions were inconsistent and, at times, unpredictable, then so are the funding decisions by the Ministry of Culture. While censorship in Turkey lost its openly fascist edge articulated in the laws above particularly in the

1

<sup>15.</sup> See Dilek Kırkpınar's dissertation 12 Eylül Darbesinin Gençlik Üzerindeki Etkileri (2009) for more details on the impact of the coup d'etat on Turkey's youth in particular.

1990s, it certainly did not disappear entirely. Rather, it took on more insidious forms that made alternative and radical filmmaking an even more precarious venture.

The films I look into in this chapter are all produced after the 1939 "Ordinance regarding the control of films and film scenarios," though a considerable number of them were produced before the 1986 "Law Regarding Works of Cinema, Video and Music," which is upheld to this day. It is worth noting that in the period between 1960s and late 1990s, Turkish cinema went through a period of a marked increase in sexploitation films, which frequently depicted sex workers, mob bosses and pimps, sexual predators and sexual violence. By and large none of these plot lines that usually revolved around physical or sexual violence on women were deemed unacceptable enough to trigger the Clause 6 of Article 7, "films that are contrary to public decency and morality and our national sentiments." Clause 6 was occasionally used to censor depictions of homosexual intimacy, though the censorship board did not necessarily use it to ban depictions of queerness and queer characters as long as they did not engage in explicit sexual acts. Thus, the history of depictions of queerness in Turkish film follows not a straight line towards progress, but rather a path full of detours, doubling back and inconsistencies which are determined by laws and legislation, the public discourses around (homo)sexuality, as well as the very plots of the films and how they treat their queer characters.

Broadly speaking, all of the films I consider fall into at least one of the following categories in their depictions of queerness: stereotypes, subtexts, superficial mentions, sexual violence, child molestation, tragedy, and villains, with a rare few outliers that manage to paint a more nuanced picture of non-normative sexualities in Turkey. A few films from the late 1950s and early 1960s offer depictions of gender transgression, which are significant in that they call into question the stability of gender roles, though it would be difficult to argue that these

directors are arguing for a radical rethinking of gender. One such example is the *Şoför Nebahat* Series, where the gender non-conformity of the main character is undercut by a heterosexual marriage plot, and her butchness is recoded as masculine honor and valiance.

In the first of the *Şoför Nebahat* Series, the 1959 *Şoför Nebahat* (Driver Nebahat), the storyline is centered on a poor but proud young woman who takes over her father's cab when he dies. Nebahat faces resistance from the people in her neighborhood, her customers and other cab drivers, none of whom think a woman should be a cab driver. She adopts a more masculine style by wearing her father's leather jacket and cap, alters her speech habits to reflect that of a working class young man, and proceeds to act as a moral crusader who repeatedly beats up men she deems lecherous and scolds women who she deems too loose. Aside from being a social commentary on the rapidly modernizing Turkey in the late 1950s, the film also serves as a meditation on the checks and balances imposed on young women who transgress their prescribed gender roles, and hints at the conditions under which this transgression is permissible. In Nebahat's case, for instance, the objections of the neighbors, her fiancé and his mother are undercut by the director, who depicts them as scheming, and in the case of the fiancé, effeminate.



Figure 1: Nebahat in her father's clothes (left) Figure 2: Nebahat arm wrestling another cab driver (right)

Recurring scenes of Nebahat fending off sexual advances, and her own loudly proclaimed moral judgments on men and women who are kissing in her cab underline her position as the moral center of the film. In her disapproval of others who engage in sexual or romantic relations, Nebahat occupies the position of a conservative Muslim man, as evident by her reaction, which is not the feminine-coded shock or verbal disapproval, but the masculine-coded anger and physical violence. If Nebahat's unexplained physical strength that enables her to beat up men left and right and win arm wrestling battles with fellow cab drivers seems a bit too far-fetched, it is justified when she gets shot by a rival cab driver and survives only because she is so strong. A fellow cabbie remarks, "Nebahat the man can survive this too." So both her moral and her physical survival in this oppressive and gender conforming environment depends on her ability to not only perform masculinity by the way she dresses, but to embody it by her physical strength. The film ends with Nebahat getting married to the lawyer Bülent – one of the few men in the film who does not seem to doubt her ability to be a driver. After the wedding, he cedes her the wheel on their drive home, signaling his acceptance of her identity as a driver (or a butch dominant woman). This acceptance, of course, can only come if this masculine-of-center identity is subsumed into a heterosexual marriage, where Nebahat, while clearly the dominant party, is coded unequivocally as heterosexual.

Perhaps unsurprisingly the later films in the series, *Driver Nebahat and Her Daughter* [1964], *Driver Nebahat It's All Our Fault* [1965] and the remake of the original *Driver Nebahat* [1970] take a more conservative turn. In *Driver Nebahat and Her Daughter*, Nebahat is reviled by her daughter who hates her mother's masculinity; plans to marry one man after another in order to provide her daughter with a stable home; switches to the restaurant business because her daughter wants to pass as upper-class; and finally reconciles with her first love, Bülent from the

previous movie. The 1965 film in the series is a slapstick comedy with barely a plot line in which Nebahat and her friends engage in cabbie rivalries, drinking games and more pub brawls as they bring down a mobster. Of these films, the most fascinating one is perhaps the 1970 remake of the original, which until the final few scenes is a shot-by-shot remake. While in the first film, Nebahat is kidnapped by the rival cab drivers and shot by accident during Bülent's rescue attempt and subsequently recovers due to her physical strength, the 1970 version alters the plot line in order to introduce a by-then familiar sexploitation plot. Nebahat is again kidnapped though this time by the men hired by Bülent's ex, and taken to a villa, where she is tied to a bed, and threatened with rape. In the end, it's Bülent's jealous ex who ends up shooting her, and the rival cab driver who saves her by giving her blood just in the nick of time. In this case, Nebahat's gender transgression and her class transgression (as she pursues a relationship with Bülent who is a lawyer) are liable to be punished by sexual and physical violence, from which she is saved by Bülent and her cabbie friends, who represent, respectively, the heterosexual order and class solidarity.

It is also in the 1960s that Turkish cinema first represents female homoeroticism and intimacy more explicitly. The relative lack of male homoerotic characters is not surprising — Turkish film industry in the 1960s and 1970s produced hundreds of sexploitation films that focused most of all on the objectification of and sexual violence towards young beautiful women. The female homoerotic films of the 1960s, with their implied sexual and romantic intimacy between the characters, would fit in with the widespread objectification of women in Turkish film at the time, while male homoeroticism would be a more disruptive force to the violent, macho and lecherous masculinities depicted on film in this period. The three films that depict female homoeroticism in the 1960s are *Ver Elini İstanbul* (Give Me Your Hand Istanbul,

1962), İki Gemi Yanyana (Two Ships Side by Side, 1963) and Haremde Dört Kadın (Four Women in the Harem, 1965), all of which treat the subject at the level of subtext of brief mention, and within the context of crime narratives. Much like Şoför Nebahat's opening sequence with cars upon cars signaling modernization, Ver Elini İstanbul opens with a sequence of trains, pointing both at the rapid industrialization of Turkey in the 1960s, and at the increasing migration from the provinces to metropolitan areas like Istanbul. The plot of the film follows the criminal underworld of Istanbul, where a mafia of pub owners, hotel managers, and petty criminals run a prostitution ring. Seher, who is in charge of a fashion house, is with Türkan, who is also seeing Kemal, the mastermind behind the operation. Seher and Türkan's relationship is signaled through a lover's fight in which Seher first scolds and then physically assaults her for



Figure 3: Seher and Türkan right before the kiss in *Ver Elini İstanbul* (left)
Figure 4: Ayten and Güler kiss in *İki Gemi Yanyana* (right)

sleeping with Kemal. The scene cuts out just before the two women kiss – the intent is clear, though the actual kiss never makes it past the Censorship Board. (Figure 3) Later on in the film, Seher and Türkan convince Aysel, the 'good village girl' figure in the film to work as a model at the fashion house, and then prostitute her to the highest bidder. *İki Gemi Yanyana* revolves around identical suitcases that get mixed up during a cab ride thus intertwining the lives of an aspiring actress, an unwitting drug mule, and a blackmailer. Ayten, the accomplice of the drug

dealer, has a relationship with Güler the sex worker, which is depicted with one brief kiss and more prolonged scenes of jealousy between the two women. (Figure 4) Ayten's queerness is further emphasized with scenes of her checking out women. In the course of the film, Ayten kills her business partner, an effeminate man coded as homosexual, to save her own skin, and later in a superfluous scene, performs a striptease at a bar to fend off the men trying to kill her. The men start a brawl in the bar, and the film ends abruptly as the two heterosexual protagonists get together during the brawl and kiss. We never find out if Ayten makes it out of there alive. In the last one of these homoerotic films of the 1960s, Harende Dört Kadın, the three scheming wives of a pasha attempt to thwart his plans to marry a fourth wife. The film takes place just at the turn of the 20th century, and contains a brief scene in which the two younger wives, Şevkidil and Mihrengiz are seen embracing each other and nuzzling each other's necks. Mihrengiz later murders her male lover who loves another woman, while Sevkidil's fate is unclear, though she does remark suggestively to the fourth wife "no man is worth loving." In all three films, female homoerotic intimacy is associated with women who are criminals, sex workers, or adulterers, with the plots either actively punishing or completely ignoring these women by the conclusion of the films. They are often juxtaposed with the "good" female characters in the film, who are almost always naive girls from a village. Thus the directors intentionally or unintentionally align queerness with an urban and a criminal sensibility, while virtue and goodness are associated with a naive and rural feminine heterosexuality. These alignments also indicate an anti-urban sentiment, wherein the urban space almost always poses a threat to the young, chaste and heterosexual female characters.

About a decade after the homoerotic films of the 1960s, director Nejat Saydam releases his film *Köçek* (1975), which is perhaps one of the most fascinating examples of a queer-themed

film from Turkey. The film's title refers to the male belly dancers of the Ottoman Empire, who were often prepubescent boys, and who dressed up as women and entertained palace and public crowds with dance and music. As such, it is a direct reference to gender transgressive performances from Turkey's cultural and historical past, which was widely accepted by the public. In Chapter 3, I discuss *köçeks* in greater detail as a recurring figure in contemporary Turkish queer culture. K*öçek* recounts the story of Caniko, <sup>16</sup> a young adult who has grown up as a man. We see Caniko playing soccer, strutting around the neighborhood and acting in a macho fashion, though his<sup>17</sup> gender is always in question from the very first scene of the film, when Adnan, a professional football player, asks him "Are you a man or a girl?" Caniko and Adnan become friends, Caniko entertains his friends by dancing and singing in the bar, picks a fight with other men in the bar who make fun of him, is eventually kidnapped by them, dressed in women's clothes and forced to dance. They refer to him as a "girl" which he denies vehemently. In the following scene, the men try to rape him only to realize that he indeed has a penis, and stab him and leave him to die.

In the next scene, he is at the hospital, where the doctors diagnose him with hermaphroditism and proclaim "it is our duty to humanity to save Caniko from this and return him to a normal life." (Figure 5) The split screen shows on one side Caniko dressed as a man, and on the other side dressed as a woman. (Figure 6)

<sup>16.</sup> Caniko translates to "the dear one."

<sup>17.</sup> Here, I use male pronouns for the points in the plot when Caniko identifies as a man, and female pronouns for when she identifies as a woman. I avoid using "they/them/theirs" pronouns as it imposes a western queer epistemology on the way I describe this character. Since the Turkish language does not have gendered pronouns, the film does not have to contend with this pronoun shift in a way an English-language film would, and gender-neutral pronouns such as "they/them/theirs" do not have the epistemological connotations in Turkish that they do in English.



Figure 5: Caniko in the hospital bed and as he has been presented in the film (left)
Figure 6: Two Canikos on the beach (right)

Upon waking, Caniko asks the doctor why he did not make Caniko a man, to which he responds by saying that that the tests revealed that Caniko's "young woman side is clearly more dominant." From that moment on Caniko begins to live as a woman, avoids her old friends, moves in with the local madam and is renamed by her as Raziye. Her old friends from the neighborhood are disbelieving of Caniko's new gender, and one even proclaims that he will kill her if this is true. Raziye and Adnan meet and he falls in love with her, not realizing Raziye is Caniko. Just as they are about to get married, everything is revealed and Adnan is furious. He says, "Know your manhood! This level of köçekness is unheard of! Were you going to go to bed with a man as a man?" and slaps her. Raziye runs away in her wedding dress, climbs up the steps to the Bosporus Bridge and starts running across to the other side. In the meanwhile, the madam and the doctor assure Adnan that Caniko has had the surgery and no longer has a penis. Appeased, Adnan runs after Raziye to beg forgiveness. On the bridge, just as Adnan shouts after Raziye to get her to come back, a rainbow appears. The two lovers run towards each other, passing under the rainbow. The madam tries to stop them but fails. The moment the two lovers pass under the rainbow, they are thrown into an alternate universe. Raziye is now Caniko again, and is wearing a suit. Adnan, on the other hand, is now wearing a wedding dress. They get

married and they dance as their wedding guests cry. (Figures 7 and 8) They are then transported into a bedroom where they are once again cross-dressed, Caniko in men's pajamas, Adnan in a nightgown. (Figures 9 and 10) Caniko proclaims, "No, this cannot happen, we must both die" and the scene fades to black. On the bridge, Raziye, who has fainted, comes to and the film ends with her and Adnan embracing.

The dream sequence is conceived as the polar opposite of what society dictates should be the norm. The couple cross-dresses, the wedding guests cry instead of laughing. The sequence is clearly meant to be a comic relief: the guests' exaggerated sighs and cries dominate the soundtrack, and the camera focuses on the awkward way in which Adnan carries himself in the nightgown. Nevertheless, the moment the scene comes to its logical conclusion, that is, the moment of the consummation of the marriage, the narrative crumbles and Raziye wakes up.





Figure 7: Adnan and Caniko in their wedding clothes Figure 8: Guests at the twilight zone wedding Figure 9: Adnan in a nightgown Figure 10: Caniko in men's pijamas

Neither the dream Caniko or Adnan, nor Raziye, nor us as the audience can or are allowed to see the consummation of this queer marriage. Taking into account the censored kiss from the 1960s female homoerotic films and the previously mentioned laws regarding films, it would stand to reason that this storyline is allowed only insofar as Caniko's gender ambiguity is "fixed" with surgical intervention, and the queer dream sequence is structured as a comic relief that stops short of depicting actual queer physical intimacy. In other words, the narrative of a non-normative sexuality is allowed insofar as it is not treated as a legitimate mode of existence.

The 1980s and 1990s in Turkey depart significantly from this trend of subtext, stereotypes, and brief fleeting scenes of homoerotic intimacy. By and large, this has to do with the Turkish state's priorities during this period, which focus more on limiting political speech rather than depictions of potentially "immoral" behavior. Because the laws around film production and censorship are ambiguous in their formulations, their implementation too remains highly opaque and is shaped primarily by the political, social, moral or religious agenda of the party in power. In her article "Images delegitimized and discouraged: Explicitly political art and the arbitrariness of the unspeakable," cultural anthropologist and the co-founder of the *Siyah Bant* initiative Banu Karaca traces the seemingly arbitrary censorship to which political contemporary art from Turkey has been subjected. She defines the Turkish mode of censorship in the following way:

There are, however, exceptions and limits to the notion of art's inherent beneficial quality; when these are reached, art is met with measures of censorship. Beyond the straight-forward banning and suppression of artworks, censorship here is taken to include a variety of practices that range from processes of (partial) silencing to the continuum between criticism and censorship, incentives for self-censorship, and delegitimization, as

<sup>18.</sup> In his book *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History*, Savaş Arslan provides a comprehensive analysis of 1980s and 1990s in Turkish cinema.

<sup>19.</sup> Siyah Bant (Black Tape) is an online and print platform for the research and documentation of instances of censorship in Turkey, in particular in the arts, cinema, media and the internet.

well as modes of foreclosure that authoritatively frame the production and reception of artworks (157).

Because "the domain of the unspeakable... remains unclearly mapped; its boundaries are not always visible, or infallibly discernible," (Karaca 158) meaning that the state can avoid the stigma of blatant censorship in the international arena, while keeping artists sufficiently apprehensive about producing works that are political (or otherwise "unsuitable") in content. I would argue that this logic carries on to the film industry in Turkey as well. While it has become rarer for the Ministry of Culture to outright ban films in Turkey (though, as I will address later on in this chapter, not impossible), the ministry has nonetheless kept a tight leash on film production through the funding decisions it makes and bureaucratic obstacles it enacts for certain films. The kinds of films the Ministry of Culture takes issue with change from decade to decade, depending often on the priorities of the state and its ideologies.

Technically, the draconian pre-1986 laws regarding film that I quoted at length above are no longer in effect, and the police and the government no longer have the authority to ban films according to those criteria. The Ministry of Culture, however, makes its funding decisions based on their post-1986 reincarnations: that is, on the basis of their "originality and value in terms of culture, art and aesthetics," "contribution to the promotion of national culture and cultural values," and of course, on the condition that they do not pose a threat to "public order, public morality and the mental health of the children and the youth." The ambiguity of this legal formulation, however, leads to what Karaca refers to as the "arbitrariness of the unspeakable." The case of two films, *Beddua* (Malediction, 1980) and *Şöhretin Sonu* (The End of Fame, 1981), that star the famous transgender singer and cultural icon Bülent Ersoy, exemplify how and under

<sup>20.</sup> Sinema Filmlerinin Desteklenmesi Hakkında Yönetmelik. (Regulations Regarding the Support of Films). (2004) T.C. Resmi Gazette [Official Gazette], 25642, 13 November 2004.

which conditions explicit and extensive narratives of gender and sexual identity can be represented in film during the coup era.

Beddua depicts the story of Bülent, who travels from his village where he is abhorred by his father for being raped by a man as a child, to Istanbul to become a singer. The film follows a typical Yeşilçam melodrama plot in which the protagonist faces insurmountable odds (in Bülent's case, his inability to fit in with the other workers at the factory, and homophobia), is spurned by the woman he loves (the factory owner's daughter), eventually finds true love, only to be murdered along with his wife by his enemies.<sup>21</sup> Beddua is often cited as the first Turkish film to openly tackle issues of homophobia, and draws heavily upon the famous transgender singer and actor Bülent Ersoy's story, who plays the protagonist: not only is the protagonist named Bülent, but images of newspaper headlines from the 1980s regarding Bülent Ersoy are integrated into the plot in order to position the protagonist not within a fictional world, but within the world of the audience. The subsequent film Söhretin Sonu, is released only a year later, with Bülent Ersoy once again playing a protagonist modeled after her. This film depicts the deterioration of Bülent Ersoy's relationship with fiancé and childhood friend Aslı, with friend and back up musician Doğan, and another childhood friend Murat who is in love with Aslı. The plot traces Bülent's feminine gender presentation and inability to desire Aslı sexually to Bülent's childhood. Unlike Beddua, which posits Bülent's rape as a young boy as the reason for a feminine gender presentation, Söhretin Sonu shows Bülent as a child sewing, wearing girls' clothes, putting on make up, making friends in high school, while the voiceover states "I grew up like a girl." At no point in this flashback narrative that is meant to serve as the explanation of

<sup>21.</sup> Here, I'm using he/him/his pronouns to refer to the protagonist. Although the Bülent in the movie is heavily inspired by the real life Bülent Ersoy who is a transgender woman, he is not written as a transgender character, and his cisgender male and heterosexual identity is underlined through the marriage plot.

Bülent's sexual and gender identity does the film depict a traumatic event. Rather, the film depicts Bülent's transgender identity as something that Bülent is born with, and that cannot be changed. Despite this somewhat more progressive depiction, the film's final scene casts a definitive judgment on non-normative sexualities. Bülent, who is on trial for attacking someone who called Bülent a "pervert," stands up to receive the judge's verdict. The judge acquits Bülent but then delivers a prolonged speech in which he advises Bülent not to let fame go to his head, not to set a bad example for the fans who look up to him, and to be mindful what his private life looks like. Thus chastised by the judge who stands in for the public sentiment, Bülent emerges from prison in men's clothing, and issues a public apology to the people of Turkey. The plot line and the release year of the film are significant – in 1981, the same year as this film was released, Bülent Ersoy underwent gender affirmation surgery in the UK, as the surgery was not available in Turkey at the time. Upon her return to Turkey, she was left without a job as after the 1980 military coup the General Kenan Evren implemented a series of laws against "deviancy" that banned transgender and transsexual people from performing in public. In some ways, *Şöhretin* Sonu can be read as a cinematic response to the military coup era laws and legislation that significantly restricted transgender or otherwise gender non-conforming individuals from access to the public sphere.<sup>22</sup> Bülent Ersoy subsequently moved to Germany in order to continue her career as a singer and a performer. The openly transphobic and homophobic laws of the military enforced in the 1980s meant that the stereotypical depictions of non-normative sexualities made a comeback. A 1985 film titled Suçlu Gençlik (The Guilty Youth), for instance, has yet another court scene in which one of the lawyers gives a speech blaming the drug addiction, homosexual

<sup>22.</sup> For a more detailed analysis of Bulent Ersoy's life and the way in which she navigates the state's restrictive discourses, see Rüstem Ertuğ Altınay's "Reconstructing the Transgender Self as a Muslim, Nationalist, Upper-class Woman: The Case of Bülent Ersoy" in *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36:3&4 Fall/Winter 2008.

behavior, and violent crimes of a group of youth on their irresponsible and neglectful parents, and ties a young woman's suicide to her father being a homosexual. So once again we encounter a "save the children" discourse that condemns homosexuality on the grounds of setting a bad example to and directly impacting the lives of the younger generation. Much like the judge in *Şöhretin Sonu*, the lawyer in *Suçlu Gençlik* functions both as an agent of the state, a representative of the judicial system, and as an outlet for the public sentiments regarding nonnormative sexualities at the time.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Turkey underwent a phase of neoliberalization under the president Turgut Özal from the neoliberal Homeland Party (ANAP), who came into power in 1989 when Kenan Evren finally stepped down from his long presidency. This period of neoliberalization brought about some relaxation of the military era restrictions, which was reflected in the preoccupations of the state regarding film censorship. While films that were political in content were banned or otherwise limited in circulation frequently, sexuality was no longer high on the agenda. In his *Republic of Love* ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes remarks that "it was no secret that Semra Özal, wife of President Turgut Özal, was a great fan, and an amnesty (of sorts) secured Ersoy's return" (169) to the stage. Thus after the extremely restrictive laws and legislation that regulated public life in the mid-1980s, Turgut Özal's neoliberal policies and his wife's active efforts to relax the rules in the artistic sphere changed the artistic and cinematic spheres in Turkey.

This change accounts for Atıf Yılmaz's 1985 *Dul Bir Kadın* (A Widow), which depicts a lesbian relationship, 1992 *Düş Gezginleri* (Walking After Midnight), which depicts again a lesbian relationship between a doctor and a sex worker, and Orhan Oğuz's 1992 *Dönersen Islık Çal* (Whistle If You Return), which depicts the friendship between a trans woman sex worker

and a bartender dwarf. While the film deals in some stereotypical depictions of non-normative sexualities or bodily otherness, overall it is also an outlier in that it is the first film to depict the violent and unfair treatment of trans people, and in particular trans women sex workers, by the police. The final scene of the film, in which the unnamed trans woman sex worker protagonist steps onto the main pedestrian street, İstiklal, in broad daylight and takes off her wig, points both to a disavowal of her identity as a woman by ending on a "reveal" moment, and to a potential integration into society as one's self, without hiding. (Figures 11 and 12)



Figure 11: The protagonist walking down the street with wig on Figure 12: The freeze frame with the wig off

Another film by Atıf Yılmaz, *Gece, Melek ve Bizim Çocuklar* (Night, Angel, and Our Folks) depicts the solidarity and friendship between a ciswoman sex worker Serap, a trans sex worker Arif, and ex-convict and spurned lover Melek. Serap's boyfriend, Hakan, is a cisman who is also sex worker, who sleeps with the upper class Mehmet. Like *Dönersen Islık Çal*, this film, too, depicts sex workers, male and female, cis- and trans-, whose existence is at best ignored by the government, and at worst actively prosecuted. Through these various characters, and the claustrophobic setting that confines these characters to dingy and dark bars and private homes, the director Atıf Yılmaz brings to life Istanbul nightlife in the 1990s Taksim

neighborhood, which served (at the time and until the late 2010s) as the home of all kinds of marginalized communities.

With the faltering of the neoliberal regime, however, and the rise of the more conservative parties – first Saadet Partisi (Welfare Party), led by Necmettin Erbakan, then Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party) – issues of public morality once again came to the forefront. A number of films that deal with LGBT issues were banned by the state in the 2000s, or else were denied funding repeatedly. I will briefly discuss two of these films to illustrate the impact of these laws and political trends for queer filmmaking. Ali Kemal Güven's 2008 film Kralice Fabrikada (The Queen is in the Factory) was denied funding by the Ministry of Culture due to the depiction of a gay sex scene. The film, which tells the story of a sister who tries to convert her brother to heterosexuality upon the "honor killing" of their gay friend, also could find neither a producer nor a distributor in Turkey. In an interview, Güven says that the producers required them to cut out the gay sex scenes, and when they refused their funding was rescinded.<sup>23</sup> This shows unwillingness both on the part of the state and on the part of production companies to promote works that deal with homosexuality. While the film was not outright banned by the Turkish authorities, the lack of state funding, producers, and distributors resulted in its never being screened in Turkey, except at a special screening in the German-funded Goethe Institut and a semi-private screening at Turkey's largest LGBT organization, Lambdaistanbul. The film was subsequently screened in various queer films festivals in Europe and North America. It is perhaps unsurprising that Lambdaistanbul, which was founded in 1993, was being sued for closure by the Istanbul Municipality around the same time. The municipality sued the organization in 2006, citing the Turkish Civil Code's Article 56

<sup>23. &</sup>quot;Kraliçe Fabrikada Değil, Sansürde" (The Queen is not in the Factory but in Censorship). Gecce. 3.3.2009. https://www.gecce.com.tr/haber-kralice-fabrikada-degil-sansurde

which states that organizations "against the law and morality cannot be founded," and the Turkish Constitution's Article 41, which states that "the family is the foundation of Turkish society" as some of the reasons for the closure case. The hearings lasted well over 2 years, and the organization was shut down on May 29, 2008 until the decision was appealed in a higher court and rescinded on November 25, 2008. With the largest and most politically influential municipality bent on shutting down the most active LGBT organization in the country, it is hardly surprising that LGBT films like *Kraliçe Fabrikada* have trouble finding funding, producers or distributors.

In contrast, a number of films from the mid and early-2000s did not encounter similar direct and indirect censorship. Filler ve Çimen, a thriller about the Turkish intelligence service featured a gay couple as minor characters; 2 Genç Kız by queer artist and director Kutluğ Ataman focused on the increasingly romantic and intimate relationship between two teenage girls; and Fatih Akın's *The Edge of Heaven*, which featured a Turkish/German lesbian couple was screen widely at festivals and regular movie theaters. This, of course, begs the question why ban Kraliçe Fabrikada and not these other three? When it comes to direct or indirect censorship, it matters not just what the director depicts but how they depict it. So, while all of these films depict non-normative sexualities in one way or another, they do so differently, which may account for the differences in their treatment by the state. Kraliçe Fabrikada for instance has an explicit gay sex scene and fully developed gay characters. Filler ve Çimen on the other hand, barely shows any intimacy between the two gay characters, sets up their dynamics as that of a guardian and his charge, and in the end kills one and hints at a heterosexual relationship for the other. In 2 Genç Kız, while the romantic undertones of the two girls' relationship is heavily emphasized, there are no explicitly sexual scenes, and one of them repeatedly sleeps with men,

partly working against a straightforward queer reading of the film. Finally while *The Edge of Heaven* depicts an explicitly lesbian relationship between Ayten, a Turkish anti-government activist, and Lotte, a German university student, is set partially in Turkey, and directed by the Turkish-German director Fatih Akın, it is produced and distributed entirely by non-Turkish companies. Additionally Fatih Akın's national and international fame makes any censorship effort on the Turkish government's part a public relations nightmare. In short, what is acceptable depends on a number of variables, including but not limited to how the storyline deals with its queer characters, whether queerness is depicted primarily as a subtext, whether the queer characters are male or female, and how much financial and legal control the government has on the film's production processes. I will briefly turn to the 2012 *Zenne* by openly-gay directors Caner Alper and Mehmet Binay to demonstrate how these processes work for a film that does not deal in subtext, does not kill of its characters in a punitive manner, and is produced in Turkey.

Zenne, which deals with the murder of Ahmet Yıldız by his father that was dubbed by the media "the first gay honor killing in Turkey,<sup>24</sup>" tells the story of the relationship between Ahmet, his lover Daniel, and their friend Can, who is a zenne dancer. The film depicts Ahmet's tragic death, and also offers a critique of the Turkish military, which, to this day, classifies homosexuality as a psychosexual disorder and bans homosexuals from military service.<sup>25</sup> The directors' application for funding from the Ministry of Culture was denied; the only reasoning given by the ministry officials was that "the film has not been found suitable" for state funding<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>24.</sup> See *Independent*'s coverage of the murder on July 19, 2008 with the title "Was Ahmet Yildiz the victim of Turkey's first gay honour killing?," after which the term took off.

<sup>25.</sup> In my fourth chapter, I offer a full analysis of this film and how it negotiates local and global narratives of queerness, as well as how it comments on the relationship between the nation state and sexual minorities.

26. See Ayşe Arman's interview with the two directors in the daily *Hürriyet* titled "Dürüst olmak mı önemli hayatta kalmak mı?" published on September 25, 2011.

The film was screened at the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, where it won 5 awards, and was the only film in the festival to not receive state funding and support. The directors produced the film with a combination of personal funds, crowdsourcing and the Embassy of the Netherlands Human Rights Funds.

It is not only funding decisions, however, that factor into queer visibility in films from Turkey. It is also a myriad of laws regarding circulation and screening of films. These laws regarding the production, circulation, and funding of films apply only to Turkish productions. In 1988, "The Regulations Regarding the Supervision of Works of Cinema, Video and Music," which constitutes the criteria for state support and film circulation, is amended to exclude foreign films that are exhibited in film festivals. This shows that the state is not necessarily interested in preventing the circulation of foreign queer and LGBT films in Turkey, but rather preventing the production of Turkish queer and LGBT (or otherwise politically suspect) films. Furthermore, these laws are applied arbitrarily, which leads to bureaucratic obstacles functioning as censorship mechanisms. Zenne's screening history in Turkey attests to this: After the screening in the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival, the film was set to be the opening screening at the Malatya Film Festival, which took place in 18-24 November 2011. On November 9, 2011 the directors of the film received communication from the festival organizers that they should provide a "license of operation" for the film to be screened at the festival, even though they had previously provided all the documentation required by the festival. With only nine days to go before the screening, the license was impossible to obtain, and the film was consequently not screened at the festival. This event was covered in various newspaper editorials as an instance of "indirect censorship," 27 wherein bureaucracy is used as a way of hindering the dissemination of

<sup>27. &</sup>quot;Zenne Filmine Sansür Mü?" Nazlı Ilıcak. Sabah.com.15 November 2011. Web. Accessed 23 April 2015.

films considered unsuitable. Whether the organizers knew about the necessity of this license and neglected to inform the directors, or they simply required only this particular film to provide one is unclear – in either case, the film's screening was made impossible due to the lack of this license. Considering the license can only be obtained from the Ministry of Culture, whose inner workings and ideological leanings I have briefly outlined earlier, this procedure can be read as a thinly veiled form of censorship.

As I have stated earlier, the instances of censorship in Turkey are by no means consistent. It is difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate state censorship in its various forms, though one can surmise, from the films that are censored, what triggers a reaction from the state. Emre Yalgın's 2010 film Teslimiyet (Other Angels), for instance, is one of the few queer themed films that have not encountered censorship. As in the previous cases, the film received no funding from the Ministry of Culture, but it was nonetheless screened nation-wide in festivals if not at regular movie theaters. The film depicts the story of four transvestite sex workers and their struggles to survive in a society that bars them access to other employment. While the film certainly touches on a lot of issues that are considered taboo in Turkish society, it does so in a way that remains by and large personal – that is to say, while the film certainly has a political valence, it does not directly target Turkish state institutions as oppressive forces in the lives of these four characters. Zenne, in contrast, includes a blatant critique of the Turkish military in its depiction of its procedures for obtaining what is known as the "pink discharge papers," which excuses gay men from the mandatory military service on account of their "psychosexual disorder." This scene criticizes the absurdity of this classification, also exposing once again one of the most controversial open secrets of the Turkish military – that is, the requirement that gay men provide photographic or video evidence that shows them receiving anal sex from another man in order to

prove their homosexuality. I would argue, then, that limited releases of queer and LGBT films that do not have blatant critiques of the state are usually allowed, whereas films that have more explicit criticism of state institutions get tangled up in bureaucratic obstacles in every stage of their production and circulation.

The "license of operation" requirement, of course, is not only used to prevent the dissemination of queer-themed films but also other films that may be considered "suspect" which the events surrounding the last Istanbul Film Festival made abundantly clear. On April 12, 2015, Istanbul Film Festival got word that the documentary *Bakur*, which depicts the lives of PKK<sup>28</sup> fighters, was banned from being screened due to the lack of a license of operation. This resonates perfectly with the story of Zenne – again, the festival organizers were not notified of the necessity of such a license until it was too late to obtain one, and they were forced to cancel the screening for fear of being sued by the Ministry of Culture. This time around, however, the film festival organizers protested the decision by the Ministry of Culture and cancelled the rest of the festival, publicly denouncing the censorship mechanisms at play. Various cinema and actors' unions organized a walk against censorship on April 18, 2015<sup>29</sup> and protested the arbitrary application of licensing laws, demanding that films from Turkey that are screened at festivals be afforded the same status as foreign films that are screened at festivals. What is most striking about this chain of events is not just the obvious ideological reasons behind these acts of censorship, but also the limits of the law. It is clear from the many film festivals (both larger ones like IF Istanbul Film Festival, Istanbul International Film Festival, and smaller ones like Uçan Süpürge Women's Film Festival, or KuirFest Queer Film Festival) that queer and LGBT

<sup>28.</sup> Kurdistan Workers Party, which is considered a terrorist organization by the Turkish state, and freedom fighters by the Kurdish community.

<sup>29. &</sup>quot;Sinemacılar Sansüre Karşı Özgür Sinema İçin Yürüyecek." KaosGL.com 17 April 2015. Web. Accessed 23 April 2015.

themed films are indeed being screened frequently, if in a limited fashion, in Turkey. What seems to be the problem is the dissemination and screening of queer and LGBT films that are made and produced in Turkey. This clearly demonstrates that the state is interested in limiting depictions of Turkish queerness rather than queerness at large. In other words, non-Turks are allowed to be queer on screen, whereas the depiction of Turkish queerness obviously is at odds with the ideal citizens that the republic envisions.

What all of these case studies and laws reveal, then, is the way in which queer filmmaking, due to its depiction of non-normative and non-state sanctioned sexualities, is always in tension with the state ideologies. While Turkish law does not ban homosexuality and it rarely refers explicitly to the LGBT population in its diction, it nonetheless constitutes the largest obstacle to the development of a queer film practice in Turkey. The ambiguity of the laws allows for the direct and indirect censorship of queer and LGBT films by way of denying funding, licenses of operation, and screening rights to queer and LGBT-themed films produced in Turkey, while the public morality laws serve to paint these acts of censorship as positive steps to protect the mental health of children and the youth. Moreover, the discrepancies between the treatment of non-Turkish queer and LGBT films often screened at festivals, and Turkish queer and LGBT films, marginalize homosexuality and by default define it as something foreign. By suppressing the representations of local queerness, the state attempts to curtail the very possibility of local queerness, to erase it from the cultural landscape of Turkey. What is at stake for the state, of course, is the notion of the ideal citizen, which constitutes the ideological underpinnings of the Turkish republic. Without this ideological construct, the diverse population of Turkey becomes too difficult to manage and engineer in accordance with the state's wishes. Retaining this construct, then, becomes a matter of sovereignty and control.

The implications of these laws and regulations are clear. They prevent the formation of a Turkish LGBT film practice and tradition by imposing upon the few films produced notions of public morality. Within such stringent parameters of what is acceptable and suitable, any expression (whether cinematic, verbal or textual) of non-normative sexualities becomes difficult, if not impossible. By attempting to suppress queer artistic expressions, the state attempts to erase the very existence of queer individuals from the artistic, social, cultural and political history of Turkey. In his discussion of historiography, Michel de Certeau speaks of "what can be *understood* and what must be *forgotten* in order to obtain the representation of a present intelligibility:" (4)

But whatever this new understanding of the past holds to be irrelevant – shards created by the selection of materials, remainders left aside by an explication – comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies: "resistances," "survivals," or delays discreetly perturb the pretty order of a line of "progress" or a system of interpretation. These are lapses in the syntax constructed by the law of a place. Therein they symbolize a return of the repressed, that is, a return of what, at a given moment, has *become* unthinkable in order for a new identity to *become* thinkable (4).

The new understanding of the past pushed by the Turkish state is one of unquestionable heteronormativity, wherein the homoerotic affects, traditions and cultural artifacts of the Ottoman Empire are glossed over. Queer and LGBT films from Turkey, on the other hand, embody the return of the repressed par excellence – they depict identities that have been rendered unthinkable by the state for the formation of the ideal citizen. They represent a disruption to the ideology of the state, a resistance to its laws and regulations. It is in their (hi)stories that we can trace alternative modes of existence within the social, cultural and political context of Turkey, and see increasingly clearly the ways in which the state attempts to police, manage and mask non-conforming identities and their artistic expressions. Writing the

historiographies of queer and LGBT films in Turkey, then, makes visible these resistances and survivals against all odds, and disrupts the neater official historiographies of the nation.

In this chapter, I have introduced some of the political, social, cultural and religious factors that impact representation of non-normative sexualities in Turkey. I have also attended to recurrent patterns of how non-normative sexuality is represented in these cinematic traditions; that is, through subtext, stereotypes, tragedy, brief and cursory treatments and comedy. In the following chapters, I will turn to a more in-depth analysis of a number of these films from Turkey as well as others from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia that serve as illuminating case studies for parsing out the dynamics between the nation state and queer individuals, for thinking about the national and global politics of representation, and for beginning to theorize a local queer aesthetics that takes its bearings from religious, political, cultural and linguistic specificities.

## Chapter 3 : Deconstructing National Narratives of Gender: Queer Spectatorship and Narratives of Female Homosexuality in Turkey and the former-Yugoslavia

In an interview with a Turkish daily newspaper regarding his film 2008 Vicdan (Conscience), which features a love triangle between a married heterosexual couple (Songül and Mahmut) and another woman (Aydanur), director Erden Kıral remarks "I don't see it as a lesbian relationship at all. What Aydanur and Songül have is a maternal relationship."30 Not long before that, in an interview with the Croatian newspaper Nacional, Dalibor Matanić, the director of 2002 Croatian film Fine Mrtve Djevojke (Fine Dead Girls) responds to the negative reviews of his film by the lesbian community in the Balkans by saying, "Some of the girls wanted Hollywood, happy end, ending in which the two were in wedding dresses. I just asked them 'Which country do you live in, did you ever see something like this in Croatia?"<sup>31</sup> In another interview, Matanić dismisses the sexuality of his protagonists as insignificant beyond shock value – "I am a man who shocks"<sup>32</sup> he says, indicating an interest in sensationalism over nuanced depictions of marginalized experiences. Both Kıral and Matanić's attitudes reflect not uncommon trends in representations of lesbians by non-queer directors – namely, willful erasure by denying the existence or the particularities of the lesbian experience; and inability to cast lesbians as anything other than within clichéd storylines with tragic endings.

30. See Sema Denker's interview with Kıral, published in the daily *Hürriyet* on June 19, 2008.

<sup>31.</sup> Simić, Tanja. "Kako shvatiti ličke redikule" Nacional. 30 June 2006. Arhiva.nacional.hr/clanak/46924/kako-shvatiti-licke-redikule. Accessed 12 May 2017. Translation mine.

<sup>32.</sup> Dumančić, Marko. "Dalibor Matanić: Fine Dead Girls (Fine mrtve djevojke, 2002)." Croatian Film Today. Croatian Film Association, 2012, pp. 153.

Conscience depicts the story of a love triangle between a married couple, Mahmut and Songül, and Songül's childhood friend Aydanur, who becomes Mahmut's mistress. Tensions grow in the marriage when Songül finds out about the affair and cultivates a friendship with Aydanur, only to enter into a homoerotic relationship with her. The film's plot culminates in violence as Mahmut murders his wife upon finding out about their intimacy, and years down the road, Aydanur murders him in revenge. In *Fine Dead Girls*, Iva and Marija, a couple, move into an apartment in the outskirts of Zagreb only to be hounded by the various residents of the building once the nature of their relationship is revealed. The landlady's son, Daniel pursues Iva aggressively and eventually rapes her, and in her rage Marija kills him and is then consequently murdered by the residents of the building.

Taking these two films as my starting point for this chapter, I analyze how lesbian desire and/or female homoeroticism is depicted within mainstream frameworks and how spectators engage with such work. In particular, I focus on how queer audiences engage with texts that are not explicitly queer or that are openly patriarchal and homophobic, but that nonetheless do not foreclose the possibility of oppositional, queer readings. How do we approach texts that are ambivalent in the narratives they create? How do we interpret and position works that do not aspire to unsettle traditional narratives yet offer us possibilities of queer spectatorship and sites of homoeroticism?

In order to formulate some answers to these questions, I tease out the ways in which the notion of spectatorship and the act of looking steers the narratives of *Vicdan* and *Fine Mrtve Djevojke* – both within the world of the film, and outside of it. Outside the narratives of the films, of course, is the camera itself; the director chooses where we look, and to a certain extent, how we look. Also on this outer layer are the spectators – our positionalities and subjectivities as

spectators determine what kind of a narrative we construct, what meanings we ascribe to the images we see, what kinds of readings (complicit, oppositional, queer etc.) we engage in. Within the films, the looks exchanged between the characters, where they choose to direct their gazes and the consequences of those decisions steer the narratives. The looks of the spectator and of the camera at times align with the gazes of the characters, and at times do not, resulting in varying levels of identification or distance with the characters we see on the screen. The way the characters look at each other in *Vicdan* and *Fine Mrtve Djevojke* can be broadly categorized as either denoting surveillance or desire, two impulses that constitute the central conflicts of both films. Similarly, the spectators of these films oscillate between occupying the position of a surveilling gaze and a desiring gaze, at time in keeping with and at times in spite of the position the directors strive to privilege.

The issue of spectatorship has long been one of the central areas of film theory, and in particular, feminist film theory. Laura Mulvey posits the camera as a conduit for the male gaze, which assumes, and to some extent enforces, a heterosexual male audience for mainstream (Hollywood) films. In her formulation, which has been discussed, amended and extrapolated extensively by theorists, women on the silver screen are defined through their "to-be-looked-atness," that is to say, through their physical and sexual appeal; while the men in the film (and by extension the audience) retain power over the "look" as the "bearers of the gaze." As Mulvey herself later admitted, and a number of critics have argued, this formulation, however deeply it rings true for most spectators' experience of classical Hollywood cinema, does not take into account different spectator positionalities that may resist the heterosexed and masculine role

<sup>33.</sup> Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Screen 16:3, 1975, pp. 6-18.

<sup>34.</sup> Mulvey, Laura. "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and the Narative Cinema' inspired by Duel in the Sun." Feminism and Film Theory, edited by Constance Penley. London: Routledge, 1988. 68-79.

pushed upon them by the cinematic apparatus. As Jackie Stacey outlines in her article, "Desperately Seeking Difference," Mulvey's position and those of her critics have resulted in reading the feminine spectator position as "masculinized," (Mulvey) "masochistic," (Bellour 97) or as "narcissistic," (Doane 78) to name a few. Not only do these formulations all pathologize female spectatorship to various levels, they also remain firmly rooted in a psychoanalytic tradition and assume a heterosexual female spectator. As an alternative, Stacey proposes that we "separate gender identification from sexuality, too often conflated in the name of sexual difference." (53) Looking at modes of female spectatorship within and outside of the narrative of two films, *All About Eve* and *Desperately Seeking Susan*, she focuses our attention on the "possibilities of pleasure" afforded by the conglomeration of female gazes within and outside of the narrative. Like Stacey's work, my analysis of the two films which constitute the focal points of this chapter, *Vicdan* and *Fine Mrtve Djevojke*, pays attention to the various narratives made possible or curtailed through a reading of the films from a female and lesbian spectator's position.

Reading *Vicdan* and *Fine Mrtve Djevojke* concurrently allows us to see how national, religious, social and political mechanisms of control attempt to discipline non-normative sexualities and bodies, and how reparative readings of these homophobic yet homoerotic films can help us determine the fracture points wherein these films can be repositioned as narratives that subvert notions of honor and conventional masculinity in the Turkish case, and notions of ethnic and sexual belonging in the Croatian one. *Vicdan* and *Fine Dead Girls* have a similar plot structure in which the violence perpetrated by the heterosexual male figure disrupts and makes impossible a lesbian or homoerotic intimacy and future between the two female protagonists. *Vicdan* starts with the frame story in which Aydanur and Mahmut are in the backseat of a cab.

After a fight in which Aydanur yells at him "Shoot me then!" the scene abruptly ends with a single gunshot heard over a black frame. The film then flashes back to a nonspecific point in the past, where all three are working in the same factory. Upon finding out about the affair, Songül goes to Aydanur's house to confront her, but instead, a sexually-charged intimacy is born between the two women. First, they share private conversations in Aydanur's apartment; then Aydanur comes over for dinner, during which the two women explicitly exclude Mahmut from their shared bond; and finally they go out for a night of dancing and drinking at an all-female space. Their growing intimacy culminates in a town wedding in which the two women dance with each other provocatively and without inhibitions. Mahmut's growing anger finally turns into violence and he murders Songül as she dances with Aydanur. After serving time in prison for the murder, Mahmut once again finds Aydanur to lure her back into a relationship with him. She fails to escape him and his men, and he abducts her in his car, which brings us to the opening sequence of the film. During the fight, Mahmut offers her a gun and screams "Come on, kill me then" to which Aydanur responds by doing exactly that. The film ends with Aydanur in police custody, refusing to say why she killed him. In my reading of Vicdan, I argue that the various layers of looking (the camera, the spectators, the characters) in tension with one another create possibilities of queer spectatorship, and that the representations of female homoeroticism are deeply enmeshed in the various power dynamics created by these conglomerations of gazes.

It would be tempting to read this film as a revenge plot, in which the violent and patriarchal murder of Songül is avenged by her lover, Aydanur. It would likewise be tempting to dismiss the restrained female homoerotic desire in the film and read it as a crime drama, in which the characters are trapped within a cycle of violence and abuse. The plot line and the visual narrative Erden Kıral constructs pull us in a number of directions at once, in effect repeatedly

pushing us to reevaluate/renegotiate our positions as spectators. What is worth looking at in this film is those moments in which these two opposing tendencies are in tension, in which the film continually challenges spectators of either camp to reevaluate their interpretation of the film. The ambiguity of the scenes, and the discrepancy between the meanings that can be derived from the visual signifiers on the screen reveal the tensions between mainstream and queer spectatorship, and allow us to think about how we employ oppositional readings to texts that only marginally lend themselves to such readings. Reading resistant texts queerly is not simply an exercise in wishful thinking – rather, it allows us to think about the relationship between meaning making and spectatorship, and the radical potential of queerness as subtext within the mainstream. Unlike other films I have talked about in the previous chapter, the female homoerotic intimacy in *Vicdan* does not simply remain at the level of a brief mention or a subtext that has little to do with the overall meaning of the film. Rather, Aydanur and Songül's intimacy is the driving force of the entire film, thus setting *Vicdan* apart from previous representations of female homoerotic intimacy in Turkish film.

The film sets up the two protagonists, Aydanur and Songül as rivals for Mahmut's love, who is depicted as the sole figure connecting the two women. We are introduced to him in the factory, in a sequence of low-angle shots and low-key lighting highlighting his imposing, muscular figure, and sweat-soaked skin. Kıral then cuts to Songül warily watching him from among the stacks of crates, as another worker asks her "Does yours also go to that cursed house from time to time?" We then see Mahmut follow Aydanur around in the factory and ask her not to get married, thus establishing her as the owner of the "cursed house" and Mahmut's mistress.



Figure 13: Aydanur, Mahmut and the bellydancer (left)
Figure 14: Songül approaches the bar (right)

After establishing their initially romantic, and later drug-hazed encounters through flashbacks, the director fast-forwards 7 months, when Aydanur and Mahmut are at a local bar, drinking and watching a belly dancing performance. The framing of the trio is telling – Aydanur is squeezed into the far left side of the frame in the background, while the lens is focused on Mahmut's larger figure in the center of the frame, establishing his desire as signified by his gaze directed at the large, partial figure of the belly dancer in the foreground on frame right, as the dominant force in the sequence. (Figure 13) The scene then cuts to Songül walking in the dark towards the bar, the diegetic music from the bar serving as a sound bridge between the two scenes, only to discover Aydanur and Mahmut having sex in his car. (Figure 14) The director alternates between objective and level shots of the car and the characters (Figure 15), and Songül's point of view (Figure 16), thus pulling us in and out of forming an identificatory relationship with her. The camera then transitions into a tacitly subjective point of view in which we are aligned with Songül's gaze and partake in her surveillance of her husband and his mistress.



Figure 15: Objective POV (left) Figure 16: A tacitly subjective POV (right)

This scene, in combination with several other ones in which we see Songül's silent anguish and rage over the betrayal, seemingly sets up the love triangle the audience expects, in part because of the film's poster, which depicts the characters in a triangular arrangement, and in part due to the countless narratives in Turkish classical cinema, which feature a modest "good" girl and a seductive "bad" girl fighting over a (oftentimes rich and somewhat clueless) man. The frame story which sets up the murder plot line, Mahmut's introduction as a potentially violent and possessive man, Aydanur's characterization as a "loose" woman and Songül's position clearly highlighted as that of a betrayed wife all point to a relatively clichéd narrative, permutations of which the local spectators would have seen time and again in Turkish films.

Finally, Songül makes her move and goes to Aydanur's house, for all intents and purposes to confront her about the affair. The uncomfortably lingering and silent shots of the two of them looking at each other in the doorway increase the tension in the scene, and set the audience up for a confrontation. They sit down on the sofa, Songül towards the farther end but physically taking up more space, Aydanur closer to us but squeezed tight against the arm of the sofa in a defensive posture and visibly uncomfortable. Unexpectedly, Songül says, "I had a dream about you last night. We were fighting. You were yelling at me. And I was hovering over you, yelling at you. You were telling me to go. I woke up in sweat and tears. I figured I must

have missed you, so I came to see you." Their conversation, littered with awkward silences and banal pleasantries, points at the impossibility of an explicit confrontation, of naming the affair as such. Instead, Songül pulls out a childhood photograph of the two of them riding a donkey together. The two women talk about the people they knew in common, and their childhood days — "How lovely were those days, weren't they?" asks Aydanur, and suddenly what connects them is not the affair, but their shared childhood, their own personal history.

The awkwardness somewhat dissipates as Aydanur hugs Songül tight, which Songül returns after only a moment's hesitation, with the camera tightly framing this prolonged embrace. (Figures 17 and 18) Even the mention of Mahmut later on in their conversation causes only a brief awkwardness, which dissipates immediately when the two women begin joking about Aydanur's potential suitors and confess to having missed each other. What initially starts



Figure 17: The initial distance (left) Figure 18: The intimate hug (right)

out as an investigation of the affair turns into a reminiscence of their shared history – that is, Songül's surveilling gaze from the previous scenes suddenly transforms so that Aydanur is no longer the object of her investigation but a friend with whom she shares fond memories. The decreasing tension of the scene is noticeable as Songül tacitly decides to define Aydanur not through her affair with her husband, but as an old friend who preceded him, and who now takes precedence over him.

The intimacy between Aydanur and Songül that is emphasized in this scene is undercut in the following scene when we are once again back in the factory. The forewoman talks to one of the workers and remarks to her, "All of Songül's rage is towards her husband. You'll see, she'll risk everything." This ambiguous line, which then cuts to a silent and stewing Songül among chattering women takes us away from the unexpected tenderness of the previous scene, and pushes the audience firmly back into the by now expected love triangle and revenge plot. It is from this moment on that the narrative of the film begins to fork in two different directions. On one hand, Kıral continues to set up a conventional heterosexual betrayal and revenge drama through Mahmut's clear interest in Aydanur and shots that linger on Songül's carefully watching eyes. On the other hand, the narrative begins to increasingly write Mahmut out of the story, and focus on intimate moments between the two women, which highlight not their rivalry over Mahmut, but their own developing intimacy.

An unspecified amount of time has passed since Aydanur and Songül's encounter in Aydanur's home in the next scene, which opens with the two women at the window of Songül and Mahmut's house, awaiting his arrival. Aydanur helps Songül dress up for him, pulling her hair down and fixing it, in a moment reminiscent of a mother sending her daughter off to school – an effort that Mahmut scarcely acknowledges. Pushing past his wife, he goes to the staircase, where he sees Aydanur at the top, framed by the doorway perfectly. Her confident figure silhouetted by the lighter colors of the walls and the low camera angle from Mahmut's point of view highlight her power and effect on him. (Figure 19) The reverse point of view shot from





Figure 19: Aydanur at the top of the stairs (top left)
Figure 20: Mahmut looks up to Aydanur (top right)
Figure 21: Songül enters the frame (bottom left)
Figure 22: Songül and Aydanur locked in their own gaze (bottom right)

Aydanur's position at the top affirms the power dynamics between the two, looking down on Mahmut who is visibly startled and rattled by her presence. (Figure 20) Kıral then switches to a level, objective shot of Aydanur, undermining the effect of the previous shots, and unsettling his spectators as to how we are meant to read this scene. The handheld camera used throughout the whole sequence adds to the tension of the scene, and accentuates the unmoving figures of Aydanur and Mahmut. Songül then enters the frame behind Mahmut, her eyes trained first on Aydanur, then on him, thus visually enacting the triangle set up by the director between the three characters. Both Mahmut and Songül stare at Aydanur, and the composition of the frame seems to suggest that Mahmut has come between them. (Figure 21) Soon, however, the camera then switches to Songül's point of view from the bottom of the stairs, as Mahmut goes up towards Aydanur and bumps past her and out of the frame, and switches back to a tacitly subjective point

of view from Aydanur's perspective to linger on the two women still locked in an intimate gaze. (Figure 22) The constantly changing conglomeration of gazes in the scene, along with the switches between point of view and objective shots disorient the spectator, as they once again point at two different narratives that are beginning to get uncoiled from one another. Aydanur and Mahmut's gazes connote a power struggle, in which Aydanur retains the upper hand as Mahmut's inquiring gaze tries to figure out why she is there. Songül's gaze initially functions as a surveilling one, as she glances at Aydanur and Mahmut staring at one another, and her gaze makes Mahmut uncomfortable enough to leave. The tension shifts, however, once Mahmut exits the frame, leaving Aydanur and Songül locked in their own intimate gaze.

In the scene immediately following the stairwell, the focus is entirely on Songül and Aydanur's intimacy, from which Mahmut is excluded, much to his anger. At the dinner table, Songül surprises and angers him by drinking rakı and smoking – both actions that are considered inappropriate for married and "proper" women. 35 By stepping out of her role as a wife and behaving much like we have seen Aydanur behave in other scenes, Songül silently signals a refusal to adhere to the role prescribed to her by society and aligns herself more closely with Aydanur. Confused and disturbed by the scene unfolding in front of him, Mahmut's demeanor turns hostile, and he hesitates to raise his glass with them. When he finally does, Aydanur responds by withdrawing hers, which is a symbolic refusal to honor his presence, and an open slight by Turkish standards. As Mahmut stews silently, shooting glares at the two women, they sing together and to one another, either oblivious or indifferent to his anger. The song they sing is a familiar one for a Turkish audience. "Lale Devri" (Tulip Era) invokes the masochistic pleasure derived from the pain of love. Referring to an era in Ottoman history famous for its

<sup>35.</sup> Here and previously we see Aydanur doing both of these things on various occasions, which furthers her characterization as a "loose" woman.

consumption and leisure activities, and written by easily the most revered Turkish singer of all time, Sezen Aksu, the song speaks of nostalgia for the past when love was possible and immortal, and beseeches the listener to be proud of the love they feel:

We are too late my dear, it is not the time.

Like old radios, love is hidden away in the attic.

We thought so my dear, but it's not immortal any more.

Like Leyla and Mecnun, love is already a tale.

We are children of the Tulip Era, our time is long passed.

Who knows which fortunate one has last drank the wine of love?

I say, don't be embarrassed, be proud, let those who do not love be embarrassed.

If it has been condemned to lovelessness, let this world burn. (Sic. Let those who love burn)<sup>36</sup>

In the vein of *alaturka* songs<sup>37</sup>, Lale Devri sets a nostalgic tone in the first stanza which the singer is too late for the kind of love that she desires – it is no longer a thing of her era. The evocation of old radios, the attic, and Leyla and Mecnun<sup>38</sup> emphasize this sense of nostalgia and deification of love. The second stanza starts on a likewise wistful tone, in which the singer envies the unknown person who has tasted such love as she desires. The unexpected shift comes in the last two lines, in which the tone of the song shifts entirely, from nostalgic and wistful to defiant and angry. In a world where love seems impossible, the singer beseeches those who have it to be proud of it – a world without love, the singer proclaims defiantly, might as well burn down.

The song creates an intimacy between the two women, who sing it with emphatic gestures towards and to one another. (Figure 23) Ironically enough, Songül sings the last line incorrectly – instead of "let this world burn" she sings "Let those who love burn," signaling to

66

-

<sup>36.</sup> Sezen Aksu. "Lale Devri." Yürüyorum Düş Bahçeleri'nde. 2009. Lyrics by Sezen Aksu, English translation mine.

<sup>37.</sup> Historically, alaturka is a term used to refer to Ottoman style music. Its counterpart alafranga, was used to refer to western style (classical) music. As it is currently used, alaturka refers to a specific kind of music that is traditional in its composition, rhythm and the set of musical keys and chords it uses, as well as the instruments. It is also characterized by lyrics that are meant to create a high level of pathos, through exaggerated expressions of dismay or sadness, such as "let the world burn" or more popularly "let the world sink."

<sup>38.</sup> The reference is to the 12<sup>th</sup> century Persian narrative poem *Layla and Majnun* about star-crossed lovers.

the audience of a doomed ending which was similarly foreshadowed by the frame story. For the first time in the film, we see the two women from his point of view – the tight framing brings them closer both visually and emotionally, and the close-ups of Mahmut's face make clear his discomfort at seeing two women he feels entitled to forging a bond that so blatantly excludes him. These interjecting close-ups that recur throughout the scene keep drawing our attention back to Mahmut's increasingly ominous gaze. (Figure 24)



Figure 23: Aydanur and Songül sing to each other Figure 24: Mahmut's ominous gaze

As Ann Kaplan points out in her essay "Is the Gaze Male?" "men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession that is lacking in the female gaze" (210) and their gaze is "designed to annihilate the threat that woman poses" to masculinity. Even though Mahmut cannot clearly or explicitly articulate what, precisely, makes him uncomfortable with what he sees, it is clear there is something disturbing about the way Aydanur and Songül behave that bother him. By drinking, smoking and singing together, Aydanur and Songül perform a conventionally masculine script within the Turkish context, from the nostalgia, bonding and pleasure of which Mahmut is excluded. Their claim to this script, and to one another contests Mahmut's, whose constant gaze the camera keeps returning to indicates his desire to possess and to insert himself into the narrative, to which he feels entitled. Aydanur and Songül's refusal to interact with him, and the way Aydanur toasts to their shared history ("in the memory of old

days," she says invoking her conversation with Songül from a previous scene) leaves Mahmut increasingly outside of the narrative and denies him emotional access to either woman, both of whom prioritize their relationship with one another over the one they have with him. As such, the way Kıral highlights Mahmut's discomfort and outsiderness through this sequence denies him the narrative power that the male gaze is traditionally and often awarded.

Kıral returns the issue of physical and emotional access over and over again throughout the film. Songul and Aydanur grow physically closer after an evening at an all-female gathering which bars men, and consequently the male gaze; Mahmut grows increasingly violent after he is denied access to the two women both physically and emotionally; and after he murders Songül, Aydanur takes revenge by denying him access to her body first by rejecting him verbally, then by killing him in cold blood. This plot twist set up by the frame story, which I will discuss at length later, endorses a narrative contrary to the film's otherwise patriarchal and narrative framework, once again creating an alternative narrative in line with the homoerotic undertones of the scenes I have discussed thus far. In a scene following the dinner, and a shot of Mahmut going to work alone the next day, Aydanur and Songül go on a day trip together. On the bus, they both exclaim "oh be!" an expression denoting relief and laugh and fuss over each other. This scene of departure from the routine, a journey taken together, partakes in clichés of the romance genre, as two women grow physically more comfortable with one another, laugh, scream in the canyon they hike in. Unlike the scenes in the village, the lighting is more high key and much less saturated, creating a lighter atmosphere, accompanied by a light-hearted tune in the background. The two women then end up on a hill, where the brilliant greens and yellows of the earth contrast with the ever-spinning blades of a windmill, which is reminiscent of and in tension with the spinning wheels and belts of the factory. The field they end up sitting in is both visually

evocative of the field from Aydanur's flashback in which she and Mahmut make love in at the beginning of their relationship, and is revealed to be the same field where Mahmut and Songül's relationship had begun. Aydanur reads out loud from a comic book, while Songül leans against her, laughing and following along. By going back to the field and embarking on a new intimacy there that excludes Mahmut, they rewrite the history of the place and recode its meaning. The field, which had hitherto been the space of heterosexual intimacy within the narrative, is transformed into an alternative space of female homoerotic intimacy, which layers onto the more sanctioned and hegemonic use of the space. Reconfigured as a space of escape and beginning for the two women, the field constitutes an alternate space far from the rigid structures of the home, the factory and the town.

This newfound intimacy is made explicit when Mahmut comes home to find Aydanur and Songül asleep on the couch together after their trip. (Figure 25) He tries to shake Songül awake, but she pretends to be asleep, and mumbles "go away," snuggling closer to Aydanur. She then touches the sleeping Aydanur's face intimately, drawing her body even close to hers, as the



Figure 25: Mahmut gazes at Aydanur and Songül (left)
Figure 26: Songül touches Aydanur (right)

camera pans to their intertwined legs. (Figure 26) Songül once again makes herself physically unavailable to her husband, and signals that the emotional intimacy between the two women has

transformed into a physical one as well. The troubled Mahmut's temper is further tested when the next morning, Songül simply announces to him that she is staying at Aydanur's that night, and will go to work straight from there. His extreme anger, combined with the way Songül carefully shaves and stashes a nice dress in her purse before she leaves, hint at the unspoken reasons for either of their actions.

From this moment on, Songül and Aydanur become inseparable. Their commitment is first and foremost to one another, as evidenced by the increasingly dramatic risks Songül takes to be with Aydanur, and the way Aydanur pulls her further into her own world and shifting her attention away from Mahmut. Away from his questioning gaze, Aydanur takes Songül to a house party at Sultan Ana's (Sultan Mother) house for an evening of dancing and drinking among women. Sultan Ana's house is the only physical space in the film that is exclusively female – while the factory also allows for pockets of female solidarity, the women there are still under the watchful eyes of the male overseers. Sultan Ana's house serves as an alternate reality where women are allowed to step outside their roles as wives, daughters, sisters, and objects of the male gaze. They dress up for one another, they dance with each other, and, most tellingly, they gaze at one another unabashedly. The red filter and the primal drumbeats of the music accompanied by breathy vocalizations in the following dance sequence evoke an atmosphere of sensuality and sexual desire, and pushes the audience to take note of Songül's attraction to Aydanur, whom she watches with rapt attention. The camera alternates between shots of Songül drinking and gazing at Aydanur first hesitantly, then blatantly with an exulted smile on her lips, and close-ups of Aydanur dancing feverishly to the beat. The quick pans which abruptly stop to focus on the faces and bodies of the two women punctuate the sequence, and mimic the way they take in their environments only to settle on one another. Songül's eyes roam over Aydanur's body

possessively, not violently like Mahmut's, but with a hint of bashfulness and genuine surprise. As the music crescendoes, a handheld camera turns towards more shots of women drinking and smoking, which then dissolve into blurred images, recreating the sense of disorientation Songül likely feels. The scene reaches its climax as we see Songül dancing on the table in delirium, with complete abandon, as other women dance below her, and yet others, Aydanur among them, pass around a joint. Finally a laughing Aydanur pulls Songül down from the table, and the camera



Figure 27: Aydanur and Songül spooning in bed

cuts to Aydanur's bedroom, where they lie in bed half-naked, giggling and touching each other affectionately. The giggling and laughing finally dies down as the mood grows more serious, and Aydanur cups Songül's face in a gesture that mirrors Songül's earlier one. The same red filter permeates the room throughout the scene, and they fall asleep with Songül first awkwardly, then more contentedly spooning Aydanur, creating a sense of intimacy. (Figure 27)

Despite the sensuality of the scene and the way in which it emphasizes both physical and emotional intimacy between the two women, the camera placement positions the viewer outside of their circle of intimacy. While in the dancing scene the shaky and abrupt camera movements

and point-of-view shots push us to identify primarily with Songül but also the other women in the gathering, the static, medium close yet high angle shot in the bedroom establishes a definitive distance between us as the viewers, and the playfulness we witness between the two women. The camera position no longer serves to align us with Songül homoerotic desire towards Aydanur, but rather edges us closer to the inquisitive and surveilling gaze of Mahmut. This tension between the two scenes of the sequence, highlights the opposing tendencies of the narrative, which continually build homoerotic desire and intimacy, only to undercut it with contrasting scenes or cinematic techniques. This doublespeak is by no means unique to *Vicdan* or to Turkish cinema – in "Anal Rope," D.A. Miller explains how connotation rather than denotation has been the mode of representation on screen, mainly due to production codes and the unwillingness of directors to signify homosexual desire openly. This, however, should not necessarily be read as an erasure of homosexuality. Rather, Miller says, "once received in all its uncertainty, the annotation instigates a project of confirmation." (125) That is, if homosexual desire is implied rather than represented explicitly, it has the power to infiltrate all aspects of the film and queer the ambiguities of the narrative. Miller's formulation necessitates, in turn, a spectator who is willing to read the connoted message rather than the denoted one, and to engage with the material in oppositional and resisting ways.

In "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," Theresa de Lauretis remarks that "the conventions of seeing, and the relations of desire and meaning in spectatorship remained partially anchored or contained by a frame of visibility that is still heterosexual, or, hommosexual, and just as persistently colorblind." (173) What de Lauretis is referring to here is both the dominance of heterosexual narratives and frameworks in film and the dominance of male narratives and frameworks in queer film. As such, lesbian narratives must push against not only

against a heterosexual framework, but also a male gay one that renders invisible female homosexuality and homoeroticism. Dismantling these heterosexual and male gay frameworks is essential to a project of lesbian (or otherwise oppositional) spectatorship. The master codes that constitute our spectatorial methods (such as heterosexuality) determine not just what can be seen but also how it is seen - that is to say, without actively deconstructing heterosexualized modes of viewing which privilege certain narratives and modes of visibility over others, we cannot work towards addressing, exhuming, prioritizing stories of non-heterosexual intimacies. In another work dealing with the representations of the female body and heterosexual presumption, de Lauretis suggests "rejecting the terms of the heterosexual contract and working to construct forms of representation and modes of enunciation and address that counteract the stipulated correlations of the master code."39 de Lauretis' suggestion for representing and rewriting the female body can easily be applied to reconfiguring the way we think about spectatorship. I would suggest that we unilaterally reject the terms of the heterosexual contract to make possible a shift in our attention to the stories, intimacies, "heroes" that exist in the margins of the filmic narrative, that do not necessarily come to the forefront as explicitly but that nonetheless complicate the narratives of which they are a part.

Viewing *Vicdan* queerly, with an eye towards its gendered and sexual transgressions allows us to see narratives that exist in the shadow of the heterosexual order depicted within the film. The existence of female homoerotic desire as a subtext within the film echoes its marginalized position within the Turkish context, and replicates the modes of depicting female homoerotic desire that I will further outline in Chapter 5. Resistant spectatorship is oftentimes

-

<sup>39.</sup> de Lauretis, Teresa. "Film and the Visible." *How Do I Look?: Queer Film and Video* edited by Bad Object Choices. Seattle: Bay, 1991, pp. 261.

the only way in which one can find her reflection, though distorted and fragmented, on the silver screens of one's homeland. Queerness and homoeroticism in Vicdan emerge most often at moments of the narrative that lend themselves to multiple readings, and that push against the expectations of the dominant regime – such as the scene in Sultan Ana's house or the dinner scene. It is these moments that oscillate between the familiar and the curious that encourage us to engage in modes of looking that counteract and actively resist the narratives promoted by the master code. Manthia Diawara, writing about black looking relations in British cinema, writes, "every narration places the spectator in a position of agency; and race, class and sexual relations influence the way in which this subjecthood is filled by the spectator." (33) Oppositional or resistant readings occur when the spectator refuses to fill this position in expected ways, and through their own subject position brings markedly different, and at times, diametrically contrary readings to the table. Reading and interpretation are processes that are continually being negotiated – for instance, in his "Encoding/decoding" Stuart Hall refers to "dominant, negotiated or oppositional codes" that a spectator might use to make sense of the message being communicated with them, wherein each code would yield a different interpretation of the message. Similarly, in an article on lesbian spectatorship, Christine Gledhill refers to meaningmaking as a "struggle of negotiation between competing frames of reference, motivation and experience." (169)

All of these theories of spectatorship imply that the spectator is just as constitutive as the director in creating and recreating the meaning of a cinematic text. This act of interpretation, if not divorced, then at the very least willfully separated from the dominant meanings endorsed by the director or the narrative, is crucial to marginalized spectators. In particular within the context of Turkey or ex-Yugoslavia, wherein queer and LGBT narratives do not often make it into the

mainstream in affirming ways, oppositional reading practices are often the only reparative option available to a marginalized spectator. In a context where homoerotic desire cannot be named as such, the sites of queerness are the moments of tension and ambiguity that betray the director's anxieties regarding non-normative sexualities and ideologies, much like the extended dream sequence in  $K\ddot{o}cek$ , where the rainbow transforms the main character back to his intersex self.

It would be naive to argue that Vicdan's director, Erden Kıral, willfully creates a subversive queer narrative – rather, his film, through its ambiguous moments that are almost always in tension with the director's denoted message, lends itself to an oppositionally queer reading that is in tension with a complicit reading of the text. In an interview with a Turkish newspaper, Kıral adamantly insists, "Songül falls in love with the woman her husband is in love with. But Aydanur does not return her love. She only acts motherly towards her. So there is no lesbian relationship. What is between them is completely innocent." (Kıral 2008) The paradoxical formulation here is revealing – the director both acknowledges that Songül is in love with Aydanur and refuses the existence of a homoerotic intimacy between them. To him, it seems sufficient to exclude an explicit physical lesbian act from the narrative or to describe the Songül's love as one-sided to write out the lesbian desire and render the narrative "innocent." The inherent homophobia of this remark aside, it points to the impossibility of representing lesbian love, desire, intimacy and sex on the screen. The director implies that he is well aware of where his narrative is going, or *could* go, but he is unwilling to go there, and thus limits his films to scenes that stop just short of explicitly showing the desire between them and teetering on the edge of visibility and plausible deniability. Curiously enough, this ambiguity bleeds into the narrative itself, wherein it serves to protect Songül and Aydanur's relationship from Mahmut and others around them, and allows them freedom to a certain extent, precisely because their

intimacy is *impossible* and *cannot possibly be*. Outside of the narrative, the ambiguity serves as a point of entry to the text for queer spectatorship. The scenes between Aydanur and Songül constitute a rather conventional romance narrative – the initial conflict which puts them at odds with another, the diffusion of that tension into initial awkwardness followed by the establishment of things they have in common, the growing physical and emotional intimacy, the almost betrayal, and finally, the public manifestation of their bond in the village wedding scene.

The almost betrayal takes place when Mahmut comes home to find Aydanur in his bedroom, getting ready at Songül's vanity. A struggle ensues in which Aydanur alternately rejects and encourages his advances, and Mahmut oscillates between trying to kiss her and trying to strangle her. Songül walks in just as Mahmut has a seemingly willing and encouraging Aydanur pinned to the bed. Looking at Songül, Mahmut says, "you come too," which serves as the breaking point for the tension. Aydanur springs out of bed and grabs Songül by the wrist, and the two of them take to the streets, screaming obscenities at him. While Aydanur's reasons for rejecting him remain unclear (is she jealous of his desire for Songül? Or is she unwilling to share Songül with him?) the scene nonetheless reads as a total rejection of Mahmut and the fantasies he (and perhaps some of the audience, too) has. Mahmut's attempt to police both of their bodies and sexualities have failed – indeed, the increasing frequency of scenes in which Aydanur and Songül dress up, put on make up, wax or otherwise tend to their bodies also points to a (sexual) liberation on the part of the two women, a liberation that ends up steering them away from Mahmut and the respective roles prescribed to them as the wife and the mistress. Their rejection of his offer of a threesome signals a failure to subsume homoerotic desire into a heterosexual matrix and rendering it an object of pleasure for the male gaze. By leaving him on the bed

aroused and alone, Aydanur and Songül reject him both as a possessive and controlling figure in their lives, and as the stand in for a heterosexist and patriarchal order.

As Mahmut sullenly goes to work only to be warned by another man that his wife's behavior is inappropriate, Aydanur and Songül skip in favor of drinking beer, walking along the streets and bridges of the town in broad daylight, yelling, swearing and singing. Climbing onto the fence of the bridge, they yell, "My mother died in this shit hole!" "We'll get the fuck out of this town, of course we will!" "Don't you remember our mothers' hands? They were so ugly!" and "Not leave, girl, we'll escape from this town! We'll escape!" "Promise? Are you coming? Do you promise?" asks Aydanur of Songül, to which she replies, "I promise, damn it, I'll come anywhere with you!" The disturbingly bright lighting, the overwhelming sounds of the cars and trucks passing by and the high fence of the bridge always visible within the frame intensify the feeling of entrapment, while the loud screams of the women and the way they climb and beat at the fence points at the sense of outrage and rebellion they feel. (Figures 28 and 29)



Figure 28: Songül and Aydanur on the bridge Figure 29: Songül and Aydanur make a promise

Not only is this scene reminiscent of Kutluğ Ataman's 2005 feature 2 *Girls*, which features a similar escape fantasy between two teenage girls in a similarly homoerotic relationship, it also allows us yet another glimpse of how Aydanur and Songül formulate their personal histories.

The reference to the shared history of their mothers who toiled and died in this town, point both

to their fear of being trapped like them, and hints at a matrilineal understanding of their own lives. By deciding to leave and do it together, Aydanur and Songül fantasize a future that is not dictated by the rigid societal structures that surround them, and once again affirm their intimacy by building a future with each other.

This future, however, is not to be. Once their bond is made public, it becomes vulnerable to the surveilling gaze of both Mahmut and the various townspeople, and inadvertently is subject to the unspoken laws of the society in which they live. Drawing upon Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, Teresa de Lauretis talks about "the conditions of the visible, what *can* be seen and represented" ("Film and the Visible" 224) in film; "namely, the female body displayed as a spectacle for the male gaze 'to take it in,' to enter or possess it, or as fetish object of his secret identification; the woman as mystery to be pursued, investigated, found guilty or redeemed by man." ("Film and the Visible" 255) The village wedding scene diminishes the narrative ambiguity of the film, and pushes the limits of what can be represented by offering such a spectacle, but one that ultimately refuses to be tamed by the male gaze. What was previously becoming apparent only to Mahmut is now out in the open for all to see – in a way, this scene is one in which the desiring gaze and the surveilling gaze collide. Refusing to be disciplined by the surveilling gaze of Mahmut and the townspeople, Songül and Aydanur's gazes at one another, and back at their surveillants points to the failure of the control mechanisms of the society and the people around them. What has already been visible to the queer spectators of the film, and to Mahmut to a certain extent, becomes undeniably visible both to the other characters of the film, and to the audience at large. Aydanur and Songül arrive to the wedding together, dressed up and raring to have fun. What starts out as a scene of all the women dancing, suddenly turns into Aydanur and Songül as the sole spectacle of the wedding. The other dancers disappear from the

clapping crowd. The camera cuts between close-ups of their gyrating bodies, the steady and excited glances of the men, and the increasingly concerned glances of the women some of whom clap along. Their bodies move in tandem and Songül's eyes are locked on Aydanur's body. She glances up into the crowd only one, to lock eyes daringly with Mahmut, and turns her body away in a move that can only be read as a defiant rejection. This is no fervent glance – her gaze communicates a refusal to be tamed and possessed by Mahmut's increasingly heavy and dark scrutiny. To go back to de Lauretis's point, Songül's stance curtails any possibility of Mahmut possessing or redeeming her, and she makes it clear that she refuses to be shamed for her public display of her sexuality and her desire for Aydanur. Furthermore, by dancing with Aydanur in public and in front of Mahmut, Songül contests not just Mahmut's claim on herself, but his claim on Aydanur as well. Thus excluded from the narrative and his possessive and surveilling gaze voided, Mahmut hits Songül on the head with a roof tile, killing her instantly.

But why kill Songül at this precise moment? What is it about this scene that warrants such a violent response, considering Mahmut has been silently stewing for most of the film? The village wedding scene allows us to think about not only female homoerotic intimacy, but also how it interacts with, upends the rules of and otherwise reconfigures public space and societal norms. As Özlem Güçlü argues in her article, "Intimacies Crossing the Line: The Limits of Female Homosociality in 2 Girls and Vicdan," "Songül and Aydanur's erotic dance does not only upend a wedding, it also subverts the celebration of heterosexual live and sexuality; it not only transgresses the heterosexual conventions, but also defies masculine mediation by doing it in a wedding scene." (446) What Güçlü points at here is a clear demarcation between the intimacy of the two women and everyone else at the wedding. The wedding celebration defines the town

square as a locale for celebrating heterosexual love, desire, and the societal norms and conventions that endorse it. Songül and Aydanur's refusal to adhere to these norms and the way they interact with the space in queer and subversive ways call into question the stability and the universality of these norms. <sup>40</sup> As such, what was initially a threat only to Mahmut and his masculinity becomes a threat to the heterosexual order at large. As the crowd gazes at them desirous and disbelieving, and forms a circle around them, the two women quite literally become the center of attention. This completely restructures the crowd's previous interaction with the village square and reconfigures the space of the wedding as a space of female homoerotic desire, and allows the desiring and the surveilling gazes to align.

Aydanur and Songül's dance indeed does offer the audience (oppositional or otherwise) as well as the audience within the narrative a voyeuristic pleasure. The excess of their desire, expressed through their harsh movements, the close ups, the intense sweating and the constant eye contact, invites us, as the spectators of their spectacle, to consume their desire, to take part and pleasure in it. The self-orientalizing tone of both the wedding dance scene and the one in Sultan Ana's house wherein the women are overly sexualized and depicted as the conduits of repressed desire yearning to burst out, point at how the director views them, and how, in turn, he wants us to view them. Despite the obvious voyeuristic pleasures and the deliberate exploitation of female homoeroticism of these two scenes, however, the fact remains that Aydanur and Songül's physical and emotional intimacy functions more than just as a spectacle, but rather as an alternative relationality that proves so dangerous to the status quo that it must be promptly destroyed by the heterosexist order.

<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>40.</sup> Nilbar Güreş's work, which I will get to in Chapter 5, uses a similar strategy of queering heteronormative spaces in order to force her audience to reimagine the norms dictated by the societal rules that govern those places.

Songül's murder, of course, is hardly surprising considering the still prevalent trope of the dead lesbian in television and film, both in Turkey and in mainstream western and Hollywood productions. What sets *Vicdan* apart from a great number of films that end with the punishment of non-normative sexualities, however, is that it does not end there. After a silent montage consisting of images of a traumatized Aydanur following the murder, the golden field that refers back to happier memories, the eerie silence of the factory, the film jumps three years ahead. Aydanur is now living in Izmir, the closest urban center to their small town, and is making a living working as a bargirl in a seedy nightclub. She seduces and subsequently enters into an Islamic marriage<sup>41</sup> with a man she meets there, starts wearing a headscarf and assumes the role of a conventional middle-class wife.<sup>42</sup> Recently released from jail on parole, Mahmut tracks her down at the nightclub during one of her escapades when she sheds the headscarf and reverts back to her previous self. She attempts to leave town following their encounter, but is stopped by Mahmut who forces her back to his apartment to convince her to come back to him. We then see them on the backseat of a cab, bound for an unknown destination in the pitch-black night. Mahmut starts shooting out the window of the cab, to which Aydanur responds by saying, "If you're man enough, shoot me! Go on, shoot me!" Instead he gives her the gun and repeats her words back to her. In one fluid motion, Aydanur takes the gun and shoots him in the chest without so much as blinking or looking at him. Notwithstanding her panic at her own actions later in the scene, Aydanur's coldblooded murder of Mahmut conforms to the codes of local masculinity, which he likewise enacted by murdering Songül. The invocation of the word delikanlı and all the codes of masculinity associated with that figure, means that Aydanur

\_

<sup>41.</sup> This would entail a religious ceremony and not a civil one, meaning the marriage is not recognized by the state.

<sup>42.</sup> During this part of the montage, Mahmut has a flashback of a bloodied Songül, Aydanur is near catatonic as she watches animals being slaughtered for Ramadan.

temporarily occupies that masculinized position, and in doing so, turns this distinctly male brand of violence back towards its male perpetrator. The word Aydanur uses, *delikanlı*, can either mean a young man (the literal translation would be 'crazy-blooded' referring to the recklessness and volatility of a particular kind of young masculinity, or a person who lives by the certain codes of conduct<sup>43</sup> deemed appropriate and honorable by a lower-middle class and working-class masculinity. By shooting Mahmut, Aydanur is being more *delikanlı* as per this code of conduct. The film ends with the police asking Aydanur why she shot Mahmut, to which she responds with a prolonged silence and a noncommittal shrug. (Figure 30)



Figure 30: The final frame of the film in which Aydanur simply stares

The ending positions *Vicdan* in a peculiar position – while it is by no means a work of queer cinema, it certainly does not subscribe entirely to the "dead lesbian" trope and refuses to end the narrative with the restoration of the heterosexual order. Neither is it entirely what Karen Hollinger in her book *Feminist Film Studies*, characterizes as "the ambiguous lesbian film,"

<sup>43.</sup> For example, a delikanlı doesn't cry, a delikanlı controls his women, a delikanlı is very much concerned with his 'honor' etc.

which offers "the audience the voyeuristic satisfaction of seeing two beautiful women interacting in sexually provocative ways on the screen without overly challenging heterosexist norms." (128) As Hollinger points out elsewhere in her argument, these ambiguous relationships are portrayed as sincere and loving (one might think of the director's remark about their relationship's "innocence" here) and the characters are not punished for their intimacy. Vicdan, however, breaks out of the conventions of both the dead lesbian film and the ambiguous lesbian film by ending the narrative not at the death (actual or metaphorical) of the lesbian, but rather, at the death of the homicidal male gaze. Furthermore, despite the abundance of voyeuristic pleasures Kıral affords his audience, Aydanur and Songül's relationship contests heterosexist norms explicitly, most blatantly through Mahmut's murder. Mahmut's murder can be interpreted in several ways. It might simply be that Aydanur realizes she will never be free as long as Mahmut lives, that he will never give up his claim on her. In that case, the murder becomes a refusal to let him dictate her existence. Or perhaps by meeting his gaze head on, and by shooting him, she is turning the violence back on him and his heterosexist order, returning in kind his murderous gaze that killed Songül. Aydanur's murder of Mahmut points to the very real existence of these homoerotic intimacies that dictate her actions even after Songül's death. Undercut as this reclamatory reading is by Aydanur's panic and fear at her own actions, her steady gaze and silence against the police in the final frame still hints at moments of resistance towards the institutions that often protect the men that inflict violence upon the women in their lives.

What is perhaps most telling about *Vicdan* is the title, which means "conscience."

Conscience denotes an inner ethical compass which generates one's sense of right or wrong, and which dictates one's behavior accordingly. Within the Turkish context, the notion of *vicdan* has

tremendous social and cultural weight, wherein all manners of cruel, unjust and otherwise contrary behavior can be characterized as *vicdanstz*, that is, "without conscience." In short, *vicdan* is a personal mental/ethical tool that regulates social behavior – when we are asked to be *vicdanlt* ("with conscience") we are being asked to empathize, to understand, to put ourselves in someone else's shoes. This begs the question – to whose conscience is *Vicdan* appealing? Who exhibits a conscience in this film and to what end? Is the audience meant to feel for the women in this film? I would argue that we do end up doing that, regardless of authorial intention, as we follow Aydanur and Songül. *Vicdan* is based partially on two short stories by Hasan Özkılıç, and partially on what is commonly called a 3<sup>rd</sup> page story in Turkey – that is, news stories that sensationalize murder, violence, rape and suicide. We are thus implicitly asked to see beyond the newspaper clip and into the desires, intimacies and the violence of these three people, whose cinematic representation allows room for our conscience and empathy to enter into our viewing of their story. After all, conscience in and of itself implies the act of gazing – towards our own souls, and our own judgments regarding the world around us.

In the final scene, we see Aydanur being scrutinized by the gaze of the state, as symbolized by the police. This gaze wants to interrogate her, to demystify her reasons for killing Mahmut, to make her actions intelligible to the dominant order. Aydanur does not yield. Instead she turns her gaze back at the police, back towards the audience and remains silent, refusing to justify to make intelligible her actions, and by extension, her intimacy with Songül. Her defiant gaze, undeterred by the probing one of the police and the camera, communicating the complexities of the narrative that she refuses to divulge, remains the final one standing at the end of the narrative.

At first glance, *Vicdan* and *Fine Mrtve Djevojke* do not have much in common save for the love/lust triangle plot with a lesbian or homoerotic couple, the death of the oppressive male figure, and the frame story device which structures both narratives. Set in vastly different contexts – one in Turkey in the rural Aegean coast, the other in post-war urban Croatia – the two films nonetheless speak to eerily similar mechanisms that are utilized by the state and the society in order to enforce dominant and traditional models of gender and sexuality. While the individual stakes of the characters are different, in either case the women who transgress the boundaries of the roles prescribed to them are punished swiftly and by way of figures who are stand ins for traditional and/or nationalist ideologies. The methods of policing women's bodies and their sexuality are disconcertingly similar for Aydanur, Songül, Marija and Iva.

Dalibor Matanić's *Fine Mrtve Djevojke* (Fine Dead Girls), the first Croatian film to feature lesbian protagonists, is structured as a story within a story, much like *Vicdan*. The frame story features a group of detectives who search an old couple's house for a child who has gone missing. The mother of the child, Iva, believes that the couple has abducted her child. When the search yields nothing, the detective in charge of the investigation begins to question whether Iva herself is involved in the disappearance of the boy. His questions trigger Iva's flashbacks, which constitute the film proper embedded within the detective narrative. Four or five years earlier, Iva and her girlfriend Marija move into an apartment building in the outskirts of Zagreb. Iva is a medical student and Marija is a martial arts teacher, though we never see the two protagonists' professional lives. The entire film is set in the neighborhood and within the apartment building, which has an eclectic mix of characters, all of whom stand for various factions of post-war Croatian society. Iva and Marija's nosy landlady Olga, has a mild and friendly husband Blaž, and an overly spoilt, neo-fascist son, Daniel. Daniel begins to pursue Iva, who is not interested in

him. In the meanwhile, Marija's father, who is very religious, pays Lidija, the sex worker who also lives in the apartment building, to seduce Iva and to break up the couple. The plan fails and Marija's father dies as he is having sex with Lidija. Matanić also shows us glimpses of the other neighbors in the building – the ultra-nationalist Lasić and his abused wife; the gynecologist Perić who performs abortions on the sly and his mute teenage son Ivica; the old Mr. Rukavina, who is hoarding the dead body of his wife, cashing her pension checks and pretending she's still alive. When Olga decides to kick Iva and Marija out upon finding out they are lesbians, Daniel cajoles his way into their apartment, and rapes and beats up Iva. Both Ivica and Olga witness the rape, but neither do anything – Ivica because he is simply unable to do so, and Olga because she is covering for her son. Marija comes home and figures out what has happened. She goes after Daniel, and during their fight by the railroad, Daniel gets pushed onto the tracks and is hit by an oncoming train. Olga witnesses Daniel's death and rounds up the neighbors. The people of the apartment building congregate to capture (or kill) Marija. During the altercations that follow, Iva manages to get away and hide in Mr. Rukavina's apartment, only to emerge to find her girlfriend's dead body in the staircase. Flash-forward to the present, Iva tells the detective that Ivica the mute boy was charged for the murder, but was released due to his age and mental state. We now find out that Iva has married her ex-boyfriend, Dalibor, with whom she is raising a son, Toma. Iva believes Olga kidnapped Toma because she is convinced he is Daniel's son from the rape – a claim that is neither refuted nor admitted by Iva. The film ends with Blaž bringing back Toma to Iva's home after murdering Olga, and Dalibor coming back from a business trip, unaware of the events that took place in his absence.

Fine Mrtve Djevojke has been written about a number of times extensively by Kevin Moss and Mima Simić, both of whom position it expertly and articulately within a framework of

post-war ex-Yugoslav films with queer and LGBT characters, almost all of whom are meant as an allegory to the ethnic tension within the newly formed nation states. They argue convincingly that the sexuality of the characters in these films (all made by heterosexual directors) have little to do with advancing a liberal sexual politics, but rather with the impossibility of talking openly about ethnic differences in the post-war period. Building on their work that attends to the political and social significance of the positions various apartment residents occupy, I will turn my attention towards the way in which these positions are used to surveil and control the body of the other. While Matanić's primary goal is certainly to create a national allegory for the experience of ethnic otherness, it is not by mere accident, nor due simply sensationalism (though he does admit to this) that a lesbian couple is chosen as the conduit of this metaphor. Doubly disadvantaged and marginalized due to their gender and sexual orientation, Marija and Iva's story helps us see the way in which nation states deal with othered identities – whether ethnic or sexual. As Foucault outlines in *Discipline & Punish*, visibility is the precondition of discipline:

Disciplinary power, on the other hand, is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. (187)

The subject is always being watched and surveilled, whether directly through state institutions (as is the case with Iva and the detective in the frame story) or through social institutions and their representatives (Mahmut and the other villagers in *Vicdan*, primarily Olga but also the other residents in *Fine Mrtve Djevojke*). As it is the case with *Vicdan*, the power dynamics, the axes of surveillance and of desire in *Fine Dead Girls* are structured through the act of looking – that is the gaze of the camera, which directs the audience's gaze, and the gaze among the characters within the narrative. Trapped in the claustrophobic space of the apartment building, all of the

neighbors in turn spy on one another, some in curiosity, some in desire, some in malice and judgment. It is the way in which these surveilling, desiring, resenting, and envious gazes are pitted against one another and depicted through the enveloping gaze of the camera that tells us a crucial story – not necessarily about lesbianism or ethnicity specifically, but about how the "others" are watched, disciplined and, when necessary, punished through socio-political mechanisms. Both in *Vicdan* and *Fine Dead Girls*, the disciplinary power structures set up by the patriarchal mores of Turkish society or the inter-ethnic dynamics of the post-Yugoslav context are by and large invisible as such. Rather, these structures exercise their power on Aydanur, Songül, Marija and Iva through intermediaries – that is, other subjects (like Mahmut, Olga or Daniel) who absorb the principles of the disciplinary power, and through their constant gaze on these women, try to keep them in a total state of surveillance.

The frame story immediately sets up this structure of looking. The film opens with detectives knocking on Olga and Blaž's door, looking for the missing Toma. When Blaž opens the door, he is confronted by the detectives who ask after his wife. It is only a little later that the detective moves to reveal the inquiring gaze of Iva, hidden from view behind the larger form of the detective. The figure of the detective here is significant – long associated with notions of voyeurism, the inquiring gaze of the detective figure in films works alongside the camera to reveal the hidden story of the object of its gaze. Likewise in *Fine Mrtve Djevojke*, the investigation into Toma's disappearance unravels Iva's secret past and her relationship with the various tenants of the apartment building. Prompted by the detective's questions, Iva admits that "probably nothing would have happened if..." the camera pauses on their faces looking just off camera, towards the glass in front of them, and we switch to a flashback. The lead in to the flashback increases the tension much like the gunshot, which signals the transition to the

flashback in *Vicdan*. In both cases, the frame story functions as a reflection of one of the main characters, Aydanur and Iva, who recall the sequence of events that lead them to the moment of being scrutinized by a police detective.

What is most jarring about the switch into the flashback is the color scheme. Gone are the muted tones of the frame story, where the subdued lighting is always diffused through a blue filter (Figure 31). We are now on a loud and busy street in a working class neighborhood of Zagreb, and the sunlight dominates the scene, resulting in saturated and warm yellows and reds (Figure 32).



Figure 31: Pre-flashback scene with Iva and the detective (left) Figure 32: Flashback scene in which Iva and Marija arrive at the apartment (right)

As the narrative progresses, not only does the light get gradually dimmer, the characters begin spending more and more time indoors, often masked by doorways and walls that highlight the sense of claustrophobia. This initial scene in the apartment also sets up one of the recurring patterns in the film – a tracking shot relatively close to the ground. The camera tracks inside the apartment through the empty bedroom before Iva and Marija enter it, only to pull back slightly once they do, and switches to a more conventional angle behind them as they tour the place. This camera movement, which moves through the space to close in on a character, occurs throughout the film routinely, simultaneously creating a sense of surveillance, and increasing the dramatic

impact of the scene. Soon after, Olga makes her presence known by answering a question directed to Blaž unexpectedly from another room.

It is within the figure of this matriarch landlady that all the powers of surveillance coalesce. Her gaze feels omnipresent – she pointedly asks after Mr. Rukavina's wife, whom we never see but he claims is fine, she harasses Mrs. Lasić for rent, scolds her husband for various trivialities, and attempts to chat Iva up as a potential partner for Daniel. She serves as a regulatory and disciplinary force within the structure of this apartment building turned microcosm of the nation, wherein her sympathy always lies with the loyal sons of the nation at the expense of the communists, the disabled, the abused and the marginalized. Daniel's own possessive gaze towards Iva the moment he sees her seems to be an extension of his mother's: though the violence of their gazes play out in different ways, they are faces of one and the same coin. The very apartment Iva and Marija live in is a testimony to Olga's sense of righteousness – Blaž implies that Olga threatened or otherwise tricked the late owner of the apartment to sign the deed over to her, which Olga justifies by remarking that their son now has an apartment. In short, we find out that not only is she asserting her power and surveillance on others in invasive ways, but also that she is also doing this within a space that is not rightfully hers.

Despite the various infractions of the residents of the apartment, none are surveilled or punished as severely as Iva and Marija. Lasić's abuse of his wife is well known by both the inhabitants of the apartment and the local police, yet nobody does anything. Everyone knows Dr. Perić performs abortions, in fact quite regularly on nuns, yet we do not hear a peep from Olga about him. Likewise, the inhabitants suspect that something is wrong with Mrs. Rukavina, and are perfectly aware that Lidija is a sex worker, but their private spheres are left intact. Nobody forces their way into these apartments; nobody attempts to hold them accountable for infractions

against societal norms, and Croatianness at large. This same indifference, however, is not afforded to Iva and Marija. From the moment they move to the apartment, their lives become the subject of public speculation. Their entry into this microcosm of the Croatian nation renders them subject to the gaze and to the rules of the nation state, as embodied by Olga.

The moment Iva and Marija show signs of deviating from the norm, the surveilling gaze of Olga becomes invasive. When Olga finds out that Marija did not go to her father's funeral, and that Iva has repeatedly rejected Daniel's advances, she enters their apartment with her master key, ostensibly to give her condolences to Marija. In other words, when Iva and Marija behave in ways that are not sanctioned by society, their right to privacy is revoked, and Olga, the matriarchal and despotic gaze of the nation, decides it is her duty to find out exactly what is going on. Sneaking into the apartment, she walks slowly towards their bedroom, the camera tracking alongside her in the hallway, only to be confronted with the incontrovertible proof of Iva and Marija's otherness. Their homosexuality, now revealed to the narrative representative of the hegemonic order, casts them out of the domestic order, as well as positioning them outside of the roles prescribed to them by the nationalist ideology. In *Body of War*, Dubravka Žarkov points at the way in which ethnicity, gender and nationalism are inseparable from one another:

Linking ethnicity to gender and heterosexuality furthermore allows for a reconceptualization of nationalism. For, if ethnicity is produced through gender and heterosexuality, then nationalism is too. Consequently, while ethnicity appears as the central category of so-called ethnic nationalism – as the marker of the ultimate Self-Other dichotomy – I insist that this centrality itself is produced, and that gender and heterosexuality are implicated in this production. In other words, the Other of nationalism is never *only* ethnic, but also always gendered and sexualized, albeit in ambiguous and conflictual way. (11)

In short, it is not enough to belong to a certain ethnicity or religion to be part of the nation – one must belong to the correct sexual orientation or gender as well. Since the nation, according to

Žarkov, is conceived of as masculine and heterosexual<sup>44</sup>, women become reproductive commodities who are meant to ensure the future of the nation. Within this conceptualization of the nation, lesbianism is an impossibility – since women can only participate through reproduction, an unreproductive sexuality that does not allow for male pleasure is at best undesirable, and at worst a threat that must be neutralized. Iva and Marija, notwithstanding their ethnicities or other identities, are not and cannot be part of the Croatian nation. It is thus no surprise that the lesbian sex scene she witnesses renders Olga, who is a stand in for the nationalist ideology, quite literally speechless. (Figures 33 and 34) When she tries to articulate it





Figure 33: Iva and Marija in bed (top left)
Figure 34: Olga peeks in (top right)
Figure 35: Olga speechless (bottom left)
Figure 36: Olga reacts (bottom right)

<sup>-</sup>

<sup>44.</sup> For an earlier analysis of masculine stereotypes and how they relate to post-WWII Europe, see George L. Mosse's *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (1998).

to Blaž, she can only say, "They are licking each other," focusing on the physical act rather than its identitarian implications. It takes Olga a while to be able to name them, and when she does, she uses the extremely offensive "lezbača" rather than the neutral "lezbejka." Shocked yet vindicated in her suspicion, she proceeds to tell all of the neighbors, who react with a range of responses from total indifference (Lidija) to nationalist indignation (Lasić). Blaž merely says, "Let the girls live their lives" but Olga is adamant: "Whores," she says, "they should be taught a lesson." Once the threat is articulated, like a verdict, it must be carried out. (Figures 35 and 36)

In "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance," Cheryl Clarke says, "men at all levels of privilege, of all classes and colors have the potential to act out legalistically, moralistically and violently when they cannot colonize women, when they cannot circumscribe our sexual, productive, reproductive, creative prerogatives and energies." (128) This is precisely what happens in Fine Mrtve Djevojke – once Daniel becomes aware of Iva's lesbianism and thus the impossibility of his desire towards her, he reacts violently, not unlike Mahmut who also lashes out at both Aydanur and Songül the moment they reject him. Iva and Marija's lesbianism justifies Daniel's violence and anger towards them, much like the Roma ethnicity of Mohamed justified Daniel and his friends' violence towards him, and the way ethnicity and religion became justifications for rapes and massacres a mere decade before the film was released. What starts out as verbal harassment soon becomes more invasive as Daniel breaks into their apartment to leave a dildo in their kitchen, with a note attached to it that says, "It's much sweeter with this." An enraged Marija throws the dildo out of the window with an attached note that reads, "Impotent, put it in your ass!" and gets into a very loud and public fight with Olga in which Daniel's masculinity, virility and intelligence are all called into question. The terms of the rejection are particularly significant – the symbol of the heterosexist order, the phallus, is thrown out of the

domestic space that belongs to the two lesbians, and its symbolic power turned back on Daniel, who is instructed to engage in an act that he would consider homosexual. Thus, not only is his masculinity and intelligence contested when Marija refers to him as "idiot" and "impotent" but his heterosexuality is likewise in question through the dildo and the attached note.

The increasing tension culminates with Daniel tricking his way into Iva's apartment the following day feigning a hand injury and raping her when she rejects his advances once again. Daniel's own words after he rapes Iva are telling – "Sorry, are you OK? It's not my fault. You shouldn't have teased me. See what happens when you fuck with me?" The camera is positioned at a high angle, almost at the ceiling, and Iva's half naked form is in the center of the frame. Daniel stands to the side as he mutters these words, which try to shift the blame to Iva, blaming her for being complicit in her own rape and thus attempting to absolve himself of any wrongdoing. The way Iva's body remains in the center, however, points at the futility of his words – the camera does not allow us, or him, to look away from what he has done. When Lidija sees Daniel leave Iva's apartment, he threatens to kill her if she talks, clearly acknowledging that what he has done is a crime. However, it is not only Lidija who sees him. Ivica, the mute son of Dr. Perić sees Daniel rape Iva, and runs to Olga to alert her. Olga comes to see his son raping Iva, she and Iva make eye contact, and Olga leaves without a word. Olga's presence in this scene is significant – as the representative of the national, heterosexist, and dominant order, her gaze has the power to surveil, punish or sanction what she sees. Tacitly, she condones the rape and by refusing to step in, becomes complicit in it. Žarkov continues her previous argument by elaborating on the national and ethnic implications of sexual assault:

... A (female) rape victim is always female and ethnic at the same time, but her ethnicity and her femininity may bear different significance in different contexts; a man belongs to the ethnic Self only if both his heterosexuality and his masculinity are unquestionable; what will question them, however, may be very different, in different contexts. In all

these cases, the physicality of the ethnicized body can hardly be separated from the symbolic meanings vested in it. (11)

Marija's taunt, then, does not merely threaten Daniel's masculinity or heterosexuality, but his ethnic belonging as well. He cannot be a Croat if he is not also heterosexual. However, Daniel does not exist in a vacuum – he is a Croat man, but he is also a Croat son. In her analysis of motherhood within a nationalist context, Žarkov says, "The son is both the proof and the product of the maternal body and its procreative heterosexuality, it is the very point of distinction with the Whore. The body of the Whore cannot, by definition, produce Sons, for the Whore has a nonprocreative body, a body for sex, and not for giving birth." (39) Insofar as Daniel is Olga's son, he is also proof of her heterosexuality and her privileged position as a reproductive citizen of the nation. Marija's words not only wound Daniel's ego, but they also pose a threat to the integral values of the nation. Since a body exists within a relation to all the systems that make it a part of the nation – the nuclear family, heterosexuality, reproduction etc. – threats to the individual bodies of model citizens become threats to the foundations of the nation state and to a myriad interconnected hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity. This, perhaps, illuminates Olga's reaction to Marija and Iva's sexuality more fully. Olga's is not necessarily a metaphor of homophobia or conservatism, but rather, a reaction embedded in the values and requirements put forth by the nation, the (hetero)sexist order and the religious narratives of which she is part. It is not merely that she thinks the two women are perverted or immoral (though she certainly does); it is also that she recognizes them as a threat to her own existence. Maria's articulation of the threat by calling into question Daniel's heterosexuality makes explicit the fragility of the whole system – if Daniel is not a model citizen, then neither are Olga and Blaž.

Confronting Marija and Iva, then, becomes so much more than Olga witnessing something private that she should not have seen. What she sees is a dismantling of the symbolic

order she belongs to. According to Julia Kristeva, the abject is that which falls outside of the symbolic order, that which is at once repulsive and seductive, and that which, ultimately, functions by blurring the boundary between the subject and the other.<sup>45</sup> Kristeva proposes that confronting the abject is almost always traumatic in that the viewer is not merely confronting an "other" but something that is a part of her own self. Seeing a corpse, for instance, is jarring because a corpse is a former subject, and it reminds the spectator of her own fatality. The abject is used to perpetuate the spectator's place within the symbolic order, which is constitutive of identity, and to reaffirm her existence. Abjecting someone, then, is a way of casting them out of the hegemonic order and imposing on them certain qualities that are undesirable, yet that are present in the spectator. The scene in which Olga confronts Iva and Marija's lovemaking and the events following after can be read in these terms. Olga is indeed traumatized by what she sees in the bedroom, though curiously enough, her insistence on going into their apartment uninvited and peeking into their bedroom connotes a desire to enter into the two women's private lives, and a fascination with the "other." If the abject is a way of reaffirming one's own existence within the symbolic order, then Olga's total rejection of Iva and Marija's lovemaking is akin to her reasserting her own heterosexuality. Her exaggerated horror at Iva and Marija suggests that she may not be as detached from the "abject" as she may seem. In order to maintain the hegemonic order, she must banish Iva and Marija from the apartment building, which stands in for the Croatian nation at large. It is not enough to simply remove them from the space, however - they must be punished and destroyed so that they cannot pose a threat to the status quo again. Vicdan follows a similar script in that once out in the open, homoerotic intimacy must be

45. Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. Columbia UP, 1982.

removed – by murdering Songül, Mahmut affirms and reclaims his heterosexuality, which was called into question by the two women's rejection of him.

But why must the lesbians die? Or rather, why must Marija and Songül die, and Iva and Aydanur survive? If the abject must be cast outside of the symbolic order and be established as the "other," for the subject to survive, then this must necessarily be case for a nation and a society as well. Songül must die because as a married woman, her actions are irredeemable by her community's standards. Aydanur is afforded more freedom – she is, after all, a "loose" woman whose actions are not held to the same standards. A similar logic governs Fine Mrtve Djevojke: a nation state in the incipient years of establishing an identity must cast out that which fall outside of what it establishes as its hegemonic values and identities. Since identities exist with relation to other identities, nations and individuals alike position themselves in opposition to what they are not, and in alignment with what they aspire to be. As Žarkov elaborates in *The* Body of War, since the Croat nation, like all other nation states, is by definition built upon a heterosexual matrix, anything that falls outside of this matrix must be destroyed. Marija's butchness, then, as something unsubsumable to the nation and to its prescribed gender roles, must be destroyed. A female body that is neither available for heterosexual sex nor procreation, cannot be integrated into Croatia. Iva, on the other hand, can and is integrated into the nation due to her bisexuality. Since her bisexuality does not curtail the possibility of heterosexual sex and reproduction, her fate is rape and not death. When Daniel rapes her, it is an act that is meant to violently push her back into the hegemonic sphere of heterosexuality and the nation, rather than casting her out as the irreconcilable abject. The film's title, Fine Dead Girls, both points at and complicates this reading. It's not "fine dead girl" in the singular, referring only to Marija's death, but "fine dead girls" in the plural, indicating that Iva, while physically alive, is still on some level dead. It is not her physical body that is killed but her homosexual desire, which cannot be reconciled with the values of the nation. Through the rape and her eventual subscription to the ideal nuclear family, Iva's lesbian identity is effectively destroyed, or at the very least obscured. Her pregnancy (either as a result of the rape or her relationship with Dalibor, it is not made clear) positions her within this heterosexual and reproductive matrix whether she wants to be part of it or not. Her body is controlled, "corrected" and shaped according to the national ideal – this, I would argue, is her symbolic death. The nation and heterosexist patriarchy are thus symbolically reclaimed and its (rather questionable) values kept intact. The film, both within the narrative and outside of it, participates in a discursive corrective rape, wherein sexual threats to the hegemonic order are rendered null, and the heterosexual nuclear family is affirmed as the desired building block of larger social structures.

In addition to Olga's surveilling and Daniel's desiring gazes, two other gazes are significant within the narrative. The gazes of Ivica and of Blaž are the only other ones who have a sense of the full picture. Both are marginalized in different ways – Ivica's muteness positions him within the margins of this microcosm and prevents him from being able to express what he sees fully. His gaze is a witnessing one – he watches, and he records but he can do little to change the course of the events. In the apartment building, Ivica's presence oftentimes goes unnoticed, but he is constantly watching and witnessing. Early on in the film, he watches first as Daniel and Lidija talk about their arrangement – Lidija gives Daniel sexual favors monthly and in return he does not tell his mother to kick her out of the apartment – and then as Daniel forces Lidija into giving him a blow job. He likewise witnesses the many young women who are brought into his father's apartment for under-the-table abortions. He witnesses Daniel rape Iva, and once he alerts Olga to what is happening, he witnesses her indifference and her refusal to

interfere as well. After the rape, he sees firsthand Iva's trauma when she asks her not to tell Marija what he has seen. He likely witnesses Marija's murder as well if his constant presence in the staircase is any indication, and he watches as Iva cradles Marija's dead body later on. We find out from the detective in the frame story that Ivica has been charged for Marija's murder, and has subsequently been released due to his disability. So not only is Ivica the sole witness of all the vices of various apartment residents, but he also carries the burden of their punishment as well when he is (strategically, due to his younger age and disability) named as the murderer.

Blaž, too, witnesses the events in the apartment building, and is similarly aware of the various moral failings of its occupants. His continuous failure to intervene echoes his secondary position within his own home as well, where Olga is the one holding all the power. We get a sense that Blaž's silence has been long ongoing – he refers to questionable things Olga has done in the past that he has clearly been a silent bystander to. While he never engages in a violent or invasive action towards Iva and Marija, his silence and his refusal to stop Olga makes him complicit in her actions. Unlike Ivica's silence, which is enforced, Blaž's silence is by choice.



Figure 38: Blaž looks back at Iva in mutual understanding

He is unable to resist Olga's domineering ways – indeed, he has to kill her in order to be able to defy her. In the end, it is Blaž who returns Toma to Iva – the look they share in the final moments of the film betrays both Iva's understanding of the price he has likely had to pay and

Blaž's apology for not interfering sooner. Perhaps his is a reparative gaze, though of course it comes too late. (Figures 37 and 38)

In contrast, *Vicdan* hardly has any gazes within the narrative that can be characterized as witnessing or reparative – that function is left to the audience to fulfill. There is absolutely no one who will interfere or share the burden of the punishment imposed upon them and thus Aydanur must take matters into her own hands if she is ever to get out of it alive. Unlike Iva who seeks refuge within the system by marrying Dalibor, Aydanur chooses to remain on the fringes by killing Mahmut.

As may be expected, the film and the way in which the director chose to portray Iva and Marija got mixed reviews. Could the film be read as a critique, a call to stop a cycle of violence directed against the so-called others of the nation, or did it merely serve to perpetuate stereotypes about those others? In the collection In Contrast: Croatian Film Today, for instance, historian Marko Dumančić extols the director as a filmmaker "who challenges injustices, conservatism, complacency, and uniformity of modern societies" (152) and points out that Matanić has an "activist agenda" (153), which aims to galvanize society by drawing attention to the marginalized communities. While Dumančić acknowledges negative criticism of Fine Mrtve Djevojke, he seems to agree with critics who argue that the film is successful because it depicts a "realistic" lesbian relationship, without necessarily focusing on homosexuality as the main driving force of the film. (155) According to Dumančić, the film's deconstruction of patriarchy and nationalism is extremely valuable and potentially more important than the lack of queerness and female empowerment. I would argue that this is a rather reductive and privileged position to take, seeing how it implies a hierarchy of oppressions. In "La Güera," Cherrie Moraga very rightly warns, "The danger lies in ranking the oppressions. The danger lies in failing to

acknowledge the specificity of the oppression." (29) This is precisely the trap that both Dumančić in his analysis, and Matanić in his execution of the film, fall into. By assuming that the existence of one critique justifies the lack of acknowledgement of another, they prioritize critiquing the nation state over representing the dynamics of a queer relationship. The lesbians in the film become synonymous with the other "others" of the state – Bosnians, Serbs, Romas, Muslims, Montenegrins etc. In their article "Post-Communist Lavender Menace: Lesbians in Mainstream East European Film," Kevin Moss and Mima Simić criticize the misrepresentation of lesbian culture in the film, and say that this is ultimately "a film about a society that crushes and destroys those in the position of least power, without ever questioning the limits of its influence or allowing any room for female, feminist, or queer resistance." (276) The potentially revolutionary voices of the queer and marginalized characters in the film are silenced, and their bodies commodified for the pleasure of the (heterosexual, male) spectator. Ultimately, what Matanić seems to want is an empty signifier, a hollow vehicle through which he can construct a narrative on otherness, not queerness:

Putting lesbians in the spotlight and in the title of the film for the very first time without giving them a proper political treatment, and reducing them to yet another site of his social critique proves the director is not really interested in what queerness *is* or *can be*, but rather what it can *stand for*. (Moss and Simić, 277)

Within the context of the film, the lesbianism is nothing more than an easy solution to the problem of posing ethnic minorities as the marginalized other on film, so soon after the wars that tore apart the region. The spectators are essentially asked to do the substitution in their heads, and not to worry about the implications of substituting one kind of oppression for another. As a stand-in for ethnic otherness, queerness loses its radical potential to deconstruct hegemonic structures and becomes little more than a marker of difference, with no elaboration as to what that difference is. The aesthetics of the film also echo to this – we frequently see both women

through the eyes and the consciousness of the neighbors, whose attitudes towards them are either disgust or lust. The lesbian body then is put on the screen as an object for the voyeuristic pleasure of the spectator, much as Laura Mulvey formulates in her "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." That the women are lesbians seems to be of no consequence – Matanić gets rid of the one that yields little visual pleasure to the spectator, and drives the other one into a heterosexual relationship, thereby making her available to the invasive gaze of the (male) spectator. The man Iva ends up marrying, incidentally, is named Dalibor – same as the director himself. Not only does Matanić have narrative and cinematic control over his characters, he also manages to symbolically own Iva's sexuality as well.

Despite the bleak endings of these films that seem intent on destroying sexualities that cannot be subsumed into the heterosexist order, however, Matanić and Kıral's narrative inconsistencies and ambiguities allow for moments of resistance to come through: perhaps Aydanur will never answer the police's questions; perhaps the detective in *Fine Mrtve Djevojke* will go home to his wife with Iva's words ("Do you think you know everything about your wife?") ringing in his ears. In terms of my own project of tracing representations of queerness across cultural productions from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia and theorizing a local queer aesthetics, these films help lay out the intricate and deeply enmeshed relationship between national, social, religious and cultural narratives of female (homo)sexuality and women who partake in these intimacies, as well as how queer spectatorship can help us make sense of these homophobic yet homoerotic narratives that reveal ingrained truths about the societies they portray.

Ultimately, the queer female bodies in these films seem to remain in a limbo between the visible and the invisible, the desirable and the forbidden, the subsumable and the incorrigibly

queer. They function in a myriad ways ranging from a litmus test for a newly developing country, a way to talk and think about the various others of the nation, a mode of representing new subjectivities without having to name them in their particularity or to portray them in their full complexity. In terms of their position within film historiography, Vicdan and Fine Mrtve Djevojke both point at a shift in representations of queerness in Turkish and Croatian film respectively. Vicdan builds on the legacy of female homoerotic films in Turkey from the 1960s onwards, in particular works of queer auteurs like Atıf Yılmaz and his Dul Bir Kadın (1985), and Kutluğ Ataman and his 2 Genç Kız (2005), from which Kıral borrows thematically and visually. It serves, as distinct from these two films which feature characters in urban centers or who belong to the intelligentsia, to situate homoeroticism as a specifically local and rural phenomenon by portraying characters who are working class and who live in a small town. The director's resistance to speaking about Vicdan in terms of homosexuality or homoeroticism does not necessarily curtail the work his film intentionally or unwittingly does. Not classifying a film with a sustained homoerotic narrative as a queer or an LGBT film in some ways makes a much more radical statement: that these homoerotic intimacies and queer energies are not necessarily part of a distinct queer or LGBT culture, but rather that they appear in spaces, communities and positionalities that are deemed the most conventional and heterosexual. In my final chapter on visual artist Nilbar Güreş's work, I will attend to how queerness imbues everyday life in greater detail.

Fine Mrtve Djevojke, on the other hand, functions in a slightly different manner in terms of its place in Croatian and Yugoslav film history. Within Croatia, the film is the first of its kind with openly lesbian and bisexual protagonists. Within the context of the Balkans, however, its release coincides with two other films from the region that have lesbian or bisexual women as

main characters, *Diši duboko* (Serbia, 2004) by Dragan Marinković and *Varuh meje* (Slovenia, 2002) by Maja Weiss. What sets *Fine Mrtve Djevojke* apart from these two films is the explicit commentary on the nationalist and moralistic ideologies of Croatia and the inconsistencies of these ideologies. Despite its unwillingness to engage with female homosexuality on a deeper and realistic manner, the film's stakes in how the various others of the Croatian nation are treated, surveilled and disciplined ring true if not *only specifically* for the sexual minorities, then certainly for them *as well as* others. Disappointing as the film's ending may be – after all, it is the lesbian character who gets murdered, and the sole Roma in the neighborhood who gets beat up – the film's penchant for senseless and graphic violence perhaps does just enough work to make a case for a less violent Croatian society. If the violence is indeed a critique of the fascism inherent in nationalist projects, however, and if we are to learn from its senselessness, then perhaps what is needed is an out for the sole surviving "other" of the film – for Iva.

It is not merely enough to represent and to make explicit the existence of marginalized characters – especially when that existence comes to a violent end. If we cannot conceive of happy lesbians (or happy Romas, or happy women), if directors claim our sole survivors for their own, then it seems the future for the queer characters in film is to remain always under threat of violence and on the margins of society. In the next chapter, I will turn to two films *Zenne* (2012) from Turkey and *Go West* (2008) from Bosnia and Herzegovina, both of which attempt to imagine outs for their queer characters who do manage to make it through the violent tendencies of their countries, and ethnic and religious communities, and draw our attention to how queer and conventional masculinities are informed deeply by local, national and transnational discourses of gender, sexuality and ethnicity.

Chapter 4: The Heterosexual Nation: Queerness and Ethnic Belonging in *Zenne* (2012) and *Go West* (2008)

It was a cold Istanbul evening when I, along with a couple hundred of my classmates, students and professors at my university got together for the academic premiere of the film *Zenne* by first-time directors Caner Alper and Mehmet Binay. Referred to in media as the first gay film from Turkey, and as the first film on gay honor killings, and two years in the making, *Zenne* had been anticipated by the queer community in Turkey for a while. We had been following the production process, and a lot of us had gone to fundraising parties when the funding by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and the British Elton John Foundation had fallen through – the first because the ministry did not approve of the gay subject matter, and the latter because the directors refused to cut the more hopeful storyline of Can from the film. The film was released in late 2011 in Istanbul, when the Turkish and Kurdish LGBTQ movements were picking up at a rapid pace. Istanbul Pride had gone from being only about a thousand people in the mid-2000s to about 10,000-strong in 2011, a number which increased to 100,000 following the Gezi Protests<sup>46</sup> in 2013. Meanwhile, the issue of homosexuality and the Turkish army had been in the forefront since the German periodical *der Spiegel* had published an article in 2009

-

<sup>46.</sup> Gezi Protests were a series of civil demonstrations and protests in Turkey, which began on May 28, 2013 in Gezi Park, when a group of activists protesting the demolition of the part were attacked by the police. For weeks, activists from different factions of the political spectrum, as well as regular citizens, occupied Taksim Square to protest police violence, privatization of public spaces, restrictions on free speech and free press, among other social justice issues. The immense number of people who took part in the protests (reaching hundreds of thousands at times) lead to the biggest pride march in Istanbul's history, as the pride march at the end of June overlapped with the Gezi Protests.

exposing internationally the "visual proof" requirements imposed by the Turkish army to conscripts who wanted to get an exemption from military service due to homosexuality<sup>47</sup>. It was thus in this intersection of increased academic interest in LGBTQ studies, a growing and visible LGBTQ movement, and established public debates about military policies that *Zenne* was released.

"Honesty may kill you" goes the tagline for the film, which tells the story of "an unlikely trio" of queer men who meet in İstanbul. Daniel, a bisexual German photojournalist, is looking for inspiration in İstanbul after a traumatic experience in Afghanistan. Can, a Turkish male belly dancer who performs at gay bars, reads fortunes and hopes to become an artist one day. Ahmet, a Kurdish bear studying in İstanbul, is trying to put off his conservative parents who want him to come back to Urfa in eastern Turkey and take over the family business. Ahmet's ultraconservative mother hires a man to follow Ahmet, whom Ahmet pays off regularly to keep his sexual identity a secret from his family. Can, who is avoiding the military draft, eventually gets served with the papers and must go to the military hospital to get an exemption slip. At Daniel's urging, Ahmet decides to stop paying off his shadow and tells his father that he is gay. The film ends with Ahmet's father murdering his son at the mother's insistence, Daniel leaving Turkey, and Can becoming a dance instructor for children.

Based partially on the true story of Ahmet Yıldız, whose murder in 2008 was touted as "the first gay honor killing" in Turkish and international press alike, *Zenne* explores issues central to queer<sup>49</sup> masculinity in Turkey – namely, the militaristic culture, societal expectations

-

<sup>47.</sup> Von Mitterstaedt, Juliane and Daniel Steinvorth. "The Gay Sons of Allah: Wave of Homophobia Sweeps the Muslim World." Spiegel Online. 17 September 2009. Accessed 30 December 2017.

<sup>48.</sup> Called the "pink slip" in Turkish slang, this official exemption from compulsory military service is given to men who can "prove" their homosexuality through either photographic evidence and/or an invasive medical examination. 49. Unless specified otherwise, I use queer as an umbrella term to refer to Can's, Daniel's and Ahmet's sexualities. The film never specifies Can's sexual orientation (scholarship on the film has read him as a gay man, as well as an asexual one) though he is nonetheless presented as a sexual minority in the narrative of the film.

regarding successful performance of sexual, religious, national and ethnic identities, and the tension between global LGBTQ (progress) narratives and the real-life experiences of queer subjects in Turkey. An earlier feature film from Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Go West* (2005) by Ahmed Imamović, likewise focuses on gender, ethnic and religious performance as a way of critiquing the construct of the nation state, and offers a commentary on the fraught relationship between the "east" and the "west." *Go West* tells the story of Kenan, a Muslim man from Sarajevo, who is smuggled across the siege line to a Serbian village by his Serbian boyfriend, Milan. In order to survive, Kenan must become "Milena" and pretend to be Milan's Serbian Orthodox wife as they wait for their paperwork to immigrate to the Netherlands. Read together, these two films shed light to the ways in which global, national and ethnic narratives of gender and sexuality shape the experiences of sexual minorities and exercise power over their bodies, as well as how these global and local narratives mutually implicate one another both within and around these cinematic works.

Organized around a series of close readings of *Zenne* and *Go West*, this chapter explores the connections between various performances of identities (primarily sexual, ethnic and religious), the patriarchal norms of Turkish, Bosnian and Serbian communities, and the institutions of the nation state, as well as the ways in which western conceptualizations of gender and sexuality travel or fail to travel to different cultural and socio-political contexts. In my analysis, I consider both the narratives espoused within these cinematic works and those that circulate *around* them, such as film reviews, funding decisions, state censorship, and statements by the directors and the actors. I situate these narratives within the national discourses of gender and sexuality by engaging with Turkish and Balkan scholars of film and gender, and with LGBTQ media and blogs that respond to these films in various ways. Finally, I build on works

by Halberstam and Muñoz in order to explore the ways in which the characters of both films perform or (at times willfully) fail to perform their identities, and thus challenge the demands hegemonic masculinity imposes upon them; and consider how these films themselves are performances of particular kinds of homosexuality, the limitations of which can work against the liberatory intentions of the directors.

In this chapter, I will approach these two films by way of what I consider to be their two organizing tropes – the performances that the characters undertake, and the binaries that are set up (and at times subverted) by the films. As the performances of sexuality, gender, ethnic or national identity that the characters undertake are mired in the various social, political and cultural power dynamics between these binaries, I will begin by elucidating the binaries that govern the structure of each film. In addition to the East/West binary which informs much of the storyline of Daniel and Ahmet's relationship, and is explicitly named in the title of *Go West* almost as an edict to Kenan and Milan, the films bring to the fore a number of binaries such as empire/nation, rural/urban, queer masculinity/hegemonic masculinity, past/present, Serbian Orthodox/Bosnian Muslim and Kurdish/Turkish, which inform the quandaries the characters face.

As formulaic as these binaries are, they do not necessarily exist in stark opposition to one another in either film: The empire is enclosed within the nation, the past within the present, the Muslim within the Serb etc. Embedded within the societal structures of the nation state, the queer community we see in *Zenne* is in a unique position to blend or subvert these seemingly oppositional positionalities; while in *Go West*, Kenan's presence in the Serbian village, and Muslim and western cultural referents that enter the lives of the Serbian characters stand testimony to the ways in which these seemingly oppositional categories are always already

mutually implicated. The performances these characters engage in are likewise mediated through these binaries that they shuffle between, and that they (at times successfully, at times not) meld together in new amalgamations of identity categories. As these performances either explicitly reference sexual identities of the characters, or else serve to highlight how national, ethnic and religious identity performances are inflected through gender and sexuality, I have dubbed them "queer performances." By queer performances, I refer to both the scenes in either film that are musical or dance performances by Kenan or Can and that pace the narrative, and to the performances undertaken by all the characters as dictated by their aspirations or by the requirements of the nation state and of their specific ethnic and religious communities. In both films, the overt treatment of performance as a theme highlights the hierarchies the characters' various identities are embroiled in, which are often informed by the masculinist and militarist discourses of the nation state.

Zenne offers a rich playing field for thinking about performance, as it is paced by scenes of Can's queer zenne performances, which serve as a space of identity performance and contestation, and scenes highlighting the various identities the characters must perform. Notably, it is these zenne performances that give the film its title, rather than Ahmet whose story is ostensibly the film's main inspiration. It is thus worth briefly looking into the origins of this particular form of performance that the film repeatedly references, and which provides the historical and cultural context for Can's performances.

Zenne as a cultural and historical figure dates back to 17<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire. A more commonly used term is köçek, which refers to a prepubescent boy who dons female clothing and entertains through dancing and acting at various functions such as weddings and parties. At the time, it was considered inappropriate for (especially Muslim) women to dance for

men, which led to the popularization of this practice. Köçeks were particularly popular from the 17<sup>th</sup> century until 1837 when Sultan Mahmud II banned the practice due to unruly audiences fighting over the young boys. 50 While a distinctly Ottoman Muslim phenomenon, the köçeks were chosen primarily (and mostly by force) from among the non-Muslim populations of the empire, and trained for five to six years before they started performing at the age of 12 or 13.51 Rather than individual shows, köçeks tended to perform in groups, accompanied by an orchestra, which performed a particular genre of music named köçekçe, a mix of Anatolian, Balkan and Sufi music. Köçeks were usually available sexually to the highest bidder. 52 While köçeks enjoyed fame and often some fortune, this did not necessarily mean that they occupied a privileged social position. Indeed, the fact that they were picked from the non-Muslim populations of the empire immediately implies that being a köçek was seen as an unfit occupation for a Muslim. Thus positioned in the lower strata of the Ottoman social hierarchy, the köçeks could hardly decline the sexual advances of their often Sunni Muslim and ethnically Turkish suitors, which meant that in effect, if not in title, they were sex slaves. Their ethno-religious identity, along with their occupation, positioned köçeks as marginalized figures within the Ottoman Empire.

While the Turkish Republic implemented a nationalist, militarist and masculinist ideology that sought to eradicate all signs of the more ethnically and religiously diverse empire, cultural forms and hierarchies of the empire remain as identifiable features of the Turkish Republic. Much like the ethnic and religious hierarchies (Turkish vs. Greek, Kurdish, Armenian etc., Muslim vs. Non-Muslim) of the Ottoman Empire, cultural practices such as *köçek* also

<sup>50.</sup> And, Metin. A Pictorial History of Turkish Dancing. Dost, 1976, pp. 141.

<sup>51.</sup> Shay, Anthony. *The Dangerous Lives of Public Performers: Dancing, Sex, and Entertainment in the Islamic World.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 25.

<sup>52.</sup> Boone, Joseph A. *The Homoerotics of Orientalism: Mappings of Male Desire in Narratives of the Near and Middle East.* Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 102.

survived the transformation from empire to nation state. Once a form of entertainment for the palace elite and the wealthy, köçek now occupies a place within the cultural landscape of Turkey either as a folksy rural entertainment, or as a kind of drag performance centering on the figure of zenne whom the queer community has appropriated as its own. The local jargon spoken by the trans (and some of the LGB) community "lubunca<sup>53</sup>," for instance, is based on the slang used by the köçeks in the 17th and 18th centuries and, as such, has words derived from Greek, Arabic, Armenian, French and the Romani languages. While the nation state has advocated for a clear break between the empire and the nation through acts of discursive and physical erasure (and to a great extent succeeded), the cultural and social legacies of the Ottoman Empire have made their way into contemporary culture, not least through subversive appropriations such as the köçek performance as a drag show. This is not to say that köçek performances were not homoerotic to begin with – indeed they arguably were, though their homoeroticism was not necessarily intentional or a defining feature. The köçeks of the empire were meant to exist in a liminal space in which men could ostensibly enjoy the boys as young women, without identifying themselves, each other, or the practice itself as non-normative or, to put it anachronistically, as "queer." The contemporary zenne performances of the trans and gay community, however, thrive on the explicit queerness of the practice. The masculinity of the dancer clad in conventionally feminine costumes is displayed for the visual pleasure of the crowd to take note of, and rather than presenting one gender as another, the contemporary practices aim to blur the lines between masculine and feminine, and combine them in one figure – in short, they create a practice whose queerness aims to be entirely visible to its audience and desirable for that very visibility.

\_

<sup>53.</sup> For a detailed analysis of *lubunca* and its development, see Nicholas Kontovas' dissertation "Lubunca: The Historical Development of Istanbul's Queer Slang and a Social-Functional Approach to Diachronic Processes in Language" (2012).

Can's *zenne* performances are scattered throughout the film, at times as part of the diegesis and at times as digressions from it, and act as interludes between the storylines. The deliberately ambiguous position of the performances vis-à-vis the diegesis allow for a reading of them both as part of the film's narrative, and as fantastic forays into Can's inner world. In either case, the periodic appearance of these scenes serves as a reminder of the function of performance both as an outward expression of one's own identity, and as a negotiation with the various institutions of the state. The opening sequence of the film is preceded by a passage from Rumi, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Sufi poet: "Dance in your blood. Dance, when you're perfectly free." The full text of the poem reads:

Dance, when you're broken open.
Dance, if you've torn the bandage off.
Dance in the middle of fighting.
Dance in your blood.
Dance when you're perfectly free. (138)

This invocation of Rumi and this specific poem inextricably ground the film both in the history of the geography it takes place in (as Rumi predates the Ottoman Empire) and in the idea of dance and performance. The opening sequence of *Zenne* crosscuts between scenes of Daniel's days as a photojournalist asking Afghan children to pose, scenes of nationalist fervor in which a young man is being sent off to do his military service, Ahmet cruising in a park and running away when he gets spooked by someone, and scenes of Can performing a belly dancing routine at a gay bar, immediately hinting at the main preoccupations of the film – namely, militarism and performance. The overly-masculinized performance of nationalism in the soldier send-off, and the conventionally feminine gender signifiers Can adopts in his performances provide a visual range of what forms masculinity may take in the cultural landscape of Turkey. Ahmet and Can's initial encounter in Can's dressing room similarly sets up the cultural, and in Ahmet's case

internalized, parameters of hegemonic masculinity. Ahmet berates Can "At least we [bears] are like men," revealing the cultural assumption that a "real" man must look a specific way – in this case, hairy and conventionally masculine. Another dancer in the dressing room also sets up a vital plot point in the narrative, when he reveals to Can he has obtained his exemption from compulsory military duty by dressing as a "lubunya," submitting photographs of himself during homosexual intercourse, and getting a report that says he as a "psychosexual disorder." The whole sequence is narrated by Daniel, who says:

I am not a romantic person. And I don't like fairytales. That's not why I came to İstanbul. I just felt safer, more secure, away from all the heat and the dust that filled my eyes and my brain. Sometimes I wake up at weird times of night as if I still have a chance, one last chance...

This and his other voiceovers throughout the film not only position Daniel as the overarching narrative authority, but also sets his storyline as one of orientalist redemption, which proves to have fatal consequences for his lover, Ahmet. Positioned both as an outsider and as the narrative authority, Daniel becomes an uncomfortable figure who undercuts some of the liberatory intentions of the film's directors. The parallel editing in the sequence allows us access to all three of their experiences, though the camera pointedly keeps coming back to Can. Can's performance embedded within the opening sequence embodies this connection between the past and the present, as it is a hybrid of the historical *zenne* performance of the Ottoman Empire, contemporary drag shows aesthetics, and western modern dance movements. As Can puts on his accessories for the performance, the camera tilts up and down his half-naked body, emphasizing

\_

<sup>54.</sup> It is worth noting that Ahmet says "at least we are like men" (erkek gibiyiz) rather than "we are men." In colloquial Turkish it would ring awkward if one said "at least I am a man" in this context – when speaking of adherence to gender roles, the usage is almost always "like a man" or "like a woman" [emphasis mine], which ironically points at the performative nature of these roles and identities at the precise moment when the speaker is invoking the idea that these categories are natural and stable.

<sup>55.</sup> In *lubunca*, the LGBT slang used in Turkey, lubunya refers to a feminine presenting gay man or trans individual. 56. The Turkish Military considers homosexuality a "psychosexual disorder" – I will return to this point in greater detail later on in the chapter.

both the flashy accessories and his male-presenting body. Then in sync with the crescendo of the music, the camera cuts to him on stage, clad in a costume that is a collage of a belly dancing outfit, an Indian-style golden choker and bracelets, and feathers. The music is a recognizably traditional belly dance number in terms of its meter and rhythm, though the performance itself incorporates motifs of modern dance. The red tulle that Can wraps and unwraps around his body (Figure 39) is a visual match to the Turkish flag in the soldier send-off that Daniel witnesses

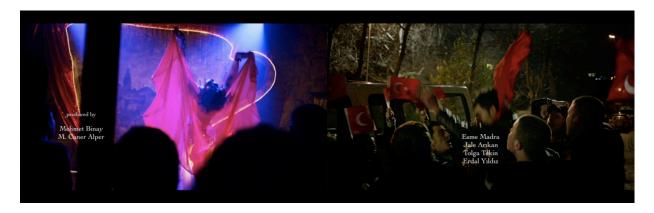


Figure 39: Can dancing at the gay bar (left) Figure 40: The military sendoff (right)

(Figure 40), which serves as a reminder that both the *zenne* dance, nationalism, and military service are all performances of specific kinds of masculinity.

The next performance scene in the film starts off as part of the narrative, and soon forays into Can's fantasy world. The music starts as Can walks from his afternoon job as a fortuneteller, to his night job as a *zenne* dancer. He emerges from a side street onto İstiklal Avenue, the center of nightlife and a meeting point of all kinds of lifestyles and sensibilities in İstanbul. While İstiklal Avenue is relatively safe especially in the evening hours for people of non-normative sexual identities and expressions, <sup>57</sup> Can pops his collar to conceal his face, betraying his

<sup>57.</sup> I should note that this is valid only for 2000s and early 2010s (which is the timeframe of the movie). İstiklal Avenue is where Pride was held every year between the years of 2003 and 2016, and where the vast majority of liberal NGOs and gender and sexuality activists reside. Istiklal Avenue has since lost its more welcoming and diverse edge since then and is no longer as politically or culturally charged as it once was. Pride Marches have been banned since 2016.

apprehension about being noticed and of getting caught by the military police, as he is evading military duty. We then cut straight to Can performing on stage with suspended butterflies adorning his arms and shoulders. With a cascading run on a string instrument that dissolves into a more modern electronic beat and a sitar melody, the scene transitions into Can's fantasy world. (Figure 41) Colors morph into Technicolor whites and purples, and the high key lighting and saturated colors of the scene create an aggressively bright visual tableau. Can dances among



Figure 41: Can dances among the wisterias

wisterias and falls onto a bed of purple poppies in ecstasy. Depressed about a bad day at work and preoccupied with thoughts of the military draft, Can withdraws into this fantasy world in which his queerness and his flamboyant performances can freely be expressed. This brief foray into escapism, however, is quite literally cut short by the directors, who end the scene abruptly with the ominous bang of a drum and cut to Can's mother (her bag adorned with a butterfly in a visual match) being questioned by the police as to Can's whereabouts. In *Zenne*, the queer fantasy world is rarely left alone, and is often interrupted by reminders of the militarist ideology of the Turkish state.

A later performance scene occurs after Can has been fired from his job as a fortuneteller and has failed to find another job. One of the longest performance scenes in the film, it begins with Can in a cage that takes up the entirety of the frame, dressed in a feather bodysuit, crawling on the ground. The blue light angled towards the viewer illuminates the interior of the cage and Can's silhouette from above, while the opening beats of a belly-dancing tune determine the rapid pace of the scene. As Can crawls in the cage and hangs onto the bars that are ever present in the shot, accentuating his sense of entrapment, the contrast between the now red lights in the background and his blue costume evoke an infernal scene. The sequence cuts back and forth between the cage dance and scenes of Ahmet, Daniel and Can sitting in Daniel's garden, talking about their lives. Can's despair is also posed as a parallel to Ahmet's as we see Daniel telling Can how worried he is about Ahmet's secretive behavior. Can's dance becomes increasingly more frenzied as he tries to break through the metal cage, and versions of himself dressed in flashy outfits with feather headdresses in orange and red (as opposed to the more muted blue of the caged Can's outfit) taunt him from outside the cage. The sequence ends with the caged Can collapsing, out of breath, with blood coming from his mouth, while the real life Can trips on the street running away from a bunch of men he thought were charging at him, but turn out to be running after a cab. While dreamlike in nature, the performance sequence hints at the oppression the queer subject experiences. Trapped in a cage that fails to keep them safe, and likewise threatened outside of it in the real world, the queer subjects of the film exist in a perpetual prison - one that Ahmet will not emerge out of alive, and from which Can can achieve only a bittersweet parole by conforming to society's expectations of him.

These scenes in the film, which I have dubbed "queer performances" as they are the only ones in which we see Can as he sees himself, position him as a queer subject trapped in a

homophobic society. By "queer performances" I refer to both Can's embodiment of his own queerness, and the particular way in which he visually communicates that identity. These scenes are queer performances also because they function through subverting and appropriating various non-queer cultural signifiers to express a queer sensibility. While Can has to be careful on the street and often wears more drab outfits that conceal his face, the performances allow him to express his marginalized identity and his visual aesthetics without limitations. These performances can also be read as a mode of disidentification as they serve as a survival strategy for Can in this aggressively heteronormative society, and as exercises in pastiche and camp in that they incorporate various cultural signifiers, artifacts, and music in order to signify queerness. In Disidentifications, José Esteban Muñoz, drawing on Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding, posits "disidentification is the hermeneutical performance of decoding mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy" (25). Can's performances decode the historical practice of zenne dancing and encode it with queer meaning through a campy reinterpretation. This act of reencoding a vestige of an imperial tradition with a queer sensibility is at once an act of claiming space within the cultural and historical landscape of Turkey, and insofar as these performances are extradiegetic, a survival strategy that Can employs when he needs a break from the oppressive society in which he must live. I would argue that it is no coincidence that these queer performances are campy in their style and sensibility – camp's critical and deconstructive relationship to the mainstream is precisely what enables Can's disidentificatory practices.

The formulations of camp by Philip Core and Jack Babuscio make explicit its various functions and features, including camp as "a lie that tells the truth" (Core, 81) and camp as encapsulating irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humor. (Babuscio) While a detailed

exploration of camp remains outside of the scope of this chapter, I nonetheless invoke camp in my reading of the queer performance scenes in *Zenne* as it facilitates reading them as moments of intertextuality and truth-telling that are available to the queer subject only in convoluted and indirect ways. For the purposes of my analysis of queer performances in *Zenne*, I take camp to be a mode of indirect truth-telling that queer subjects invoke in situations where it may be dangerous or impossible to communicate the truth of their sexual identity or orientation, and wherein the theatricality of camp may be the only acceptable way to communicate non-normative identities.

The performance scenes, whether within the diegesis or outside of it, are imbued with theatricality and a specific kind of queer aesthetics that has its roots in the belly dancing tradition of Ottoman and Turkish cultures, stylistic and visual elements from Indian dance and music, and western camp practices alike. The props, music and colors serve to complicate the meaning of the scenes – we are not watching a *zenne* performance in the traditional sense *or* generally speaking one that we would encounter in a gay bar, but rather a hybrid version of these things that lies at the intersection of kitsch music videos, video performance art and traditional dance performances. This pastiche of musical, cultural and performative influences creates a distinctly queer aesthetics within the more traditional or conventional spheres of dance performances, Ottoman traditions, and westernized gay culture of Istanbul, as well as serving as a bridge that connects different historical moments of the empire and the nation state. *Zenne* also makes use of camp in the military hospital scene, which I will return to at greater detail later, where Can and Ahmet are forced to perform a campy gayness in order to convince the military panel of the authenticity of their sexual orientation.

Through appropriation and subversion of cultural codes associated with belly dancing, gender identity and militarism, these queer performances blur the distinctions between seemingly stable categories such as masculinity and femininity, and heterosexuality and queerness, and serve as a reminder of the performative nature of all identity categories. Whether self-ascribed or imposed, the various sexual, religious, national or ethnic identities in *Zenne* are held up to certain standards, which are often at odds with one another. One of the main axes around which the film's narrative revolves is the contradictory impulses of the characters' queer identities, and various cultural, religious, or militarist demands placed upon them by their families or by the state.

Each attempt by Can or Ahmet to be themselves (or, in Ahmet's case, to be the boyfriend Daniel envisions) results in a disciplinary institutional reaction. While Can's mother acts as the pressure valve between the military police and her son, shielding him from the demands of the nation state as much as possible, Can's older brother, Cihan, who is suffering from PTSD as a result of his own military service, insists that Can will eventually get caught. The fear of getting caught by the military police rules Can's life completely, and dictates when and how he appears in public. Under a similar surveillance, Ahmet pays off the man following him as per his family's instructions, but that is only a stopgap measure – his mother, who is deeply, pathologically religious and obsessed with "cleanliness," both physical and spiritual, finally convinces Ahmet's father to murder him once Ahmet comes out to them. In the case of Ahmet, it is not a state institution that surveils and disciplines his actions but rather his family. Legally speaking, the state does have sanctions in place for honor killings and stalking, though of course, as we find out, they are rarely enforced and much less so for a Kurdish gay man. In other words,

the custom of honor killing, rooted in culture and history of the land, precedes the more recent power structures of the nation state in ordering this particular subject's life.

Can's reading of Ahmet's fortune from coffee grounds,<sup>58</sup> where Can sees "two men, one a foreigner, pursuing him, money exchanging hands, trouble for Ahmet," thus effectively predicts Ahmet's storyline. Thus what was previously presented as a fictive performance in which Can offhandedly "reads" the fortunes of his many customers becomes a foreboding narrative element, which lends credence to traditional and "mystical" ways of knowing, while hinting at the tragic predictability of Ahmet's story. As with the extra-diegetic performance sequences, the fortune telling functions as an alternative mode of truth-telling that the queer subject utilizes in order to communicate various truths about their existence. The fatalistic undertones inherent in the very act of fortune telling undercuts the activist intentions of the film directors, positioning the characters within fateful storylines from which there is no escape.

All of the characters' storylines come together in a montage sequence midway through the film, which depicts the characters engaged in various performances of their identities. The parallel editing in the scene explicitly connects Can's queer performances with other characters' performances, some religious, some familial, and some personal. Set to a techno remix of Erik Satie's "Gnossienne No.1," the scene cuts between shots of Can rehearsing in the gay bar by himself, Ahmet and Daniel walking around the city taking photographs, Can's aunt making a costume for him, Ahmet's sister Hatice lying to their mother about his whereabouts, Ahmet's mother praying, Can's mother ignoring yet another military draft letter, Can getting fired from his job as a fortuneteller and Ahmet making Daniel over as a bear. Like in the other performance sequences in the film, the directors blur the line between reality and fantasy – we are never quite

58. A traditionally female occupation or pastime, which further positions Can outside of the masculinized and militarized male culture of Turkey.

certain whether or not the music is diegetic, and while Can's scenes are set up as his daily rehearsal, the isolating framing hints at yet another escapade into his fantasy world. exhaustion he feels after the performance. (Figure 43)

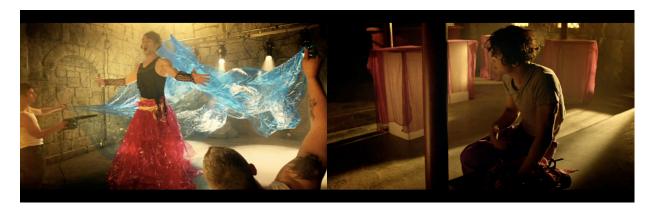


Figure 42: Can in action (left) Figure 43: Can exhausted (right)

In one particular moment, his open mouth matches the vocals of the music, and the waiters at the bar create a wind effect on his costume with blow dryers, making it seem like a psychedelic music video (Figure 42), while in another, he is curled up on the stage, his expression showing the performance of a dutiful sister/daughter she is forced into by familial obligations within a Turkish/Kurdish family structure. The mother's praying also becomes a performance of faith, rather than a representation of it, as the synced music highlights the rhythm of her body movements as she folds her hands to her chest, and prostrates in prayer. Daniel's physical transformation into a bear is also performative — Ahmet changes his clothes, styles his facial hair and feeds him relentlessly to bulk him up, pressuring him to conform to his own standards of Turkish gay bear masculinity in Turkey. Religion, family and gender identity are thus presented as performances that the characters enact to varying degrees of success. By the end of the film, we see a breakdown of all of these performances; Ahmet's mother's religion fails her as she has a nervous breakdown in the shower; Hatice's lies are discovered and she runs away from home. Ahmet and Daniel's easygoing relationship, too, dissolves, as Daniel attempts to model their

relationship after a western gay narrative, in which the person comes out to his family, and after a potentially rocky period of acceptance, the couple can live happily ever after. And even though the film depicts Can's newfound job as a dance teacher for children as a happy ending, he, too, has effectively been rent asunder from his expressed queer identity in his *zenne* performances, and been pushed into a more conventional and socially acceptable position in society.

Above all, Zenne is a film that is preoccupied with what happens when (failed) performances of masculinity come face to face with conventional institutions such as the military or the nuclear family. The failure of characters to perform a macho and militarist masculinity and the consequences of this failure provide an insight into the socio-political forces at play. Ahmet, for instance, fails to live up to his mother's standards of what a good son should be, because of both his sexuality and his reluctance to take his place in the family business in Urfa, in the Kurdish region of Turkey. Ahmet's father likewise fails in his imposed role as the patriarchal, authoritarian figure that the father must be in accordance with tradition, and with his wife's expectations. His failure to compel Ahmet to come home, his subsequent hesitance about murdering him, and his suicide all point to his inability to perform conventional Turkish/Kurdish masculinity. His wife calls his masculinity into question repeatedly and accuses him of not being a "real" man,<sup>59</sup> as a real man would murder his son without blinking an eye in order to preserve the family's honor. The traditional masculinity that Ahmet's father must perform, then, is depicted predictably as a danger to the queer community, and less predictably to society at large, as its successful performance means a total destruction of the traditional family structure.

\_

<sup>59.</sup> The parallel between this accusation and Ahmet's similar comments to Can at the beginning of the film are striking. Just as Can is initially a failed man in Ahmet's eyes due to his feminine gender presentation, so is Ahmet's father in Ahmet's mother's eyes due to his love and compassion towards his gay son. The measure of a proper masculinity, then, is not just what one himself embodies, but also what one is tolerant towards, what one will let live.

Moreover, the father's obvious discomfort with the mother's decision to murder Ahmet, marks him as a failed, and in a certain sense, queer, man. After murdering his son, Ahmet's father is unable to cope with his actions and commits suicide<sup>60</sup> and the mother, upon finding his body, has a nervous breakdown. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam argues for failure over certain types of success:

From the perspective of feminism, failure has often been a better bet than success. Where feminine success is always measured by male standards, and gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals, not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures. (4)

I would extend Halberstam's argument to hegemonic masculinity as well, since from the perspective of a queer subject in this film, failing at the performance of hegemonic masculinity also means disavowing the unreasonable and often violent expectations placed upon the heterosexual and conventionally masculine subject. In the case of Ahmet's father, success in hegemonic masculinity means murdering his own son – as such, the film clearly marks "failure" as the only humane and desirable option. When the characters in *Zenne* push themselves to live up to expectations of others, more often than not it ends in violence and pain like when Ahmet comes out to his family at Daniel's insistence. When they fail at this, however, they experience a sense of (if limited and finite) freedom, as when Ahmet and Daniel enjoy themselves in the montage scene, or when Can performs. These performances of gender identity are not only geared towards family, but also state institutions like the army, which have specific expectations regarding gender presentation codified in military policies and laws.

In an article exploring the ways in which the Turkish state governs sex, gender and sexuality, Aslı Zengin characterizes Turkish notions of hegemonic masculinity as "closely tied to

<sup>60.</sup> It's unclear whether he succeeds in this or not. It is also worth noting that the father of the real-life Ahmet Yıldız fled out of Turkey after the murder and is currently still at large. The court case for Ahmet's murder is still ongoing.

heteroreproductive sexuality and thus to processes, desires, and practices of family making and the state's investments in this intimate domain" (228) and defines it as "heterosexual, authoritarian, conservative, culturally Muslim, middle- to high-class, and Turkish (as an ethnic self-identification in relation to primarily the Kurdish identity)" (229). Thus a successful masculinity encompasses not only a specific sexual orientation, but also a specific religion, class, ethnicity, political orientation and comportment. The family of course is the principal disciplinary institution that produces and reinforces these identities, though as young men come of age, they must leave their families and participate in what is perhaps the most significant rite of passage for them after their circumcision: the military service. Ayse Gül Altınay, the leading scholar on militarism in Turkey, points out that "military service is not only, or perhaps not even primarily, seen as a service to the state, but one that defines proper masculinity" (82). In most cases, for instance, families do not want their daughters to marry men who have not yet completed his military service, and those who are exempt from it (even due to disability or medical reasons) will likely suffer teasing and ridicule, as well as a disadvantage in the job market and for marriage. As Altınay outlines in *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism*, Gender, and Education in Turkey, the notion of Turks as a military nation is one of the foundational myths of the Turkish state. The popular saying "Every Turk is born a soldier" is one manifestation of this myth, which both makes militarism an essential part of being a male citizen and effectively marginalizes other ethnic communities of the nation from full participation in the military, and thus in proper masculinity.<sup>61</sup> While non-Turkish ethnic communities also serve in

\_

<sup>61.</sup> This idiom, however, does not necessarily exclude women, as women are allowed to join the military with some restrictions. One of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's (the first president of Turkey) adopted daughters, Sabiha Gökçen, was a military pilot, who took part in the Dersim massacre where the Turkish Air Force bombed civilian Kurdish targets. Ayşe Gül Altınay discusses the gendered aspects of Gökçen's participation in the army in her book, *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism, Gender and Education in Turkey*.

the military, they often face threats and discrimination during their service, or are pointedly assigned to non-combatant roles. This, of course, also implies that Turks (or men of other ethnic groups) who are not born soldiers, who will not or cannot serve in the military, are not proper citizens, or proper men, at all.

Unlike contemporary academic definitions of sexual orientation, which base it on same sex desire and attachment, the Turkish state's definition relies entirely on the role an individual takes during intercourse, and their gender expression. In other words, only men who are penetrated are considered "truly" homosexual.<sup>62</sup> In addition, the penetrated man must also have a conventionally feminine gender presentation. As such, men who engage in homosexual intercourse but are not penetrated, or who present as conventionally masculine are considered heterosexual. Based on this (mis)understanding of sexual orientation, and the outdated 1968 version of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders which lists homosexuality as a "sexual deviation," the Turkish Military considers homosexual men exempt from compulsory military duty on account of having a "psychosexual disorder.63" However, since the military doctors maintain their belief in a fundamental difference of the position of the penetrator and the penetrated, they do not accept a verbal statement from the draftee as proof of his sexual orientation. Rather, using a policy long-debated by media and often outright denied by army officials, military hospitals require self-identified homosexual men to provide visual proof of their sexual orientation, in which their faces are clearly visible (and expressing pleasure) while being penetrated.<sup>64</sup> This practice results in an interesting quandary, in which the army openly

<sup>62.</sup> See Cenk Özbay's "Nocturnal queers: Rent boys' masculinity in Istanbul" (2010) for more on how penetration and sexual orientation intersect in the Turkish context.

<sup>63.</sup> For a detailed account of how the Turkish military regulates and classifies homosexuality, see Oyman Başaran's "You Are Like a Virus': Dangerous Bodies and Military Medical Authority in Turkey" in *Gender & Society* 28:4, 2014

<sup>64.</sup> Recent gay draftees report that following the international scandal around this issue in 2012, when the German periodical das Bild proclaimed that the Turkish army has the largest reserve of gay porn in the world, the army no

acknowledges the presence of a gay community, while most government institutions opt to render it invisible. The army also claims the discursive power to define what homosexuality is, and how it must be manifested to live up to the army's standards, thereby creating a category of "gay enough" to be exempt from military service. In effect, individuals who want to get the exemption must defer to the definition of homosexuality as outlined by the army, and perform that identity visually to the army's satisfaction. That is to say, the army will allow a self-proclaimed gay man to serve as long as he does not look or act "gay" – the army, then, is not necessarily for straight men, but rather for men who can perform hegemonic masculinity successfully.

Thus it is not always the case that individuals, and in the case of *Zenne* the characters, are forced to perform an identity that society deems appropriate for them. At times, the system works in the exact opposite fashion, and asks them to act out a caricature of themselves in order to prove the authenticity of their claims about their sexual identity. When the military draft finally catches up with Can, both he and Ahmet decide to go to the military hospital to obtain their exemption. Ahmet's gender expression as a bear, of course, is the antithesis to the military's criteria for gay men. He thus asks Can to dress him up as a *zenne*, and they make their way to the military hospital, where groups of other gay men and trans women are waiting in line among drably dressed straight presenting men drafted for the army. (Figure 44) As they wait in line to see the military medical committee, they catch a glimpse of a line of naked men segregated in a

-

longer implements this visual proof policy at least in the urban centers. They do, however, administer a multiple choice test in which in order to prove their homosexuality gay draftees must pick conventionally feminine or "artsy" answers to questions such as "What did you want to be when you grow up?"; ask draftees to draw pictures which are then interpreted by a psychiatrist; and force draftees to talk about their sexuality in front of a medical committee which is often observed by 10+ interns. Based on personal observations I made when I accompanied a friend to get his exemption, the expectation or the unspoken rule is still to dress up as conventionally femininely as possible when coming to these meetings, which take place in the psychiatric ward of the military hospital.

room, and a doctor ordering them to submit to a rectal exam, which the Turkish army claims can distinguish men who have had sex with other men from those who have not (Figure 45).



Figure 44: Can and Ahmet skip the line Figure 45: Military doctors examine draftees for homosexuality

Ahmet is then called into the room where the military medical committee is. The doctors first ask him where he is from, to which he responds Urfa, thus indirectly revealing to the committee that he is ethnically Kurdish. The committee responds "Wow, Urfa. Not a traitor but a taker" denigrating both Ahmet's ethnicity and his sexual orientation in one fell swoop. The doctors then tell him he could go on "aç aç," and serve his country that way, referring to a not uncommon practice in which female dancers entertain the troops, and when soldiers yell "aç aç" meaning "open" or "reveal" the dancers take their clothes off and dance naked. The framing is telling, as we see the Turkish flag on the far left side of the frame, with the doctors taking up most of the space horizontally, and Ahmet on the far fight, provides the balancing vertical to the flag. In a way, the Kurdish subject is positioned physically (and perhaps also ideologically) away from the flag, which represents state ideologies. (Figure 46) Ahmet then gives the photographs of him and Daniel having sex to the committee, which enables him to receive his official exemption from military duty.



Figure 46: Ahmet faces the army medical committee

He is followed by Can, who enters the room and flamboyantly salutes the committee. The outfit he wears – military jacket and pants adorned with rainbow medals of honor – both ironically complies with military dress code and subverts it by literally wearing his queerness as a badge of honor (Figure 47). The doctors ask, "What does your dad have to say about this faggotry?" To which Can responds by saying that his father was a commander like the doctors on the committee. The brief connection between them is severed when the doctors realize that the envelope Can hands them has no photographs in it. Can defiantly says, "Sorry, I brought the wrong envelope," and the doctors respond by saying, "We'll show you the right way" implying that they will send him to the other room for an invasive rectal exam. Can deliberately fails to perform homosexuality as the military wants him to and refuses to participate in a disciplinary practice that he finds repulsive and ridiculous.



Figure 47: Can salutes the doctors

In The Queer Art of Failure, Halberstam characterizes willful failure as a mode of critique:

We can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and the power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities. (88)

Can's willful failure to perform homosexuality up to the military's standards while presenting as visibly queer to the military committee works on multiple levels. First, it defies the military by refusing to provide the photographs and not adhering to the rules of the disciplinary mechanism. Second, it forces the committee to see the absurdity of their own request, as they are clearly convinced of Can's sexual orientation despite the lack of photos, but they themselves are unable to step outside of the parameters set by the state. Moreover, by exposing the military policies through the medium of film, it makes visible and explicit the very policies and identities that the Turkish state does not wish to acknowledge. And finally, by refusing to claim a specific secual orientation or identity (both in this scene and elsewhere in the film), he pushes against identity-based discourses of gender and sexuality. Can's exploitation of the unpredictability of ideology,

to borrow from Halberstam, however, does not necessarily amount to liberation or even change – we know instinctively that the other gay and trans men behind him in the line will have to contend with the same paradigm, and if they, like Can, resist, will be subjected to state-sanctioned rape in the name of determining their "true" sexual orientation.

Ahmet and Can's intentional failure to adhere to the standards of hegemonic Turkish masculinity, however, does allow them a way out of participating in the militaristic culture of the nation – despite the devious, and in Can's case traumatic, way they must go about it, they succeed in protecting themselves from the patriarchal ideals and the violence they entail. By failing to measure up to the standards of masculinity set by the state, they avoid military service, which is itself an often-traumatic experience as evidenced by Can's older brother, who as a result of his military service has become and alcoholic suffering from PTSD. Ironically enough, a large portion of the Turkish military campaigns is focused on fighting the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party),65 which devastate the region Ahmet comes from. The military hospital scene not only serves as a critique of the military culture and policies of the Turkish state, but also introduces the Kurdish/Turkish ethnic divide that informs much of the film. In the following scene, Ahmet comes out to his father over the phone, speaking half Turkish, half Kurdish, and crying uncontrollably. In Urfa, Ahmet's mother takes the phone the father has placed down, only to replace it with a gun – Ahmet's fate is sealed by his own mother the moment he identifies himself as homosexual, not unlike the way Olga in Fine Dead Girls seals Iva and Marija's fates by saying "Whores! They must be taught a lesson!" In both films, the mothers function as

\_

<sup>65.</sup> PKK, an armed guerrilla force fighting for an independent Kurdistan, is considered a terrorist organization by the Turkish state, NATO, the EU and the US. It is worth noting that the European Court of First Instance ordered EU to remove PKK from its list of terrorist organizations due to a lack of evidence, with which EU has refused to comply. Oftentimes, Turkey's cooperation in international affairs and military campaigns depends entirely on the other side's willingness to consider PKK as a terrorist organization.

castrating forces against their sons and their husbands, and emerge as the ultimate guardians of patriarchal norms. Ironically enough, as they celebrate Can and Ahmet's exemption papers that night, Daniel toasts to honesty, revealing his deep lack of understanding of the cultural and political dynamics of Turkey.

The queer community in Zenne exists both as an "other" to the traditional Turkish society, and as a hybrid identity formation that draws upon and mediates binaries that have long informed the social, political, and cultural arenas in Turkey. The interactions Can, Ahmet and Daniel have with their families and with the state exemplify how queerness is treated and managed by these institutions. Can's family, for instance, is accepting of his sexual orientation, and supportive of his gender expression. Even his aunt's lover, Murat, who is by all appearances a macho, traditional man, is protective of and understanding towards him. Murat represents a balancing figure vis-à-vis Ahmet's family, as otherwise all of the Kurdish characters would be homophobic. Murat's own Kurdishness is made explicit through his accent in order to achieve this balance, though its success is debatable as the existence of a single supportive Kurdish character does not negate the fact that the film inadvertently and incorrectly ends up depicting honor killings as an eastern – code for "Kurdish" in Turkish discourse – problem. The murder of Songül in Vicdan, which I discussed at length in the previous chapter, is also clearly an honor killing – one which takes place in the ethnically Turkish and moderately liberal Aegean region, in the westernmost part of Turkey.

A similarly dangerous binary repeats in the way Can's and Ahmet's mothers are represented in *Zenne*. Can's ethnically Turkish mother is an ideal and loving mother to both her sons, while Ahmet and Hatice's Kurdish and religious mother continually makes life hell for her entire family. In short, despite its effort to disrupt the ethnic binaries of the nation, *Zenne* fails to

offer a nuanced reading of the role ethnicity and religion play in homophobic behavior. In her article "Zenne: An Elegy on Dying Like a 'Man,'" Sevgi Kesim Güven criticizes the "West, East, and West of the East" structure that the film upholds:

The discourse of the East is presented as the guilty party in its approach to sexual orientation through the impulses of custom, honor, shame and glory. The West and the West of the East<sup>66</sup> are closer to being exonerated under the guise of democracy...In that sense the film runs the danger of revolving around stereotypical positions regarding homosexuality and homophobia. Another point regarding the film that must be underlined is the way Western Daniel tried to pull Eastern Ahmet into his own domain of power. His idea of power is based upon the belief that honesty makes life easier, and that it is the only way to be an individual. (310-311) (translation mine)

In short, *Zenne* fails to dismantle these binaries between the West and Turkey, and between the west of Turkey and east of Turkey, mistakenly casting the west (whether within or outside of Turkey) as inherently less homophobic.<sup>67</sup> This binary does not necessarily hold up, however, as the urban centers in the Kurdish regions do not necessarily support politically conservative parties such as Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP)<sup>68</sup>, and in fact have a considerable presence of LGBTQ organizations and activists<sup>69</sup>, especially in comparison to the central regions of the country, which are AKP's stronghold.

As I have previously mentioned, the Kurdish/Turkish and the East/West divides are not the only binaries *Zenne*'s narrative introduces. The spaces that the characters inhabit, and the performances they engage in are inflected with binary oppositions that are by and large easily

\_

<sup>66.</sup> By this, the author is referring to the western regions of Turkey, and the urban centers, which are often (but not always) more politically liberal than the Anatolian region.

<sup>67.</sup> This is not a phenomenon unique to Turkey – in her article "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," Milica Bakić-Hayden lays out how the former Yugoslavia was an "orient" within Europe, even as it constituted its own identity with respect to yet another "orient" constituted by the Ottoman Empire, thereby creating a system of nesting orientalisms. The Turkish case reveals a similar tendency, wherein Turkey's designation as the "orient" does not foreclose the possibility of western regions of the country classifying the eastern regions as such. 68. See the results of the couple most recent general elections (2018, June & November 2015 and 2011) to get a better sense of the political map of Turkey.

<sup>69.</sup> By my count in 2014, there were at least 7 different LGBT organizations based in the southeastern regions of Turkey, including Dersim LGBT Initiative, Hebun LGBT Association Diyarbakir, Keskesor LGBT Formation Diyarbakir, Malatya Youth Initiative Against Homophobia and Transphobia and ZeugMadi Gaziantep LGBT.

legible to a local audience, and that coexist within the physical and discursive space of the nation, undercutting the notion of a clear divide between east and west, empire and nation, or conservative and liberal. Even the cityscape itself helps complicate these binaries with its divere neighborhoods shaped by different ideologies and lifestyles. Ahmet, for instance, lives in a more traditional and historically Muslim neighborhood of Üsküdar on the Asian side, whereas Can's scenes are shot almost exclusively on İstiklal Avenue in Taksim, which has historically been home to various embassies and to the non-Muslim communities of the Ottoman Empire, and is know for its nightlife and generally tolerant (in the 1990s and 2000s) atmosphere. Thus discursively and geographically separated, Üsküdar and Taksim offer two very different modes of living that exist contemporaneously in the same city. Ahmet and Can's respective positions vis-à-vis these two neighborhoods seem to neatly align at first glance, though the ways in which they interact with these places and their beliefs belies this alignment. Despite the more recognizably "western" trajectory of Can's life (he is out to his family, he is part of a westernized Istanbul nightlife etc.) he is deeply connected both to the past and to the country where he lives. His zenne performances express a deep connection to past traditions, which he then subverts to make modern and queer. On the other hand, Ahmet, who clearly has an unsupportive and traditional family, wants to leave Turkey and live with Daniel in Germany and is hence stuck between two trajectories: going west with Daniel or returning east to his family, which is set up in the film as a choice between a hopeful future and a traumatic past. Thus as Güven points out, the way the characters and their fates map onto the geographic and political landscape reifies a double binary structure, wherein the East means death, the West of the East means a limited survival, and the West means getting to claim narrative authority.

Daniel, the sole western European character in the film, occupies the position of narrative authority through his voiceovers, and embodies a western progress narrative in opposition to the local discourses of gender and sexuality. His occupation as a photojournalist further underscores this sense of reliability, as photojournalists aspire to "tell the truth and see the real." Thus afforded a seemingly objective position of narrative authority through his profession and his position as the film's narrator, Daniel's failure to grasp the intricacies of the identities his two friends must balance in order to survive becomes all the more disastrous. When Can asks for money in exchange for Daniel photographing him, Daniel is visibly surprised, betraying both his clear sense of entitlement, and his ignorance about the financial difficulties experienced by sexual minorities in Turkey, who often face hiring discrimination. He continually encourages Ahmet to go to the police and to come out to his family, and asks, "What could possibly happen?" pushing Ahmet to conform to a western narrative of coming out and family acceptance. In "Rethinking Homonationalism," Jasbir Puar warns against the ways in which western modes of conceptualizing homosexuality become globalized, and argues that "Euro-American constructs of identity (not mention the notion of a sexual identity itself) that privilege identity politics, 'coming out,' public visibility and legislative measures" have become "the dominant barometers of social progress." (338) It is precisely this ethos that Daniel embodies, and his storyline with Ahmet shows precisely how this Eurocentric progress narrative can go terribly wrong.

In a country that still gives more weight to kinship bonds and customs than legal rights this move is bound to backfire. The urban gay community Daniel sees may be more 'western' and familiar to him, but the institutions of tradition, family and heterosexual nationhood still

7,

<sup>70.</sup> I owe thanks to my colleague Ruby Tapia for this succinct explanation of what she considers to be the ethos of photojournalism.

largely rule the daily lives of its members. From this perspective, *Zenne* is a story of what happens when western narratives are imposed on a non-western society with fundamentally different social, cultural and legal norms. Daniel's failure to step outside of the western progress narrative that he has internalized directly contributes to Ahmet's death. When Daniel first broaches the subject of coming out to his parents, Ahmet tell him, "Honesty will kill me" and it is no dramatic platitude – in the end, Ahmet's decision to take Daniel's advice and to live his life by Daniel's norms and standards becomes his father's justification for murdering him.

The directors, despite their own positionality as locals to Turkish culture, choose to narrate the film from Daniel's point of view, framing it with his voiceover. In an interview with journalist Ayşe Arman in the Turkish daily *Hürriyet*, the directors say that their own tolerant family situation may have influenced Ahmet. Mehmet Binay's words, in particular, reveal his perspective towards Ahmet's murder, which clearly informs the film:

My mom used to hug Ahmet and say, "One loves their child and accepts them no matter what, don't worry. Tell hi to your mom for me, ok?" No one thought the story could end like this. Here we are again, this division between East and West. Because we are "Western" but Ahmet's family is "Eastern." They could not accept that their son is gay. For them, it became an honor issue, Ahmet had to be erased from the world, so they did.<sup>71</sup>

Binay's clear-cut binary between the East and the West, to which he attributes Ahmet's murder, becomes one of the key narrative devices of the film, with the introduction of Daniel to the script as the irrefutable "Western" influence. Can's mother seems to be modeled after Binay's own, while later on in the same interview, the directors indicate that they write in Ahmet's mother as the intolerant parent, while in real life it was his father who was the driving force behind the murder. The interviewer later asks if this film was a confession/redemption for the directors, to which they unequivocally respond, "no." Binay indicates that the film was meant to show two

135

\_

<sup>71.</sup> Arman, Ayşe. "Dürüst olmak mı önemli hayatta kalmak mı?" [Is it more important to be honest or to survive?] *Hürriyet*, 25 September 2011. Accessed 30 December 2017.

different pathways to being queer in Turkey – that is one has a tolerant circle of friends and family, one can be like Can; and if one is in Ahmet's situation, then it's best they proceed carefully. Despite their clear disavowal of the film as a redemption story for themselves, that narrative is clearly there from the beginning, when the opening voiceover frames Daniel's storyline as a redemption narrative. By the final voiceover, however, the film's narrative is framed as a "dance:"

If this was a fairytale, it would have started like, once upon a time, there was an unlikely trio of friends. They lived in a palace safe from all the scary snakes and the monsters in the wood. And the ending would be like: They learn to live together. They learn to love each other. They learn to dance together. They learn to trust each other. And after all, they learned how to move on. They could see it but though, try as they might, they could not change destiny. Yeah, a fairytale would have ended like that. But this was just a dance.

This final voiceover brings together three ideas, fairytale, dance and destiny, which permeate the whole narrative. The fairytale in Daniel's narrative sounds like a western progress narrative in which people of different backgrounds learn to accept one another by sharing a space. Albeit belatedly, Daniel realizes that this fairytale cannot come to pass for him, Ahmet and Can, that what they are in is not a fairytale but a dance, a performance whose parameters are set not by the dancers themselves, but by the institutions around them. "Try as they might, they could not change destiny" says Daniel – a destiny which was uttered both by Can in his coffee reading, and by Ahmet when Daniel first asked him to come out. Daniel thus externalizes the conflict between western progress narratives and the local contexts they are imposed upon, and serves as an answer to the question "But why not just tell them the truth?" This question that Daniel asks, and the film answers, is of course a question that would be asked only by an outsider, a foreign audience who is unaware of the social, cultural and religious dynamics of Turkey. As such, Daniel's character from whose perspective we see the queer underground scene in Istanbul

serves as a voyeuristic "in" for a western audience, for whom the answer to that question may not be immediately clear and who can only understand through Daniel. Daniel's awakening, however, comes at the price of Ahmet's life, hearkening back to an orientalist power dynamics that imbues the price that must be paid by the local other for the western traveler to grasp what he has already been told numerous times. I would argue, thus, that the film does a disservice to its local audience, for whom the story is all too familiar, and for whom the film provides no answers save for acting as a cautionary tale.

After Daniel's voiceovers, the directors cut to the final scene, in which Can is teaching a dance class for kinds, with his now 6 year old nephew, Ahmet, among the children. (Figures 48 and 49) Can has now been subsumed into a culturally acceptable (and stereotypical) role for an effeminate man – a children's dance teacher.



Figure 48: Young Ahmet in dance class (left) Figure 49: Can teaching a dance class for children (right)

We are thus meant to read the brutal realities of the film as making way to a more hopeful and tolerant future, in which Can has a financially secure job that allows him to work with children, 72 and the young Ahmet can dance to his heart's content with his family's full support.

<sup>72.</sup> This can be read as an indication of how accepted Can's sexuality is, as most of the homophobic rhetoric in Turkey (much like elsewhere in the world) focuses on protecting children from immorality.

The ending of the film tells us that this young Ahmet, with his supportive, half-Turkish, half-Kurdish family, will not go through what the older Ahmet has gone through, thus setting him up a blank slate where the mistakes of the past generation will hopefully be remedied, and where interethnic marriage will be reparative not only of the ethnic divides in Turkey, but also of masculinist gender roles and homophobia. While the directors clearly aim for a hopeful ending that is meant to serve as a potential roadmap to the local (likely straight) audience and as a familiar Hollywood ending to a foreign one, they also inadvertently posit heterosexual interethnic procreation as the key starting point in that roadmap, which can be read as a step back towards a palatable, family-friendly integration of difference into Turkish society. As for the local queer audience of the film, to whom Ahmet's murder was already known intimately, who raised money for the film through crowd-sourcing campaigns in the couple years before its release, and of which I am one, the ending feels a little too easy, too naively hopeful even, undoing much of the complexity of the issues presented that make the film feel so relevant and pressing. Perhaps a generous reading would be to say that Binay and Alper's ending is an aspirational narrative – a way of writing into the visual history of Turkey the image of a smiling queer man, doing what he loves doing best, and passing it onto the next generations. For those of us who cannot leave, who leave but must come back, who do not want to leave, that is, for those of us whose labor and struggle must create this aspirational future the directors offer, however, the weight of cultural, historical, religious and political realities of the Turkish state is ever on our minds, and we are all to aware that there are no easy solutions. We are also aware that our oppressions within these constructed binaries that bolster the foundational myths of the Turkish nation state, whether through ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or class, cannot be dismantled

separately from one another, though each of these identities shape our lives more or less immediately as we move through social, religious, public or cultural spaces.

Zenne's overt treatment of performance of identities as something that is always inflected by our positionality (discursive and physical) vis-à-vis the institutions of the state is perhaps its most radical and urgent contribution to discussions of sexual citizenship. The medium of narrative film allows audiences to engage in what that performance of identity looks and feels like in all its authenticity, absurdity or intimacy and pushes them to confront the direct or indirect devastation masculinist and militarized institutions of Turkey wreak upon communities that cannot live up to national ideals.

In the next section, I will turn towards the 2005 Bosnian film *Go West*, which is likewise preoccupied with the idea of performance, especially as it pertains to gender and ethnic identity. Unlike *Zenne*, whose performances can be read as aspirational moves towards a queer future, however, *Go West* takes up performances we must enact to survive on a more visceral level. The film is structured as a flashback from the point of Kenan Dizdar, who has already escaped to western Europe and is telling his story to a French journalist. Two gay lovers, Kenan, a Bosnian Muslim, and Milan, an Orthodox Serb, are living in Sarajevo, where Kenan plays the cello in the orchestra, and Milan is a martial artist. As the siege of the city by the Army of Republika Srpska tightens, they decide to flee. Their train is stopped by soldiers of the Army of Republika Srpska, who are rounding up Muslim men and killing them on the spot. Milan devises a plan to disguise Kenan as a Serbian Orthodox Christian woman, and manages to get them through the siege line by proving he is a Serb, and claiming the now-disguised Kenan as his wife. They then travel to Milan's village, where Kenan is introduced to Milan's father Ljubo as Milena. Milan divulges their secret to his best friend Lunjara, who is tasked with getting women's clothes and a wig for

Kenan, and papers for both of them to flee to the west. The couple then gets married in the Orthodox Church at Ljubo's insistence, and Milan gets called to the front to fight on the side of the Serbs. In the meanwhile, Kenan befriends Ranka, a widow who is reviled by the other women in the village, and who eventually figures out Kenan's secret. Ranka and Kenan have sex after Ranka's insistent advances, and Kenan finds it impossible to tell her that he is actually gay. Milan is killed in the front, and Ranka reveals Kenan's secret to Ljubo, who decided to help him anyway. Ljubo arranges for papers for Kenan, and he and Lunjara help sneak him out of the country. The film ends with Kenan playing an imaginary cello to the journalist on the television show.

The motifs of performance, ritual, and passing permeate the film, as characters engage in various performances of hegemonic masculinity and femininity, ethnic identity, religious customs and music. Kenan's performance as Milena provides the dramatic center of the narrative, though around him, various characters engage in highly ritualized performances that serve to either reify or subvert their ethnic, gender or religious identities. Like the characters in Zenne, Kenan and Milan must perform gender and ethnic identity successfully enough to assure their survival within a war-torn and volatile state. Similarly, Ranka must reconcile the enmity between her own Serbian/Orthodox identity and the Muslim identity of her son's father, which she keeps a secret from the other villagers; and Ljubo must contend with the increasing pressure from the local priest to conform to societal expectations.

In order to escape Sarajevo, Kenan must be disguised both as a woman *and* a Serb – his disguise as a woman is necessary insofar as it exempts him from the physical examination, in which the Serbian soldiers look at men's penises to determine whether they are circumcised and, thus Muslim, or uncircumcised and thus, most likely Serbian. Kenan's identity as a Muslim is

irrevocably etched onto his body by his circumcision, and must be hidden at all costs if he is to survive. The scene in which Milan gets them out of the Serbian army's custody, he successfully proves his identity as a Serb not by his passport, which he shows to the soldiers to no avail, but rather by showing them his uncircumcised penis. Thus having claimed a privileged identity position, Milan can then get the disguised Kenan out by claiming him as his wife. The soldier asks Milan if his wife is "one of us," to which Milan evasively responds, "she's mine, brother."

Indeed, Kenan does, in a way, become entirely Milan's own, when Milan brings him to his village and introduces him as Milena. Kenan is thus christened as a Serb, and an extension of Milan, as even his name now derives from Milan's. Milan becomes Kenan's only source of legitimacy within the circumstances he finds himself in – he can only escape Sarajevo, make a place for himself in the village, and obtain papers to flee abroad as Milan's wife. The moment they step outside of Sarajevo, Kenan must continually be in drag if he wants to survive. This, however, is not just drag in terms of gender presentation – Kenan must also simultaneously engage in ethnic and religious drag in order to fit in in Milan's village. That is to say, without one of these performances, the other two are also bound to fall apart.

Throughout the scenes set in the village, Imamović directs his camera time and again towards Kenan's discomfort with his disguise as a woman, a Serb and an Orthodox Christian. When they first arrive in the vicinity of Milan's village, they get off the truck on the outskirts of the neighboring Muslim village, which has been destroyed. Kenan's discomfort is written all over his face, and Milan says, "We should go west, Kenan! There is no future here, no life." They then run into Alen, Ranka's son, who walks around with a rifle asking people for

73. There is, of course, the possibility that someone could be circumcised because they are Jewish but their fate would likely be the same during the soldiers' inspection.

passwords and chanting Serbian nationalist slogans. Kenan physically shrinks from Alen even though he is a young boy, and he is visibly ill at ease when he comes to Milan's village and meets people. He hardly speaks for the first couple scenes in the village, and befriends no one except for Ljubo and Ranka, and then only with obvious trepidation. Ranka takes him to the Muslim village to collect water, remarking that their own well dried up after they destroyed the Muslim village. The scenes in the Serbian village are dominated by the brown hues of the ground (Figure 50), with very little sound effects aside from the church bells and people's voices.





Figure 50: The Serbian village (top left)

Figure 51: The fallen minaret (top right)

Figure 52: The ritual shoes (bottom left)

Figure 53: Ranka and Kenan (as Milena) in the Muslim village (bottom right)

The scenes in the Muslim village, however, are dominated by the lush green plants and trees (Figure 53), with birds audible in the background, creating a perversely idyllic escape from the dreariness of Milan's village. The beauty of the surroundings is painfully contrasted with fallen

minarets and burnt houses (Figure 51), upon the stairs of which shoes remain. Ranka lines up the shoes each time she goes to the village, saying "they keep the trace of people," in a ritual of remembrance that she herself has devised. (Figure 52) Ranka, and secretly Kenan, seem to be the only people who are continually engaging in acts of remembrance and mourning, and keeping alive the memory of the Muslims who were killed. When Kenan asks if anyone survived, Ranka replies, "Same thing for those who did and for those who didn't," the meaning of which becomes clear later on in the narrative, when she reveals that Alen's father was a Muslim from that village. At a later point in the narrative, Kenan says, "We were the only women there with a secret," thus aligning himself with Ranka through their remembrance of the Muslim community and their silent mourning, and through referring to himself as a woman who also carries the secret of a religious affiliation.

That night, Kenan has a nightmare in which an army, presumably Serbian, is rounding up Muslim women and taking them away. Kenan screams, "I am a man" and tries to take off his wig to prove it, but it has now become his real hair. (Figure 54) As the soldiers surround him, he lifts up his skirt to show them his penis, but he now has a vagina, signaling Kenan's anxiety over his disguise and what it means for his identity. (Figure 55)



Figure 54: Kenan cannot take his wig off (left) Figure 55: Kenan realizes he does not have a penis (right)

Kenan's castration anxiety dream signals his loss of agency and power in his new life – just as in the dream his fate is determined by his genitals, in reality his survival depends on him performing hegemonic Serbian Orthodox femininity successfully so as to mask the difference of his genitals. Moreover, his possession of a vagina in the dream also signals an anxiety around potential rape, which was a systematic strategy of war employed by the Bosnian Serb forces of the Army of the Republika Srpska and Serb paramilitary units.

Kenan's relationship with Ranka is far from simple, however. One of the main narratives of the film is the narrative of discovery, in which Ranka slowly pieces together clues as to Kenan's real identity. She notices that he pees standing up, and later when she reads his fortune in coffee grounds, she prophesies that he will go on a trip alone, using the masculine "sam" instead of the feminine "sama" when she says "alone." The scene is ambiguous – we cannot tell whether Ranka is testing Kenan, suffers a simple slip of the tongue, or potentially possesses some kind of mystic knowledge. Much like the coffee reading in *Zenne*, in which Can sees Ahmet's future unfold before him, Ranka's reading comes true when Kenan leaves the village alone, to go on a long trip to western Europe. In both films, then, the ritual of coffee ground reading serves as a narrative device to foreshadow events, and as an alternative mode of knowing, which lends credence to the mystical elements of the region. As with *Zenne*, the coffee reading in *Go West* undercuts the possibility of a liberatory narrative and reinforces the notion that for someone like Kenan, who is an ethnic, religious and sexual other, there is but one predestined path: leaving the Balkans, and going west.

In the scene immediately following that one, Kenan runs to save Alen from the other boys in the village, who have tied him up to a pole and have set a fire in a circle around him.

\_

<sup>74.</sup> Coffee reading is also a Turkish/Ottoman practice, prevalent in countries where Turkish coffee is regularly consumed, thus connecting it to the Ottoman colonization and occupation of the Balkans.

Kenan's skirt catches on fire during the rescue, which Ranka tries to put out by patting him down. Ranks thus figures out that Kenan is not a woman, and soon after that, when she touches him and eventually performs oral sex on him, likely also realizes that he is Muslim. Thus stripped of his disguises as a woman and as an Orthodox Serb, all that Kenan has left is the presumption that he is heterosexual. As Dubravka Žarkov points out in The Body of War, national belonging is not only determined by ethnicity but also gender and sexuality – one must be the right ethnicity, along with the right gender (male) and right sexuality (heterosexual) in order to truly belong to or embody a nation. (11) These identities, however, are themselves embroiled in a hierarchy. In "Gender ironies of nationalism," Tamar Mayer argues that "because nation, gender and sexuality are all constructed in opposition, or at least in relation to an(O)ther, they are all part of culturally constructed hierarchies, and all of them involve power." (5) I would take Mayer's point one step further to add that even within the privileged and hegemonic ethnic, gender, and sexual identities, there exists a hierarchy, in which one (privileged) identity can take precedence over another depending on the specific circumstances. In Zenne, for instance, Ahmet can safely and easily walk the streets of Istanbul despite his disadvantaged ethnic identity, while Can who belongs to the dominant ethnic group, has to slink away in shadows, afraid of potential violence. In other words, their gender presentation takes precedence over their ethnic identities as the most salient identity category when they are out in public. In Kenan's case, his revealed identity as a man gives him a certain amount of privilege and power over Ranka, despite his ethnic and religious identities, of which she is also aware and tacitly supportive. Nonetheless, the revelation of his sexual identity can undo whatever privilege his position as a man and Ranka's support of his ethnicity and religion may bring him. It is thus that Kenan must engage in yet

another form of drag, in which he transitions from posing as a heterosexual woman to a heterosexual man in order to ensure Ranka's silence.

These hierarchies play into the dynamics of Kenan and Milan's relationship as well. While their relationship seems to be on a more even playing field when they are in Sarajevo, the balance tips the moment they step into Milan's village. Kenan is now forced to assume the position of a woman, which begins to chafe especially with the increasingly macho demeanor displayed by Milan, and the expectations placed upon Kenan as a new bride. When Milan finds out that Kenan has had sex with Ranka, he berates him, saying, "They'll kill us because you can't keep your dick in your pants. You don't know who Ranka is," and immediately after reveals to Kenan that his parents are dead and he only has Milan now. Kenan's response ("I have no one. I am Kenan Dizdar, a Muslim. And I'm not gay!") shows his unwillingness to further bind himself to Milan as his only family, for he now seems to view him not primarily as his lover, but as someone who is associated with those who have killed his parents. The sense of solidarity that existed between the partners due to their precarious position as gay men in the Balkans disappears, as Kenan is reminded of Milan's ethnic identity, which inadvertently gives Milan an immense amount of privilege over him, and through Milan's forced draft into the Army of Republika Srpska implicates him indirectly in Kenan's parents' murder.

What Milan means by the ambiguous statement about Ranka is revealed when in the next scene we see her outside at night, digging the earth. The scene is dominated by a muted blue light, with the shadows of scarecrows populating the background, creating a gothic setting.

(Figure 56) She cries out Milan's name and buries something in the ground, cuts her hand and spills her blood. She then says, in a foreboding tone, "One who takes other people's happiness may have his own taken in blood." The ritual positions Ranka as a witch-like figure who deals



Figure 56: Ranka kneels for her ritual in the graveyard

in the supernatural. After this scene, the director cuts immediately to Ljubo and Kenan being informed of Milan's death, thus establishing a causal relationship between Ranka's spell and Milan's death. Much like the coffee readings in *Zenne* and earlier on in *Go West*, the mystical element serves as a way of reifying "fate" as an organizing principle in these characters' lives. *Zenne* ends with Daniel's voiceover claiming "try as they might they could not change destiny," while a later scene in *Go West* depicts Ranka confronting Kenan at Milan's grave, and screaming "It was his destiny, you understand," to justify Milan's death.

Due to her characterization as a witch-like figure with supernatural powers, as well as her positionality within the village, Ranka can be read as a queer figure within the narrative. What I refer to as queer in this instance is not so much Ranka's sexual orientation, but how her actions and decisions upend the unspoken rules of this Serbian Orthodox village. She is shunned by the other women in the village for being a "loose" woman, and for having Alen out of wedlock, though of course having a child with a Muslim man within wedlock would pose a similar (if not worse) problem for the priest and the villagers. Her explicit sympathy for the neighboring

Muslim villagers is in direct opposition to the priest's loud and constant revilement of all foreigners and outsiders. While the film never reveals exactly *who* she is (Milan's warning to Kenan goes, "you don't know who she is"), we get the sense that she is clearly a figure that poses a threat to the hegemonic norms of village life. In addition to Ranka's connection to the supernatural (which, like her view of Muslims, positions her outside of the religious narrative that permeates the village), her depiction as a sexually active woman similarly positions her outside of the parameters set for the ideal Serbian Orthodox woman. She pursues both Milan and Kenan insistently, and in one scene, Kenan walks in on her masturbating in the bathtub, which embarrasses him more than it does her.

Aside from Ranka's graveside ritual, the most significant rituals that repeat periodically throughout the film are scenes of the priest singing and preaching, and Kenan playing his cello. The former function as rituals of religion and of nationalist fervor, while the latter are depicted as rituals of hope, mourning, and remembering. Unlike the performances in *Zenne* that often take us out of the narrative, the performances in *Go West* anchor the viewer within the daily routine of the Serbian village. *The* priest's nationalist propaganda, which is ubiquitous both in his interactions with the townspeople, and in various religious ceremonies like sermons, weddings and funerals, disseminates a very specific notion of Serbian identity. At Milan and Kenan's wedding, the priest says, "May the fruit of your womb guard Serbian pride, and may Serbia spread all the way from New York to Tokyo;" at a soldier's funeral he remarks, "At the end of the century Serbia is attacked, attacked by America, and struck by rotten Europe. They want to bury Serbia in the mud;" and during a sermon he advises, "The whole world is against Serbs; the Vatican, Mecca and Washington, Berlin, Istanbul. It's true what Saint Sava said – only unity can save the Serbs." Through such discourses, the priest establishes a reproductive, masculinist,

ethnically homogenous, expansionist yet isolated Serbian nation, which is constantly under attack and must therefore continually defend itself against outsiders.

The only person in the village who speaks out against the priest's propaganda is Ljubo – at the funeral, he opposes the priest by saying "This is a requiem mass, not a place for your political speeches," and when the priest comes to praise Ljubo for Milan's death as a martyr, Ljubo physically assaults him and refuses to perform the script expected of him as "the proud father of a son who died fighting for Serbia." Ljubo's clear disavowal of these nationalist ideologies thus makes it less surprising that he later disavows similarly entrenched notions of hegemonic masculinity and homophobia in order to help Kenan escape to the Netherlands. Both in Ljubo and Ranka's case, the disavowal of ascribed gender and ethnic roles positions them as somewhat marginalized figures within this religiously and ethnically homogenous village, and allows them to act as allies to Kenan on occasion. Their presence in the Serbian village also implies that a refusal of the idea(1)s of the nation can come from within, though ultimately that refusal is not strong enough to create a tolerant environment for those who claim non-normative identities. During Milan's funeral, for instance, the priest and his followers stand atop a hill by the cathedral and disparage Ljubo, as Ljubo, Ranka and Kenan bury and mourn Milan.<sup>75</sup> The film's narrative is punctuated by the scenes in which Kenan plays his cello, which serve both as a connection to Kenan's past and as a way of Kenan dealing with his current situation. The first cello scene takes place in 1992 in Sarajevo's National Theater, where Kenan is on stage with his cello, as the conductor makes an anti-war speech and affirms music as a universal language. The music, an uplifting melody in the major key performed by a string quartet, serves to express the anti-war sentiments espoused by the people of Sarajevo. The second time Kenan

75. Dressed in black clothes and a lace veil that covers his hair, Kenan beats his chest periodically, an old practice that is an expression of pain and mourning, which can still be observed in Muslim funerals.

plays his cello is after Milan leaves for the frontline. Milan and his cello are the only two reminders Kenan has left from his previous life, and it is only when Milan leaves to fight in the war that uprooted them in the first place that Kenan seeks comfort in music. The solo cello piece in the minor key signals a turning point for Kenan, as he is left alone in a Serbian village with no one but himself to trust. The accompanying visuals show Kenan play in his room at night with his wig still on, scarecrows in the bluish light of the evening, and Ljubo listening from outside. Kenan's song is cut short with the arrival of the soldiers from the front, as the way continually interferes with all the things that make Kenan who he is – his music, his relationship, his family and his hometown. In a later scene, when bodies of soldiers are brought home, Kenan rushes to his cello but though he hears the same music in his head, he is unable to play. Perhaps the horror of the war is too real for him to escape, or perhaps Kenan cannot bring himself to mourn or remember these soldiers who are not Milan, and who are fighting against the Bosnian Muslims. The last time Kenan plays his cello in the village is after Milan's death, when he goes to the graveyard at night to play the same song in the minor key. This time without his wig and skirt, Kenan plays the song as his true self, as his own way of mourning his lover. This touching scene, however, is cut short with Ranka's arrival who figures out Milan and Kenan's relationship, and in a fit of jealousy (unclear directed at whom) tries to first rape Kenan, and then smashes his cello and stabs him, and brings him home to Ljubo, outing both him and Milan. The delicate balance between Ranka and Kenan is thus toppled permanently, as she apparently cannot bear to see Kenan presenting as Kenan professing his love for Milan, though previous scenes of Kenan presenting as Milena doing the very same thing lead to no such reaction. Once Kenan no longer has the privilege the presumption of heterosexuality affords him, Ranka finds it easy to turn on him.

The final scene of the film returns back to the frame story, in which a French journalist interviews Kenan about the war. At the end of the interview, Kenan says he no longer has anything but his music, and asks her if she would like to hear it. As Kenan starts to play the same tune on an imaginary cello, (Figure 57) the camera cuts back to the Muslim village, where Alen



Figure 57: Kenan plays the imaginary cello (left) Figure 58: Alen rearranges the shoes in the Muslim village (right)

is rearranging the shoes just as his mother did, perhaps having found out that he is half-Muslim. (Figure 58) Like the young half Turkish, half Kurdish Ahmet in *Zenne*, the half Serb half Muslim Alen is the sole figure of hope in *Go West:* a young man who acknowledges the past and embodies the potential for a different future. The music is both diegetic and non-diegetic, in that it's audible to Kenan and to us, but not to the journalist. The camera then cuts back to Kenan still playing, the journalist looking uncomfortably at him. The final lines of the film are quite telling:

(Kenan finishes playing)

Journalist: (in French) I am so sorry, I don't want to disappoint you but I didn't hear anything.

Kenan: (in Bosnian) You should have told me to play louder. (Looks into the camera, the image switches to blue, television footage)

Kenan's cello scenes, then, are in turn expressions of hope (the National Theater scene), mourning (the village scenes) and remembering (the final scene). At the same time, these scenes both reify the initial characterization of music as a universal language in the National Theater scene, and push against it. When Kenan plays in the village, it becomes a way to tap into a

shared sorrow with Ljubo, but Kenan's inability to play in an earlier scene, or his silent performance at the end of the film point at the impossibility of speaking this universal language in certain circumstances. This distance between Kenan who hears the music and the journalist who does not is emphasized further by Kenan speaking Bosnian, and the journalist French, with no indication that they are aware they are speaking two different languages. The language that should have been universal gets lost in translation, whereas the actual foreignness of the two spoken languages gets elided by the director. Kenan's presence in this mythical west that characters and the film's title keep referring to, then, is a place where it is possible for a refugee to make the details and the logistics of his story known, but not the depths of his emotional trauma, which remains inaudible and incomprehensible to a western audience. Rather than positioning the film's audience with this western audience within the film, Imamović positions us with Kenan by allowing us to hear the music.

The artistic performances and performances of identity in both *Zenne* and *Go West* highlight how local hierarchies of ethnicity, gender, and religion shape the ways in which queer and non-normative people experience subjecthood, and how these localize experiences of one's intersecting identities are always already embroiled in global narratives of progress as it pertains to sexuality. In both films, characters either long for or are pushed towards a mythical west wherein they can be free though in all of their cases, the characters find that they cannot be free there *as themselves*. Kenan's interview reveals the disconnect between the place that allows him to be a homosexual man and his ethnic and religious background, which is unintelligible for the western audience of his story embodied by the journalist. In Ahmet's case, he can only go west with Daniel, who from the beginning tries to westernize Ahmet by holding him up to his own standards of a gay progress narrative. Despite the openly activist intentions of *Zenne*'s directors,

and the less explicit yet relatively tolerant views Ahmet Imamović espouses in his interviews, in both cases the hope of a better life for the protagonists is either curtailed (Ahmet and Milan both die in ways that are directly informed by the masculinist and militarist ideologies of their respective nation states) or compromised (Can and Kenan must resign themselves to a life where their various identities cannot be experienced fully simultaneously). In both cases, the directors postpone the happy ending to the next generation, to the young Ahmet and Alen, who are both bi-ethnic and also most likely bi-religious, <sup>76</sup> and who will hopefully grow up in a world more tolerant than their older counterparts.

The queer present of these films embodied by Can and Kenan may have to give up parts of themselves to survive, but the queer future set forth by Alper and Binay, and Imamović is not in the west, but rather in Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Serbia. Unlike *Vicdan* or *Fine Mrtve Djevojke*, these two films allow the audience a potentially different future where non-normative identities can somehow be folded into the physical and discursive spaces of the nation. In the next chapter, I will turn to works by queer feminist photographer Nilbar Güreş from Turkey, to interrogate what queerness looks like when it takes its bearings from the local cultural specificities.

-

<sup>76.</sup> While in Turkey religion does not necessarily coincide with ethnicity, most ethnic Kurds follow Alevi Islam, while most ethnic Turks identify as Sunni.

## Chapter 5 : Towards a Local Queer Aesthetics: Nilbar Güreş's Photography and Female Homoerotic Intimacy

In her standalone photographic work Ayşe Fatma'yı Seviyor (Ayshe Loves Fatma), visual and performance artist Nilbar Güreş focuses our attention on a curiously ambiguous scene. (Figure 59) Two middle-aged women with their arms around one another, one with a headscarf, the other without, gaze at a graffiti on an apartment building that reads "Ayşe Fatma'yı Seviyor," while a third woman, hidden in the semi-darkness of the ground floor flat, peeks out at them discreetly. This image, and many others like it also created by Güreş, deal in what I argue is a politically productive ambiguity that toes the line between the safety of invisibility and the political potential of legibility, whilst destabilizing the traditional tropes of womanhood in Turkey. Both in this standalone work and her *TrabZone* and *Çırçır* series, Nilbar Güreş turns her lens towards working class and lower-middle class women and their relationships with one another, and depicts narratives of female homoerotic intimacy that imbue everyday moments and which we encounter in the most ordinary of places – on the side streets of Istanbul, in living rooms of working class homes, in mosques, and among the rubble of neighborhoods undergoing forced gentrification. Employing distinctly local imagery that invokes identity and other sociocultural categories unquestionably familiar to a Turkish<sup>77</sup> audience and imbuing them with

<sup>77.</sup> By Turkish, I mean Türkiyeli, a neutral term that refers to everyone who is from Turkey or holds a Turkish citizenship, regardless of ethnicity. The word is a deliberate alternative to Türk, which excludes Kurdish, Armenian, Greek (and other) citizens of the nation. Within the scope of this dissertation, whenever I use "Turkish," I always use it to citizenship, and not ethnicity. I will specify in instances when I use it to denote an ethnicity ("ethnic Turkish" etc.) For more on this terminological distinction, see Baskın Oran's "Exploring Turkishness: 'Turkish' and

homoerotic desire, Nilbar Güreş's work demonstrates the possibilities of a local queer aesthetics that takes its bearings not from a westernized visual lexicon of queerness, but a distinctly culturally specific one.



Figure 59: Ayse Loves Fatma, 2011

Taking *Ayshe Loves Fatma* as its starting point, this chapter explores a series of works by Güreş that depict female homoerotic intimacy in a variety of public and semi-public settings, through images and narratives that are familiar and yet unexpectedly new in their juxtapositions both to a local and to a global audience. These works speak both to the dynamics these women have among themselves, and to the dynamics between them and the highly regimented domestic and public spaces of the nation. Through her depiction of female homoeroticism in traditional settings, Güreş urges her audience to consider these settings anew, and challenges us to come up with ways of formulating the scenes we encounter in her works. As such, Güreş's works embody

Türkiyeli" in Turkey and the Politics of National Identity: Social, Economic and Cultural Transformation, (eds. Shane Brennan, Marc Herzog, I.B. Tauris, 2014).

the challenges of naming local specificity in an increasingly globalizing terminology regarding identity – sexual, cultural and otherwise. Precisely this challenge comprises the crux of this chapter – how do we approach, express and formulate these distinctly local images of non-normative, homoerotic desire? What are the stakes of the terminology we use or we choose not to use? And how do we advocate for a local queer aesthetics in the era of the global queer?

Queer identities, like all other identities, get their share of global circulation in a considerably wired and connected world. Both through the circulation of cultural materials, and through direct communication, similar communities can exchange ideas and trade cultural products such as films, artworks, and books. This circulation of information and cultural products, however, is often not reciprocal. Overall, more western European and north American cultural materials get circulated, not least due to the magnitude of the economic capitals of these regions and their imperial histories which have linguistically colonized large swaths of land around the world. While not necessarily of concern in and of itself, this unbalanced circulation means that some identities and identity markers become privileged and begin to register as the default over time. In their article "Global Identities: Thinking Transnational Studies of Sexuality," Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan grapple with the necessity and the difficulty of moving away from the term "global" and consider the potentials of a "transnational" framework:

Yet thinking simply about global identities does not begin to get at the complex terrain of sexual politics that is at once national, regional, local, even "cross-cultural" and hybrid. (...) Yet how do we understand these emerging identities, given the divergent theories regarding the relationship between globalization and cultural formations? Can these identities be called "global identities," or is some other term more useful?

In light of the problems that some scholars have pointed out with the rhetoric of diversity and globality with respect to sexual identity, such that these discourses produce a "monumentalist gay identity" and elide "radical sexual difference," the term *transnational* seems to us more helpful in getting to the specifics of sexualities in postmodernity. (...) A more interdisciplinary and transnational approach that addresses the inequalities as well as new formations can begin more adequately to explore the nature of sexual identities in the current phase of globalization (663-664).

Grewal and Caplan urge us to consider the creation, circulation and conglomerations of sexual identities as a transnational process, wherein a single defining paradigm (such as an understanding of queerness coined in the north American and western European context) is inadequate in making sense of local and transnational particularities. They warn against "universalized models of resistance with idealized tropes or politics of identity" (671) and urge their reader to focus on modes of resistance that are borne from the specificities of local contexts instead. Their concern speaks to those of many others (Jasbir Puar, Joseph Massad, just to name a few)<sup>78</sup> who are similarly troubled by the identities and modes of resistance that disappear when a single (and most often western) sexual identity lexicon is adopted instead of local ones. The works that I look at in this chapter work against such a globalizing move by bringing to us images that resist easy categorizations, and that force us to rethink sexuality within a very specific national, religious, and cultural context. Güreş's images are distinctly local in their imagery yet globally recognizable in their homoeroticism, and speak at once to a Turkish audience, and to a global queer audience, though with slightly different inflections determined by the level of cultural insiderness. By not pandering to universalized models and idealized tropes (such as the coming out narrative, marriage equality, politically active urban gays etc.) Güreş makes room for the visual representation of local subjectivities that differ from globalized modes of queerness.

While these globalized sexual identity categories are of course also inadvertently transnational in their circulation and production patterns, I consider them as distinct forms from transnational modes of circulation and categorization. This is by and large due to the different

-

<sup>78.</sup> See Joseph Massad's "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World," and Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*.

relationship the global and the transnational have with the nation state, wherein the former disregards national borders, and the latter recognizes their "continuing significance:"

Unlike the globalization discourse, which maintains a kind of zero-sum assumption, in which globalization and the nation-state are treated as mutually exclusive and antagonistically related conceptual categories, theorists of transnationalism tend to treat the nation-state and the transnational practices as mutually *constitutive* rather than mutually exclusive social formations (*Transnational Urbanism:Locating Globalization*, Smith 3-4).

While Smith here refers to the nation-state as a constitutive force of transnational practices, I am instead using the term "local" to make room for categorizations, images and cultural practices that are not necessarily "national" but nonetheless an integral part of the social, political and cultural landscape of a given geography. The vast majority of the cultural productions I examine in this dissertation are indeed transnational either due to their production history or due to their international circulation, though I have chosen to approach them primarily as "local" texts – if not in their movements post-production, then in their preoccupations, modes of representation and the specificities of their contexts. As a concept, local queer aesthetics positions itself in opposition to the global queer, and to the monolithic sexual identities and formulations implied by the very notion "the global" and "the universal." Although in opposition to and in tension with one another, local and the global are not mutually exclusive entities. Rather, they represent opposing tendencies, one towards universalization and the other towards specificity. In Nilbar Güreş's works for instance, the local is privileged over the global, and its presence drives the narratives constructed by the artist. This is not to say that we should attend to these cultural productions on a linear spectrum of global/local, and in fact oftentimes comparisons between various localities have much more to offer in terms of critique than a comparison between the local and the global do. Identifying the tendencies of a cultural production can only ever serve as a starting point for analyzing the ways in which cultural productions comment on, intervene in

and alter their social, political and cultural contexts, and mapping out the complicated web of relationships created by the various interactions of the local, the global and the transnational.

But how, precisely, do we talk and write about these local subjectivities that emerge either in the real world or within the worlds of cultural productions? This question of terminology is one that comes up time and again in the works of gender and queer scholars who work outside of the north American and western European context. Naming sexual identities across cultural contexts that have little connection despite increasing globalization makes as much sense as naming them anachronistically. As such, the way in which we deploy terminology is in and of itself significant, and oftentimes political. As in the case in my previous chapters, I use homoeroticisim, homoerotic intimacy and homoerotic desire, which are slightly less charged with global associations, when I refer to the images or narratives that privilege the local and offer indeterminate identities and images.

In this chapter specifically, the term "female homoerotic intimacy" is used not simply to describe lesbian attachments, but rather manifestations of suppressed sexual desire, a propensity towards acts and bonds that push against the boundaries of heteronormativity, whether sexual or not. In her discussion of reading Bollywood texts queerly in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, Gayatri Gopinath advises to look not for markedly gay, lesbian or queer identities in the western sense of these terms, but at "fissures of frigidly heterosexual structures that can be transformed into queer imaginings" (103). In other words, the potential queerness Gopinath observes in Bollywood culture is not overt, and is at times solely in the eye of the beholder. What is significant is not so much the authorial intent in these texts, but rather the radical, political and erotic potential of these queer readings and how they might transform our own understanding of these heteropatriarchal landspaces. The way I formulate

"female homoerotic intimacy" or "female homoerotic desire" is likewise indeterminate, and refers to the erotic energies that emerge from these "fissures." Turkey's patriarchal culture and its discursive erasure of female sexuality allows for displays and depictions of homoerotic desire and intimacy between women to go unnoticed, or else be interpreted as platonic friendship that does not threaten the heteronormative assumptions of the nation. This oversight creates a space for the representation of female homoerotic intimacy that is neither entirely platonic nor subversively queer, neither wholly legible nor entirely obscured. This partial (in)visibility is at once a measure of safety – a practical instrument utilized by the artist as a mode of passing - and a gesture towards the undeniable existence of an often overlooked (and if seen, marginalized) desire.

But what happens at that precise boundary between the safety of invisibility and the radical potential of the visible? What if a gesture is a little too telling, a gaze lingers too long? Nilbar Güreş's photographs freeze these borderline moments in time to expose the tensions, the intimacies and the eroticism that bubble to the surface of our awareness by our own act of gazing and interacting with her work. Through what I call a documentary mode of fiction, these works create scenes and scripts that urge the viewer to look (and to look closely, openly) at depictions of the everyday that are imbued with eroticism. What I mean by this term is a hybrid idea of fiction that relies on indexical markers that seem to reference real-life referents and spaces, and that enhances this documentary affect with realist lighting, wide-angle lenses that keep the whole frame in sharp focus, and (with a few exceptions) a sense of spontaneity and authenticity. These are narratives that seek to document real-life affinities and intimacies through the relative safety of fiction. The realism of these images, coupled with the indeterminacy of their meanings, makes us second-guess the figures we thought we recognized, and consider them anew. And it is not

just the women in the photographs that we are urged to reconsider – through her documentary mode of fiction, Güreş presses us to turn our gaze towards the world, towards our everyday lives that are likewise imbued with similar intimacies.

Of all the photographs I focus on in this chapter, Ayshe Loves Fatma exemplifies that sense of documentary fiction most perfectly. The staging is understated to the point of seeming entirely spontaneous, as though the artist took a snapshot of an unexpected image on her way home. The faces of the two women at the center of the photograph are not visible, though we can surmise from their clothing (the slightly baggy black cotton pants, the modest faux-leather purses) that they are lower-middle class, and that they look like any other teyze<sup>79</sup> we might encounter on the street. Teyze, which means "aunt" in Turkish, is used to refer to any older woman encountered in public, and is a distinctly desexualizing term. Thus stripped of any potentially marginal identity markers (in terms of their clothing, bearing and sexuality) the two women's continuous gazing at the graffiti and its meaning become ambiguous. They may simply be pausing to look at an unexpected message on their way home, but their arms around one another points at a certain intimacy. They look like a couple gazing at a romantic view, taking a break from the rush of the day to contemplate a single image. Ayshe loves Fatma, says the graffiti – which begs the question, how and in what capacity? The names "Ayşe" and "Fatma" are significant - they are extremely common and recognizably Muslim female names, and thus function as a reference to all women in Turkey. This specific sentence comes from a popular

\_

<sup>79.</sup> Teyze is the Turkish word for "aunt." It is commonly used to refer to any older and traditionally "respectable" woman one might see in public. The use of the familial term for strangers on the street has a double function – it both invokes family values and respect and pulls in a complete stranger into the "respectable" realm of the family, and indicates to her that the speaker wishes her no (sexual) harm. In short, teyze is a particularly desexualizing term, and one that refers to a traditional, conventional sensibility. Teyze is not a sensibility distinct to Turkey, however. Similar modes of naming and approaching women of a certain age can be observed in the Balkans, in most African countries, India etc.

slogan chanted in Istanbul Pride, "Ali Ahmet'i<sup>80</sup>, Ayşe Fatma'yı seviyor" (Ali loves Ahmet and Ayşe loves Fatma), and as such the graffiti is a physical remnant of the existence of the LGBTQ movement in Istanbul, a remnant perhaps, from that year's pride march. Its inscription on an apartment building indicates an encounter between the LGBTQ community and the traditional family who is signified through the apartment building, which is the locus of traditional family life.

The half open bars, the open window and the curtains pushed aside all invite us to turn our gaze into the apartment, where we are met with the curious figure of a woman, peering discreetly outside. The opening of the private space to the outside signals a potential connection between the public and the private, a desire perhaps to communicate with the outside or to let things in. Bars, closed windows and curtains are all ways of keeping the barrier between the public and the private intact – they are at once a gesture of safety and of modesty. In this image, however, they are rendered unobtrusive, keeping in or keeping out little to nothing, and enabling the curious alignment of gazes that this photograph sets up. The two women look at the graffiti, the woman inside the apartment peeks out at them, and we as the viewers, positioned alongside the photographer, gaze at them all. This constellation of gazes evokes both desire – if not an openly homoerotic one (though I would argue that it is certainly there) – then at the very least a desire to know, a curiosity. Curiosity connotes a desire to make intelligible what is often outside of one's purview or boundaries. We are curious about things we do not know, things with which we are unfamiliar. There is danger in curiosity (it did, kill the cat, after all) but there is also an undeniable desire. In evoking curiosity (of the two teyzes, of ours), the graffiti becomes an object of desire. It signifies both a non-heterosexual desire as expressed by its content, and a desire to

0

<sup>80.</sup> Ali and Ahmet likewise are extremely common and recognizably Muslim male names. Their ubiquity is much reminiscent of the American Jane or John (Doe) for instance.

know (and perhaps experience) that desire. It is not only the graffiti that evokes curiosity, but the photograph itself, as we grow curious about these two curious women. We cannot help but ask ourselves who these women are, what they are thinking, what their pause in front of this politically and sexually charged slogan means. We wonder also about the woman in the apartment – is she aware of the slogan etched onto her apartment's wall? If so, what does she make of these two average looking women contemplating it openly? Will she, afterwards, emerge from her apartment to contemplate it herself?

By evoking this sense of curiosity and desire, Güreş imbues an everyday encounter with queer potentiality, and engages in what Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner refer to as "queer culture building." Berlant and Warner characterize queer culture building as aspiring towards "changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent of the privileged example of sexual culture" ("Sex in Public" 584). *Ayshe Loves Fatma* envisions such a world, in which the only visual cues are that of, or referring to, same sex desire and affinities. A good two decades have passed since Berlant and Warner wrote of queer culture and publics as aspirational, as specters of "a discourse world that only partly exists yet" ("What Does Queer..." 364), and their vision of a world with changed possibilities of identity have come to pass, if only in certain parts of the world and to the benefit of a westernized LGBTQ identity. Güreş's works do not continue that work (this is not, after all, a neat progress narrative of LGBTQ identities burgeoning in the "elsewheres" of the world) so much as they imagine entirely new possibilities for non-identities and revel in the simultaneous intelligibility and unintelligibility of the scenes they display.

In *Ayshe Loves Fatma*, for instance, female homoerotic desire is openly visible through the graffiti, and ambiguously so through the presence of the three women. A discursive

manifestation of homoerotic desire, the graffiti functions an intervention to public space – it disturbs the heteronormative assumptions of the nation and of heteronormative Turkish society by proclaiming that Ayşe loves Fatma, not Ali or Ahmet as tradition would have us believe, and points at the possibility of a queer world imbued with non-normative and non-heterosexual desires. This encounter between the homoerotic sign and the two teyzes – a demographic that can safely be assumed to enshrine motherhood, modesty and asexuality – implicates even the most heteronormative and conventional identities and relationships in a queer currency of desire. Güreş forces us to look at the women in the photograph – women who, traditionally, would not be the object of a sexualized gaze – and urges us to consider them anew. We are thus forced to rethink and reconfigure queer and teyze and call into question their stability as identity markers. In an article analyzing the increasing visibility of Islam and its impact on the public sphere within the Turkish context, Nilüfer Göle speaks precisely of moments like these when articulations of different (or opposing) cultural codes happen upon the same place:

The articulations and tensions between two different cultural codes, modern and indigenous, intervene in distinguishing and defining public and private spheres, interior and exterior spaces, licit and illicit practices. Sometimes they are simply juxtaposed in mutual indifference, sometimes they compete with each other, and sometimes they engage in a dialogue that produces interpenetrations and displacements ("Islam in Public" 175)

Avse Fatma'yı Seviyor exposes just such a moment of interpenetration and displacement, in which the indigenous teyzes encounter an indigenized articulation of a westernized81 mode of identity politics. The unseen but implied pride march and the medium of graffiti both invoke western urban sensibilities, while the two teyzes and the apartment building signal a local and traditional existence. In other words, both the graffiti and the clothing worn by the teyzes are

<sup>81.</sup> Göle's use of 'modern' here refers to the history of modernization in Turkey within a Kemalist/secularist context and as such I have substituted 'western' in lieu of it when talking about the globalization of LGBTQ practices.

indexical – the graffiti points us towards the pride march (and thus towards an implied global) while the clothing points us towards a lower- or middle-class Turkish Muslim identity (towards an openly visible local). Put together, the two parts of this image create an unexpected encounter that emphasizes the queer potentiality of the previously stable identity categories as embodied by the *teyzes*, and the public and private spaces of the street and the apartment building respectively. In this case, rather than being in competition with or indifferent to one another, the two different cultural codes deconstruct and destabilize one another in a politically productive manner. Once implicated in queer desire, the two teyzes cease to enshrine the traditional values of Turkish society. Rather, they become unmarked as any stable identity category, and are therefore difficult to pin down, to delineate – their whole existence runs contrary to the more stable identity categories of the nation, and of the west. These women, far away from the limiting labels of western categories of sexual identity, and of traditional assumptions regarding their age and gender, enact their own modes of female homoerotic intimacy, without necessarily identifying as anything. Rather than subverting existing identity categories and creating new ones, Güreş opts for moments and narratives of homoerotic energy that surface in unexpected moments without coalescing into an identity.

In a recent gallery catalogue, curator Başak Şenova characterizes Güreş's work as depicting "exits," and "imageries of survival strategies," though she does not specify what exactly is fled, or what survival means or from whom. Güreş's images portray moments in which her subjects push the limits of their environments, and challenge the confines of their societal roles. These exits, then, are not only from these women's mundane daily lives, organized as they often are, by familial, cultural, social and religious obligations, but also from the very identity categories available to them within a traditional context. Şenova's characterization of these

moments as depictions of "survival strategies" speaks to the severity of the burden of these societal expectations and identity categories - it is through these moments of defiance or evasion that these women can survive as themselves. In Güreş's work, we see women reshape their traditional environments full of heteropatriarchal referents, and create pockets of queer existence that take place under the very noses of their families, communities, and nation state. As such, these images break down not only the traditional and limiting identity categories of the Turkish nation, but also the by now traditional and limiting identity categories of western European and north American gender studies discourses, and expose the gap between the national and international discourses that characterize the women in them and the actual realities of their lives. Güreş chooses figures who are, for the most part, left outside of the purviews of these discourses by virtue of their ethnicity, socio-economic status or socio-cultural sensibility (Kurdish women, working class women, teyzes) and who are less easily categorizable and whose representation aids in the creation of a visual archive of local queerness in opposition to a more western queer aesthetics. They are almost entirely "foreign" to a non-Turkish audience who is likely unable to read the social and cultural significance of the settings, clothes and actions depicted; and have an alienating effect to a Turkish audience as well, through the use of familiar figures and settings enacting decidedly unfamiliar scripts. By staging scenes of homoerotic intimacy and intimate connections that are rarely made public, Güreş creates scenes that are markedly uncanny in particular to a local audience, who comes to expect certain scripts associated with certain identity categories. These unexpected scripts and encounters that render Güreş's work particularly subversive within a local context seem to be at the core of her art practice. The street and the mosque defined by official and religious narratives, or living rooms and homes defined by traditional values become backdrops of female homoerotic intimacy

playing itself out just at the edge of visibility. In her article on Nilbar Güreş in a collected volume of essays focusing on expat artists from Turkey, Övül Durmuşoğlu points at the way in which Güreş evokes the queer energy of everyday life:

Bearing witness to women, objects of womanhood, rooms they exist in, what they do together in these rooms, the artist reveals the queer energy within the everyday and potentials of diverse forms of existence in the scripts she constructs. The identifications we form - at times even unwittingly – with knowledge of life deemed absolute evolve within these bizarre unpredictable scripts (90-91).

Set in living rooms that look like a million other living rooms across Turkey, in the familiar architecture of mosques, and depicting women who wear clothes like our own or like those of our aunts or grandmothers engaging in acts that look familiar from countless wedding and promise ceremonies, Güreş's photographs evoke the everyday lives of millions of women in Turkey, who either live within these very settings, or know women who live in them. The queer energy within the everyday that Güreş reveals is depicted through distinctly local and decidedly traditional images, rather than those imported from abroad. As such, her images function doubly as a revision of the local traditions of gender roles and sexuality, and as an intervention to the globalizing images of queerness modeled on western notions of gender and sexuality. By taking the absolute scripts of the state and traditional Turkish society (that of an asexualized *teyze* for instance) and evolving them into something "bizarre" and "unpredictable" as Durmuşoğlu puts it, Güreş makes possible a localized queer aesthetics that works in contradistinction to tradition, whilst queering and incorporating it into its visual vocabulary.

In her series titled *TrabZone* from 2010, Nilbar Güreş revisits a setting from her childhood, Trabzon, an industrial and conservative city on the Black Sea coast. The series of photographs shot here, of which I will only address a few, show playful moments at home and in the fields in which women, almost always rendered only partially visible through scarves, drapes

and loose clothes, seem to almost blend into their backgrounds. We see women sharing coats and headscarves with one another, we see scarves caught in branches in patterns evocative of the women absent from the frame, or women who suggestively find themselves a little too close to one another. In *Pattern*, two women stand behind a clothesline, hidden from the waist up by the hanged fabric, whose drab colors match the color of the barn and its reddish roof in the background. (Figure 60) Their skirts (patterned black on the left, patterned burgundy on the right) look like an extension of the hanged clothes – it is not until we notice their calves and slippers that we realize they are women. We cannot see what they are doing but we can tell they are extremely close and facing one another. The door of the barn on the frame left is open, revealing a pile of sacks. The second image in the diptych shows the frame left from a closer point of view.

The barn wall and its now closed door dominate the frame, and take up more than three quarters of it. The long stick that held it open in the previous image is now lying on the ground against a pile of wood. In a tiny sliver on frame left, the legs of the woman previously on the right emerge from the barn door, which is almost closed. We cannot see anything of her body





Figure 60: Pattern, 2010

save for her calves and the hem of her skirt, which identifies her, but she is presumably lying on her back, and is now curiously sporting the blue slippers of the other woman. The colorful plastic slippers, the floral patterned loose skirts, the setting all point to a rural and working class sensibility, which, through the greenery in the background and the title of the series, is evocative of the specific geography of the Black Sea region. As such, *Pattern*, much like *Ayshe Loves Fatma* becomes emblematic of a local queer aesthetics grounded in images derived from the various geographies of the nation.

The subtlety of this work, the circumspect manner in which female homoerotic intimacy is at once depicted and cloaked is significant on two levels: by leaving room for ambiguity, it allows for a measure of protection against the violent and homophobic gaze of the nation; and it resists objectification of these women by denying us visual access to their intimacy. In these two photographs, there is at once nothing and everything to see. This tension between visibility and invisibility, and the way in which the women in these photographs challenge both the scripts of the Turkish nation and western discourse of sexuality is much reminiscent of a short story by Ismat Chugai, "The Quilt," which Gayatri Gopinath analyzes in depth in her book Impossible Desires. While India falls outside of the scope of my dissertation, the astonishing parallels between these two texts illuminate the similar strategies used by artists separated by a vast geographical distance, language and cultural context in order to push back against the prescriptive norms of both their national contexts and the western modes of queerness. "The Quilt," narrated by a woman, who recalls her girlhood in wealthy Begum's house, tells the story her sexual awakening as she watches Begum and her maidservant Rabbo engage in homoerotic acts under the quilt. The child's point of view, which is unable to name the actions she witnesses, and the quilt itself which visually cloaks Begum and Rabbo, result in "a potentially generative

site of alternative narratives and significations of female homoerotic desire" (145). Much like the quilt in Chugtai's story, the hanged clothes and the barn door in Güreş's *Pattern* at once conceal the women from our curious eyes, and signal that something is indeed happening just out of our reach. The visual composition of the photographs bear a striking resemblance to the descriptions of the quilt in Chugtai's story, in which, Gopinath argues, she refuses to "privilege either the sight or the site of same-sex desire (meaning) that the text resists being rendered intelligible within dominant narratives of 'lesbian' sexuality" (152). The narrative and the political potential of these images come precisely from their unintelligibility within preexisting categories — through deferrals of direct representation of homoerotic desire which leaves its construction to our imaginations (and thus implicating us in that very same desire), Chugtai and Güreş achieve at once a resistance to western sexual identity categories, and to the assumptions of their audience regarding these women, whether they are Indian housewives, or village women in rural Turkey.

In another work titled *İbadet* (Worship) from the same series, Güreş once again challenges her audience's assumptions through a depiction of two women praying in the main section of a mosque, traditionally reserved for men. (Figure 61) The space is empty save for the two women who are prostrating as part of *namaz* (the Islamic prayer). One is positioned behind the other and in the act of prostration, her head is inside her companion's skirt. This unexpected image pushes the boundaries of both what is publicly and religiously acceptable within a Turkish-Islamic context, and our own potential assumptions about Muslim women and their sexuality. *Worship* is much less ambiguous than *Ayshe Loves Fatma* - there is no conceivable doubt about the homoerotic nature of the image and the intentions of the two women engaged in this act. In this case, the image obtains its radical potential not from the ambiguity that implicates its audience in its web of deferred homoerotic desire, but through sheer shock value that is only

barely mitigated through the use of the wide-angle lens, which keeps everything in focus, and allows the women to somewhat blend into the patchwork of shapes and patterns provided by the background. What is most jarring in this photograph is of course not so much the explicitness of the two women's hidden (and doubly revealed) sex act, but rather where they engage in it, which clearly denotes a religious/sacred space, and specifically a Muslim one.

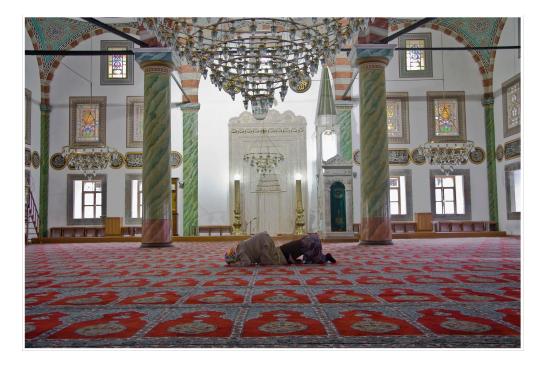


Figure 61: Worship, 2010

Places of worship occupy a very particular position, as they are simultaneously private and public. They are public spaces open to anyone who wishes to enter them, and they enable a semi-public performance of religion. Yet they are set apart from other public spaces in that they are reserved for religious reflection and are governed by their own set of rules regarding conduct, dress and purpose. On the other hand, they also function as private spaces in that they serve as a venue for communion with god and presumably shield those inside from differently minded people. The emptiness of the mosque in Güreş's photograph amplifies the sense of privacy, even

though we are aware that the mosque is a public place where anybody can enter at will.<sup>82</sup> In "Of Other Places," Michel Foucault talks about oppositions regarding space that we take "as simple givens... between private space and public space, between family space and social space" all of which he argues are "nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred" (23). He does not necessarily limit "the sacred" to the religious – rather, his argument refers to those particular values, objects and narratives of a society (or, of a nation, in our case) that shape and delineate these conventionally oppositional spaces. The conventional narratives of the Turkish nation, too, dictate and organize the lives of its citizens to a great extent, such that a deviation from them, as Nilbar Güreş's Worship depicts, serves as a visual slap in the face for an audience who have grown up in and through these national fictions. Worship subverts the scripts usually associated with a mosque and offers a warped image of piety – the women are still clearly, recognizably praying, but they are doing so in such a way that rewrites the narrative of a sacred Islamic space. The image we see conforms neither to the scripts we associate with the space of a mosque, nor does it adhere to our expectations about pious rural women, and rewrites both the physical space and the identity marker presented through this juxtaposition.

The women in *Worship* use the space queerly and claim the center of the mosque (traditionally reserved for only men) as their space of worship, to express a homoerotic desire within a distinctly religious and traditional space. Through its evocation of Islamic rules and traditions that relegate women to the back and invisible sections of the building, and in general the myriad of rules and codes that are required to be enacted in order to enter it, the mosque serves as a distinctly male and hegemonic space. There mere presence of these women at the

-

<sup>82.</sup> This particular mosque, in fact, is the Trabzon Çarşı Mosque located in central Trabzon near the marketplace, and is the largest mosque in the city with the largest congregation, which belies the deceptive sense of privacy in the photo.

center (engaged in a homoerotic act or not) then, is significant enough of a deviation from the cultural and religious codes that seem almost inherent in a mosque. Not only are they present and in the "wrong" section, but they are also not facing the *mihrab* that indicates the direction of the Kaaba, which Muslims are required to face when they pray, but rather a direction perpendicular to it. In essence, they rewrite the rules of worship as they see fit by refusing to use the space as intended and by refusing to face the proper direction. Güreş is implying, then, that oppositional practices and homoerotic desires are liable to surface anywhere and everywhere, even at the center of a place of worship, and that these oppositional practices and the hegemonic space in which they take place are not necessarily irreconcilable. The way in which oppositional practices interact with hegemonic spaces has been a point of interest to a number of scholars within the Turkish context. In her article "Islam in Public," sociologist Nilüfer Göle articulates the tension between competing cultural codes within a single national space and considers the way in which these codes interact. Göle's article focuses on the effects on Islam, particularly Islam within the public sphere, on the kind of top-down modernization that Turkey has undergone – as such, she takes as her reference points modern and indigenous codes, and analyzes points of tension and points in which they seem to converge:

The articulations and tensions between two different cultural codes, modern and indigenous, intervene in distinguishing and defining public and private spheres, interior and exterior spaces, licit and illicit practices. Sometimes they are simply juxtaposed in mutual indifference, sometimes they compete with each other, and sometimes they engage in a dialogue that produces interpenetrations and displacements (175).

While the codes that are connoted in Nilbar Güreş's images do not fall neatly into the categories of modern and indigenous, they do, nonetheless signify diverging cultural codes. Both the mosque and the women imply indigenous cultural codes – in fact, it is precisely the way the two women are coded as indigenous (through their clothing) that makes their engagement in a

homoerotic act (coded as non-indigenous) so significant. In the case of Worship, these cultural codes are melded together in an unfamiliar and radical conglomeration that produces, as Göle calls them, "interpenetrations and displacements." The heteronormative and traditional narrative as implied by the mosque and the two women's clothing, and the homoerotic and oppositional narrative as implied by the women's position within the mosque and the act they are engaged in mutually inform and transform one another. Rather than two codes directly opposing each other religious tradition vs. homoerotic desire, for instance – we see homoerotic desire routed through religious tradition. Neither one of these codes is perverted to the point that they are unrecognizable, and through the perfect symmetry of the image, Güreş hints at their congruity. So not only are these two codes (or the sacred narratives, as Foucault may call them) melded together in at the very least visual harmony and rewritten, this is done so in such a way that the supposed lines between the public and the conventions of the space break down as we witness (in the public of an art gallery, most likely) this private moment between these two women enacted in the semi-public space of the mosque. This breakdown of the public and private divide (both within the context of the photograph, and through the display of the photograph itself) results in a performance that we may characterize as disidentification. The manner in which these women interact with the mosque is reminiscent of the way queer scholar José Esteban Muñoz discusses how minorities and outsiders negotiate mainstream works to suit their own needs:

Disidentification thus allows for the construction of a narrative that is less rigid and exclusive than both the dominant one and than those constructed in direct opposition to it. It does not imply a clear break with the majority culture, but acknowledges the necessity of a continuous engagement with and negotiation of an often hostile larger culture at the same time that it allows to explore tensions and differences within minority communities that also provide the means to survive the hostility of the dominant society (31).

Worship engages with dominant and minority narratives all at once, and through that engagement creates a new narrative that negotiates the rigid lines of either faction. What we see is not a

traditional, religious narrative, nor is it an entirely westernized urban queer one. By melding these two narratives together Nilbar Güreş not only creates a discursive and visual space for those who do not fall into either category, but also offers possibilities for a distinctly local queer aesthetics. Muñoz's notion of disidentification is above all a survival strategy and a way to make one's existence known despite the overwhelming confines of a hostile and dominant ideology. Güreş's images speak both to insiders and outsiders, and present a mode of negotiating with the majority while also pushing a minoritarian mode of existence as a possibility within the dominant discourse. In other words, Güreş's images do not pit a westernized, urban mode of queerness against the religious and traditional national discourses – rather they offer a view of the world that is at once religious and homoerotic, traditional and queer.

What is perhaps more striking than the oppositional religious practice is the implication that queerness is everywhere. Güreş tells us, incontrovertibly, that queerness is not something that belongs to the young, westernized youth of Istanbul, to the thousands who show up at pride parades every year, to the urban centers of the country. It is in mosques, it is among women who look nothing like the urban, upper middle-class LGBTQ milieu of Istanbul, it is in working class cities like Trabzon in regions of the country that are not international cultural and economical centers. In short, Güreş's photos go against that discourse which classifies homoeroticism and homosexuality as western imports – in these images, homoeroticism imbues the very fabric of everyday life, and a very traditional and rural life at that. An accompanying photograph to Worship from the same series titled Kadınlar Bölümü (Women Only Section) depicts the same two women, this time in the women's section of the mosque. (Figure 62) In this image, they are hidden behind the curtain that separates the men's section from the women's, standing side by side. Instead of keeping to their places, however, one woman is visibly leaning on the other.

They are not quite holding hands but their physical intimacy is obvious in their decision to hold themselves close to one another instead of spreading out in this relatively large space.



Figure 62: Women Only Section, 2010

As in *Worship*, they are facing the wrong direction, once again hinting at an oppositional practice of religion and of intimacy. In a way, they are subverting the very idea of religion by imbuing with homoerotic intimacy and routing their love and adoration, not towards god, but towards one another. Once again, the women are recognizably praying, though they clearly modify traditional religious practices to make room for their own subjectivities. As such, they create a tension between institutionalized religion, and the more inclusive religious practices that they enact within that institutionalized space of the mosque. The scenarios that *Worship* and *Women Only Section* enact are not either/or scenarios in which the non-heterosexual subject must choose between their sexuality and their religion or culture. Instead, Güreş offers us a narrative in which sexual and religious identities come together in ways that undo the boundaries of one another.

Nilbar Güreş's *Worship* joins if not a tradition, then certainly a pattern of non-western works disengaging from western categorizations of sexuality. I would like to briefly go back to Gayatri Gopinath's analysis of "The Quilt" where she highlights the story's refusal to deal in conventional modes of classifying and locating sexuality through its focus not on the bodies and the actions of the two women, but rather on the quilt which simultaneously cloaks and reveals them:

Just as the text refuses to locate desire solely upon particular bodies - and hence avoids reifying desires into identity structures - it also refuses to privilege particular sites as the "proper" locations of the practice of such desire (...) The quilt can be read not so much as a concealing device beneath which the "truth" or visual "proof" of sex and desire lie, as much as a kind of mediating and constantly shifting surface that negotiates and marks the border between different economies and organizations of erotic pleasure. The quilt as a surface area that is suspended between that which is hidden and that which is visible calls these categories into question and suggests the impossibility of viewing the spaces they connote as discrete territories. (150)

The hanged clothes and the closed barn door in *Pattern*, and the visual ambiguities of *Ayshe Loves Fatma*, as well as the way in which *Worship* and *Women Only Section* dissolve the boundaries between private and public all enact a similar strategy of breaking down identity structures, and refusing to relegate sexuality to its "proper" site in the private sphere. By divorcing desire and identity from one another (and thus eschewing a distinctly western mode of evaluating sexuality) and through their specific settings (the mosque in *Worship*, the home in "The Quilt" and its film adaptation *Fire*, the village in *Pattern*, the urban street in *Ayshe Loves Fatma*), these works function as ways of destabilizing the national, the traditional and the sacred.

Güreş deconstructs not only the gendered and sexual narratives of the nation but also social, economic, political and ethnic ones. In her work, we witness oppositional practices outside of the bourgeoisie, upper-middle class environments of Istanbul and the educated elites of academia. She takes us to working class, rural spaces, into the lives of non-heterosexual, non-

ethnically Turkish women, which challenges the image of the ideal Turkish woman as espoused by Kemalist state feminism from the early days of the Turkish Republic in 1920s until about 1980s. Kemalist state feminism grew out of a series of reforms and movements in the early days of the republic that were intended to make the country more (and visibly) western and which included a language reform which "weeded out" Arabic and Farsi words from the Turkish language, an alphabet reform which meant switching to a modified Latin alphabet from Ottoman/Arabic script, and dress reforms which mandated western style hats for men and no headscarves for women. In short, the state feminism in Turkey required that women adapt western norms and perform a very specific kind of womanhood – the ideal woman of the republic would be chaste but without a headscarf, working but without neglecting her primary duty (which was to raise the next generation), secular but not sexual, ethnically Turkish or otherwise completely assimilated, and as far as the most commonly dissipated images suggests, middle or upper class. This is by no means particular to the Turkish case – most modernization projects deal with the position of women within society, and formulate ideal womanhood in line with their national ideals. In the preface to her edited volume Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East, which deals with the way in which modernity has shaped women in the Middle East, Lila Abu-Lughod conveys a suspicion of "the way modernity is so easily equated with the progress, emancipation, and empowerment of women" and asks "what hidden costs, unanticipated constraints, novel forms of discipline and regulation and unintended consequences (accompany) such programs" (vii). The formulation of the ideal Turkish woman that I have outlined effectively excluded women who were Kurdish, rural, queer, or simply not interested in raising children for the republic, and pushed them to the margins of society – in short, they became the collateral damage to this top-down modernization project. State feminism (along with other modernizations programs) renders invisible alternate modernities, LGBTQ, Kurdish or rural women in favor of a monolithic understanding of the new Turkish woman. As such, it functions as a regulatory mechanism of alternate modes of womanhood (whether in terms of sexuality, ethnicity or background) rather than as the liberatory movement it eschews to be. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that this staunch and restrictive brand of secularism was opposed by what Deniz Kandiyoti refers to as "the new veiling" wherein Turkey experienced the rise of the conservative middle class into power. (283) Likewise, the Kurdish feminist movement, which began earlier in the 1970s and the LGBTQ movement, which began in the 1990s became more and more visible towards the 2000s and onwards. It is precisely these counter-movements to Kemalist state feminism (and of course inadvertently to the conservative political parties in power which oppose both homosexuality, and Kurdish liberation) that Nilbar Güreş's images hearken to and evoke. In her entire oeuvre, Güreş shows us the kind of women who fall always outside of the very tight definition and aspirations Kemalist state feminism envisages for them, as well as other ethnic and gendered minorities of the Turkey. In Hayal and Hakikat: Turkiye'den Modern ve Çağdaş Kadın Sanatçılar (Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey), Fatmagül Berktay characterizes Nilbar Güreş's art practice in the following way:

Güreş's work reaches beyond the traditional feminism, which centers on bourgeois, working women. She is not interested in rigid frameworks which generalize and limit women's problems, but rather engages with the realities and ironies of life. She features lesbian, headscarfed or Kurdish women who are situated outside of the enlightened, progressive efforts of the Republic, her approach points to a shared state of womanhood which encompasses different ways of being female.

\_

<sup>83.</sup> By this, Kandiyoti is referring to the weakening of the secularist/Kemalist discourse to make way for a conservatively Muslim middle class, which rose to power first with Necmettin Erbakan and his Refah Partisi (The Welfare Party) following the 1980 coup, and its later iteration, the Fazilet Partisi (The Virtue Party), which was then shut down. Saadet Partisi (The Felicity Party) followed, once again under Necmettin Erbakan, and most prominently, Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party) was founded in 2001, which then prompty rose to power.

The works by Nilbar Güreş in the exhibition explore the areas of freedom and resistance created by women in the narrow space left to them in a male dominated society when they have migrated to the city and are squeezed in by different lifestyles. Güreş shows us women who, rather than submit to victimization, ignore and deny power/pressure to live as they please. Rather than seeking their rights on the street, these women create a zone of freedom and violate power structures from within. (198)

I would add to Berktay's formulation and argue that Güres's approach not only encompasses different ways of being female, but also different ways of being queer. The images in Güreş's oeuvre call into question the tropes of a range of identity categories, from woman to queer, religious to national. Indeed, the women in Worship look nothing like the working, middle class and "modern" women envisioned by the Kemalist feminism – in fact, they look a lot more like the conservative women often championed as an ideal by the AKP (Justice and Development Party) regime of the 2000s, yet they inhabit a more radical place than both their professional urban counterparts, and the ideal chaste woman of the conservative right<sup>84</sup>. Staged in working class homes, mosques and peripheries of urban centers, Güreş's photographs speak from the margins of the nation and of Turkish society and complicate its by and large monolithic image and much like "The Quilt," "make legible non-heteronormative arrangements within rigidly heterosexual structures" (Gopinath 99). Güreş's strategically ambiguous depictions mean that her images could conceivably be read non-queerly – the two women gazing at the graffiti could be platonic friends or relatives, or the woman's head under her companion's skirt in the mosque can escape our attention, lost in the cacophony of patterns and colors of the photograph. This ambiguity serves as a destabilizing force both towards the images of the nation and of a

<sup>84.</sup> For more on various feminisms in Turkey, see Çağla Diner and Şule Toktaş's "Waves of Feminism in Turkey: Kemalist, Islamist and Kurdish women's movements in an era of globalization" in *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12:1 (2010), Aksu Bora and Koray Çalışkan's "What is Under a Headscarf? Neo-Islamist vs. Kemalist Conservatism in Turkey" in *The Arab Studies Journal* 15/16:1/2 (2008), Ayşe Durakbaşa's "Türk Modernleşmesinin Kamusal Alanı ve 'Kadın Yurttaş'" in *Birkaç Arpa Boyu...21. Yüzyıla Girerken Türkiye'de Feminist Çalışmalar* (2011).

globalized queerness, and allows for both a measure of safety and a new visual language. The depiction of queerness in Güreş's works is almost always cloaked (through ambiguity, visual cacophony or actual physical obstructions as in the hanging clothes in *Pattern*), resulting in images that are unmarked, or alternately, simultaneously marked as seemingly oppositional identity categories. Looking at these figures, then, allows us to see queerness in hitherto unrecognized identities and spaces, helping us escape the trappings of a more category-prone, western mode of sexual identity categorization. In other words, Güreş's art practice refuses to play by the rules of preexisting identity categories, and strives instead to formulate a specifically local queer aesthetics.

Another series by Güreş titled *Çırçır* exhibited in the 6<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale in 2010 demonstrates this art practice articulated by Berktay and positions us right at that almost invisible seam between female homosociality and female homoeroticism.<sup>85</sup> The series is set in a neighborhood on the outskirts of Istanbul, in and around a house that used to belong to one of Güreş's relatives, and depicts women (presumably from the artist's family) interacting with one another and the domestic spaces around them in unexpected ways. The title of the series refers to the machinery that separates cotton from its seeds and evokes a specifically female working class context, as it is mostly women who work in *çırçır* factories. *Çırçır* features the same group of women in various pairings and groupings. As the viewers move from one photograph to the next, they grow gradually more and more familiar with the women they see. By revisiting the same women over and over again, Güreş extends the intimacies she depicts to the viewers as well. We

\_

<sup>85.</sup> Gopinath points out that in Bollywood film, this is a willful strategy utilized by directors and spectators in order to evade censorship mechanisms: "Queer viewing strategies, then, make good on the potential queerness of female homosocial space as it is represented in popular Indian cinema. They do so by fetishizing those moments where female homosociality slips seamlessly into female homoeroticism; thus such strategies offer a way to bypass the censure, punishment, and disciplinary power that overt and explicitly marked representations of "deviant" bodies and desires inevitably entail. (113)

come to recognize their faces, we speculate on how they are related, and what they are thinking. From the snippets Güreş offers us, we try to discern their stories, trace them over the sequence of photographs. There is no single narrative that emerges from these images – rather, much like a cinematic montage, their power lays in the way in which the various elements of these images (the settings, the cultural referents etc.) accrete to form an alternative vision of the world that has the power to displace the heteropatriarchal spaces and narratives of the nation.

Almost all the photographs in this series express homoerotic undercurrents within domestic spaces and interactions, and lay bare a usually unseen world of woman-identified spaces and gatherings. Güreş turns her lens towards moments both playful and serious, and captures sceneries imbued with a queer energy that emerges from within and in spite of heteropatriarchal structures. In *Oturma Odasi*<sup>86</sup> (Living Room), four women sit on couches in a modest living room. The tea glasses on the table indicate the everyday activity of women having tea together, but their bodies are covered with drapes and revealing dresses are positioned on top of their covered bodies. (Figure 63) These drapes, which are a staple in most traditional Turkish homes, are traditionally meant to preserve the furniture and protect it from dirt and fading due to exposure to sunlight. In most homes, the drapes are lifted only when there are guests, or during special days like religious holidays. In Güreş's living room, however, it is not the sofas that are covered with the drapes, but the women themselves. The drapes at once conceal their individual identities and draw attention to their gender, and label them as objects that need to be protected or concealed. In tension with the drapes, the evening dresses highlight their sexuality and individuality, though they also conceal the women's true selves, which are visible through tiny slivers of socks, slippers or hems of loose pants not quite covered by the drapes. The way they all

\_

<sup>86.</sup> It is worth noting that in Turkish, "living room" is literally "sitting room" – which associates the space not with the more active term "living" but with the more passive "sitting."



Figure 63: Living Room, 2010

limply lean back in their couches further marks them as passive, calling to mind mannequins arranged in a domestic mise-en-scène. The framing and the women feel extremely staged, and are evocative of the similarly staged symmetry of *Worship*. The only visible face in the room is that of a man in a portrait above one of the couches, gazing down upon this oddly provocative scene. Though he cannot actually see these women, his gaze serves as a reminder of a patriarchal figure – through this composition, Güreş hints at the unexpected intimacies and sexual overtures that take might place (in this case, literally) right under his nose. Güreş offers us a disconcerting tableau that oscillates between revealing and concealing the sexuality of these women. They are at once modest and sensual, which visually makes concrete the conflicting expectations imposed upon their bodies by society. As in other photographs by Güreş, their bodies are obscured and their gazes turned away from us, implying a sense of privacy. Hidden behind an everyday domestic act, these women play out the conflicting roles imposed upon them in each other's

presence and possibly *for* each other, and transform hetero-patriarchal expectations and scripts into a domestic scene rife with homoerotic intimacy.

In their article "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?" Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner characterize the function of queer commentary as driving "into visibility both the cultural production of sexuality and the social context of feeling" (347). Living Room fixes our gaze onto a telling moment in which the constructedness of women's sexuality as symbolized by the dresses and in contradistinction with that, the enforced modesty as symbolized by the drapes, is laid bare for the audience to see. The women in the photograph are obscured but their predicament is made all too visible – we do not see their individual faces, but we do notice the cloths (both the drapes and the dresses) that are forced upon them, and which disclose the tension between various identities ascribed to women. In an article on Güreş's treatment of visibility and invisibility, curator Mihnea Mircan mentions the way in which the camouflage of various draperies, textiles and veils in various textures and patterns renders the women underneath them "indistinguishable from their veils" and produce "continuities... between body and place" (85). This camouflage functions in a number of ways: in Pattern, for instance, it is a measure of protection from the potentially objectifying gaze of the audience; in Worship, it works to create a sense of congruity between the institutionalized religious space and the alternative religious practice enacted by the women; and conversely in *Living Room*, it becomes an oppressive device that erases the subjectivities of the women, much like the domestic spaces and rituals that dictate the majority of their lives. The motif of veiling and unveiling recurs throughout Güreş's work, not just in *TrabZone* and *Çırçır Series*, but also in a video performance Soyunma (Undressing) in which the artist continually takes off veil after veil, while reciting the names of her matrilineal ancestors, and in her performance pieces enacted in Fatih, Üsküdar and

Beşiktaş neighborhoods where she strips down a wedding dress to reveal a professional boxing outfit. Mircan reads *Living Room* as the women participating in the "accretion of stereotypes and sedimented 'common sense' about" their own identities (85) but the larger context of veiling and unveiling in Güreş's work, which is not always religious in nature, suggests otherwise. Rather, the drapes and the veils in the photographs function on multiple levels wherein they reveal just as much as they conceal. Through compositions that visually draw our attention to these fabrics, dresses, and costumes, Güreş emphasizes their artificiality. Below them, perhaps just as a contour as in *Living Room* or as a whole new personality (like the boxer outfit that emerges from underneath a wedding dress in her public performances) lie the actual bodies of these women, which signify so much more.

In what is perhaps the most joyous work in the Çırçır series, *Toplanma* (The Gathering), Nilbar Güreş photographs a group of women sitting in a circle under a pavilion. (Figure 64) The pavilion is adorned with bright and shiny New Year's decorations and there is a microphone set



Figure 64: Gathering, 2010

up for one of the women, who appears to be singing. Around her, a diverse group of women listen and keep tempo. There are young and old women, urban and rural ones, some religious and some non-religious, all of whom are caught mid-action, laughing, clapping, and smiling.

Unlike the previous works I have discussed, *The Gathering* depicts not an intensely quiet intimacy between women or an unexpected encounter, but a joyous celebration — a gathering of women in the woods, singing in a brightly lit pavilion in an otherwise dark and deserted place.

We are no longer in the static rigidity of *Living Room*, but rather among a group so lively that it is almost impossible to imagine them sitting silently underneath the drapes. What is striking about this work is how dynamic it is — it points not at ambiguous moments captured by the artist's camera but to a shared joy unfolding before our eyes. We do not know what they are celebrating, or whether this is a common occurrence in their lives. By bringing together these women under the same roof, Güreş makes visible the possibility of intimacies and solidarity between women of disparate backgrounds, and offers a discursive intervention to domestic locales traditionally organizes around hetero-patriarchal principles.

Another photograph in the series, *Göğüsler* (Breasts), depicts two women standing atop a dirt hill from a low camera angle, baring their breasts to one another by stretching open the necklines of their blouses. (Figure 65) Both wear modest clothing, though the one on the right, whom we have previously seen in *The Gathering*, is more traditional in terms of her style. Their defiant postures, the way they lean into one another in a gesture reminiscent of dancing and the eye contact create an intimate atmosphere. The framing and the low angle of the camera keep the focus entirely on the connection between the two women who are silhouetted by a bright and cloudy sky. Their bodies and faces are relatively in the dark; instead the light from behind



Figure 65: Breasts, 2010

illuminates their reddish brown hair, drawing our eye to the leaning motion of the woman on the left. They are outside, in a public space but they seem to be completely alone and focused on one another, much like the women in Güreş's other works. And once again like the other women, they avoid the audience's gaze, leaving the spectator with the feeling that they are witnessing a private moment, that the intimacy in the photograph is not meant for us at all, but for the women themselves. By baring themselves to one another, the two women in *Breasts* create a private space, a private moment between them, to which we bear witness as outsiders.

The two women in *Breasts* make a comeback in the diptych *Söz* (A Promise). (Figure 66) They are once again on the dirt hill, though this time the camera is farther away, allowing us to see the infrastructure construction behind them, which provides a gray background. The women are depicted mid-motion, slipping golden bracelets onto each other's wrists, which to a Turkish audience, signals the ritual of a matrimonial promise. Traditionally, during the promise



Figure 66: A Promise, 2010

ceremony, the groom and the groom's family give the bride-to-be jewelry, most likely golden bracelets and necklaces. The scene is thus ambiguous – we cannot tell whether one of the women is part of the unseen groom's family, or whether she, herself, is being promised to the other woman. They are once again in public but seemingly alone, inflecting this traditional encounter, which usually takes place in the presence of families, with an uncanny feeling.

The diptych is called simply *A Promise*, but a promise of what? The second panel offers us a possible answer. The camera is now even further away, and we see an oddly staged tableau of women in the grass below the dirt hill. Five women, presumably naked, lie intertwined with each other under a comforter, while one woman stands guard by them, her posture defiantly triumphant. The distance between the camera and the scene evoke a sense of voyeurism, while the hill that seems to be almost cascading down towards them creates an ominous backdrop.

Among the rubble of urban gentrification, at the foot of hills that seem just about to come down upon them, these women sleep peacefully in each other's arms, watched over by a female guardian. Combined with the first panel of the diptych, then, this scene points at the enclaves of female intimacy even among the destruction wrought upon these working class communities, out in the open, protected and sanctioned by women themselves. The promise of the title seems to be one of deep commitment to these woman-identified and markedly homoerotic intimacies.

A Promise speaks to a number of issues I have previously touched on in this chapter — disidentification, queer culture building, and queering domestic and traditional spaces, just to name a few. In Disidentifications, Jose Esteban Munoz characterizes disidentificatory performances as performances that "disassemble (majoritarian) sphere of publicity and use its parts to build an alternative reality" (196). A Promise, along with the next photograph I will attend to Demand More!, engages in such a dissembly of majoritarian, traditional culture in order to make from its parts a queer alternate reality. At once partaking in tradition and rewriting it, Güreş's image flips the heteronormative assumptions and scripts of the nation and inspires in the audience an automatic recognition of this custom. In a way, she reconfigures this promise ceremony as something that can expand beyond its heteronormative context. In a move similar to that of queer culture building which Berlant and Warner reference in "Sex in Public," Güreş's image refuses to privilege heterosexual couple as the default referent by visually enacting "changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture and sex" (548) and queering a traditional practice.

In the final image from the *Çırçır* series that I would like to turn to, *Demand More!*, we see two women, one conventionally feminine and one conventionally masculine, coo over a small baby in a sparsely decorated room. (Figure 67) Folded bedding dominates the center of the

image behind which the couple stands, and they are framed on one side by an exercise equipment and the windows, and on the other a large expanse of wall adorned with the artist's own exhibition poster (her name strategically covered), what appear to be a child's doodles, a dried



Figure 67: Demand More! 2010

rose and posters and calendars of Tarkan, a popular music star known for his androgynous image. On the ground and parallel to the wall, the diagonal of the vacuum cleaner also directs our eyes to the couple in the middle. As with *Ayshe Loves Fatma* and *A Promise*, the nature of their relationship is ambiguous, but the gender presentation of the two women complicates the image further. At first glance, the masculine presentation of the woman on the right may call to mind countless images of a heterosexual couple gazing at their child, while upon second look the image is queered through our realization that we are looking at two women. Whether a masculine-of-center heterosexual woman, a butch aunt or a queer mother, the presence of the non-conventional presenting figure destabilizes the notion of the home as a heterosexual locale.

The married home and the child's room become potential sites of not just homoerotic desire but also of a whole life built together by women. The title tells us to demand more – more for the newborn children who have little, or whose homes are being evacuated because of urban gentrification, demand more for these women who must provide for these children, demand more for these women for themselves, demand more, perhaps, than the heterosexist narrative that we have been sold by our communities, and by the nation state.

Güreş's works systematically dissemble familiar locales and scripts of everyday life in Turkey and imbue them with a queer energy that challenges the very tenets and ideologies they are founded upon. However, this is not simply a project of an aimless destruction or a critique without an alternative vision - together, these images offer their audiences a montage of a localized, indigenous queer existence that is unconcerned with the seeming rigidity of the categories they complicate. This vision is doubly alternative – it rewrites everyday scenes from the cultural landscape of Turkey and reconfigures them as moments of resistance against heteronormative and patriarchal scripts; and it contests and variegates western notions of queerness. In a certain sense, Güreş's photographs, which take their power in part from their realist style, can be read as a mode of writing into history, into the visual archive of Turkey, homoerotic intimacies and desires among women. These photographs, by discursively making permanent these moments of queer existence, encapsulate a local queer aesthetics that takes its bearings not from westernized images of queerness, but from a local visual vocabulary. They offer us visuals that are at one familiar and unfamiliar – they hearken to sexual identity

-

<sup>87.</sup> It might be important to note that this is a trend that is present in a number of non-western queer artistic contexts. Zanele Muholi of South Africa, for instance, embarks upon a similar project with her photographs of lesbians and transgender women in South Africa. Gabeba Baderoon characterizes her work as "reversing a pattern of absences in the visual archive" and "finding a history in which she is a part and which would also allow her to envisage a future." (403)

categories we know and recognize, and yet they disobey the rules just enough to make us feel unsettled. As I have argued in this chapter, the interactions and encounters presented in these works can be considered ways of turning the stable, situated, sanctioned and proper places of the dominant order into personal, intimate, unordered and homoerotic spaces. Occupying a space, laying a claim to it, is an exercise of power, and of visibility. Though the scenes themselves are fleeting, temporary, the narratives they enact are forever inscribed through the artist's medium within the artistic history of Turkey, and within the minds of those who gaze upon them. They stand testimony to the possibility of desire experienced differently – not elsewhere, in other worlds and contexts but right here, in our own.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I advocate for a local queer aesthetics and theory that takes its bearings from the particularities of the local cultures, religions, ethnicities, politics and visual lexicons. I propose this not to replace current epistemologies of queerness and non-normative sexualities, but rather to provincialize the dominant discourses that shape the field of queer studies and gender and sexuality studies in order to make space for a wide range of new epistemologies that can help us interrogate our own assumptions regarding expressions, whether artistic, political or personal, of gender and sexual identity. These new epistemologies need not be entirely indigenous models – indeed, most of the cultural productions I analyze in this dissertation exhibit hybrid, conglomerate or concurrent modes of articulating non-normative sexualities. This intermingling of various epistemologies, lexicons and formulations allow us to see the points of tension or complicity between global, transnational and local discourses of gender and sexuality, which in turn helps us map out the constantly shifting dynamics between sexual identities and ethnic, national, religious, cultural and political ones.

Without mapping these intersections, we cannot have a clear sense of the complexity of the forces that play upon both queer individuals and queer works of art, both of which must constantly negotiate these forces in order to exist. My dissertation thus necessarily continually asks questions regarding the politics of visibility, conditions of belonging and strategies of survival within the constraints of nation states and seeks to make explicit the radical potential of

speaking back to the ideologies of the nation state and the limitations of Western European and North American scholarship on the subjects of gender and sexuality alike.

The present study constitutes one such attempt to rethink queer theory and aesthetics by taking previously understudied regions and artistic traditions as a starting point. In addition to paying attention to how queer cultural productions from these regions disrupt dominant national narratives, it also asks how we can undertake academic and activist work in gender and sexualities without reenacting East/West binaries and colonial power dynamics that tokenize non-western queer individuals and artifacts and approach them ethnographically, rather than as potential sites of producing theory. That being said, it only elucidates a small piece of the larger queer cultural histories that exist in Turkey or in the former Yugoslavia and focuses on the particularities of a specific set of queer cultural productions and what they allow us to see about queerness outside of the global north, rather than presenting itself as a comprehensive study of queer culture in Turkey and the former Yugoslavia. The reason for that is twofold: One, to me as a scholar with a comparative literature training, the attention to those particularities and the wealth of information close reading can provide constitute the essence of my methodology. Two, the archives of primary materials I work with are often spotty, the scholarship often not comprehensive.

Both in Turkey and in the various countries of the former Yugoslavia, there are no published and comprehensive scholarly studies of queer history – much of the queer history that made it into this dissertation came from scholarly studies of specific subcultures and cultural materials, queer blogs, social media posts and magazines such as *Kaos GL*, conversations with activists, artists and other members of the queer community in these regions, and my own experiences living in these countries as a queer woman. While methodologies like oral histories

and digital historiography have become part and parcel of more recent feminist and queer microhistory projects and will likely comprise the core of a queer history of Turkey and the former Yugoslavia when written, the way I have used them in this dissertation only hints at the possibilities these new archives and methodologies can afford us. The lack of a critical and comprehensive history of queer culture and movements in these regions presented a challenge to my project, but more importantly, it revealed a more urgent fact about the state of queer studies in the Balkans and Turkey: that in order for a local queer aesthetics and theory to thrive, we must write comprehensive and critical histories of queer existence in all of its facets so that we may situate the theory within the particularities of the local contexts in meaningful and productive ways. And we must do so using a range of methodologies that can adapt to the constantly shifting natures of the digital and oral archives.

This is no small feat. It is not only queer histories in these regions that have gaps and ruptures, but the national and regional histories themselves. Riddled as they are with state violence, ethnic cleansing, genocide, demographic engineering and strong nationalist sentiments, the histories of Turkey and the former Yugoslavia often present conflicting accounts, or else erase entire minority groups and atrocities committed against them from official histories the states. This presents a challenge to the would-be queer historian as well, who must navigate these myriad "official" narratives to situate a history of queerness within the political, social, cultural, national and transnational histories at hand. In other words, writing the queer histories of these regions is not just filling the gaps in existing histories, but challenging the often racist, xenophobic, sexist and heterosexist premises of existing histories as well.

Finally, the archives from which these histories must be written present their own challenges. In Turkey, for instance, a lot of the Ministry of Culture documents are either not

made available or are redacted, and ministry officials are not particularly helpful to scholars who would like to scrutinize funding or direct and indirect censorship decisions made by the ministry. In most state-run archives, researchers must also provide their name, national identity number, address and their research topic if they are to receive access to the materials they seek. While this has not posed a barrier beyond intense discomfort to me personally, many researcher friends have been denied access or else have risked being put on lists for researching topics that go against official state histories. In a similar and seemingly innocuous bureaucratic hurdle, the Yugoslav Film Archives in Belgrade similarly ask for passport information of any foreign researcher who would like to have access to their documents, with little to no explanation as to what this information might be used for or how long it might be stored. Another significant challenge of working with archives in the former Yugoslavia is, of course, the effects of the Yugoslav Wars that ravaged the region throughout the 1990s. Many archives, including the Sarajevo City Hall with its extensive library, were destroyed during the war, leaving a gap in the political, cultural, artistic and social history of the region. Finally, for researchers who hold passports from non-European Union countries like me, the process of obtaining a Schengen visa for EU countries such as Croatia and Slovenia is an added bureaucratic and financial hurdle to accessing relevant archives – one which I, unfortunately, was not able to clear.

Despite these challenges I have outlined, however, there is still a wealth of scholarly, artistic, historical and cultural archives in my chosen regions. Not all of these fascinating materials I was able to find made it into the final version of this dissertation, though they will no doubt form the foundations of my future work. One future avenue of research, of course, is queer literature from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia, of which there is a not insignificant amount. Queer themes and characters have been taken up by authors and poets as diverse as Murathan

Mungan, Attilâ İlhan, küçük İskender, Ahmet Güntan, Perihan Mağden and Sema Kaygusuz in Turkey; and Vjeran Miladinović, Suzana Tratnik, Ajla Terzić, Boško Tokin, Miloš Mrvošević in the former Yugoslavia. As is the case with the films from either region, the novels and poems cover a diverse range from queer characters only being used as sensational props, to centering queer experiences as the driving force of the narrative. In addition to these authors, both Turkey and the former Yugoslavia boast LGBTQ and queer collectives that publish short story collections by emerging authors, which bring together queer narratives based on various themes such as "coming out" or "women loving women."

The literary, artistic, activist and legal documents produced by these organizations also comprise a significant portion of the existing queer archives in Turkey and the former Yugoslavia. Lambaistanbul, the largest LGBTI organization in Istanbul, for instance, has a variety of publications that range from pamphlets on coming out to parents and safe sex practices for LGBTI communities, to results of fieldwork conducted with trans\* and LGBTI communities in Istanbul. Another organization in Istanbul, SPoD (Social Policies, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association) has manuals for people who are transitioning that focus on medical, legal and social aspects of the process in Turkey, legal and activist reports on LGBTI rights and education, politics, housing and the medical establishment in Turkey, all of which are compiled and written by staff and volunteers. These documents, produced by the LGBTQ community in Turkey, work towards creating a critical history of the experiences of LGBTQ people. In addition to these kinds of publications, there are also a number of LGBTQ-focused magazines currently being published and circulated in Turkey, such as the Ankara-based LGBT organization Kaos GL's print magazine Kaos GL, which has been running since 1994 and its scholarly counterpart  $Kaos Q^+$ , which has been running since 2014, and other online magazines

such as GMag, Gaia, GZone and a handful of short-lived zines and magazines which can be traced in the archives of the aforementioned organizations, or in the Women's Library in Balat. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the independent feminist organization Sarajevski Otvoreni Centar (Sarajevo Open Center) has taken the lead on conducting research and publishing reports on LGBTI issues, ranging from domestic violence to gender affirmation process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, from annual LGBTI rights reports in the country to same-sex unions and marriages in the broader region. Sarajevski Otvoreni Centar has also published collections of short stories by women who love women and a glossary of LGBT culture that touches on both global and local LGBT history, culture and activism. Its sister organization, Fondacija CURE, also boasts a number of publications including human and women's rights reports, feminist dictionaries and histories and feminist and queer poetry by women. In Serbia, Labris, an organization for lesbian human rights, has published a collection of short stories by lesbians in the former Yugoslavia, as well as a separate volume on coming out in Serbia, specifically. Together, these publications offer a range of scholarly, artistic, literary and activist voices that speak to experiences of sexual minorities in Turkey and the former Yugoslavia, and will no doubt be a fruitful archive for scholars who wish to focus on nonfiction narratives of queerness in the region.

One question that emerges from these archives and this dissertation alike, is the question of translation. Not only are the majority of these publications not available in English, the ones that are translated point to the difficulties of using gender and sexual terminology that was coined in a different part of the world, within a vastly different social, political, historical, economic and linguistic context. While I touch on this issue in my introduction and throughout my dissertation, the intersection of translation studies and queer studies is an area I have not yet explored fully. Bringing translation studies and queer studies together is not only a productive

and fascinating avenue of research, but also absolutely imperative when we are dealing with texts and cultural materials that are produced in languages other than English. Without a critical eye on the very terminologies we use to talk about sexual minorities in other social, political, linguistic, national and religious contexts, we cannot help but reinforce the binaries, assumptions, premises and blindspots of Western European and North American queer and gender studies. It is only through a careful attention to the way we define, formulate and express gendered and sexual identities and experiences can we begin to challenge the assumed universality of ideas, theories, aesthetics and terminologies coined in a monolingual and Anglo-Saxon context. This work can take many forms, including translating these local archives to various languages of the region as well as dominant languages of gender and queer studies, analyzing existing scholarly, artistic and activist materials with an eye towards the language they use and the discourses that language invokes, considering the politics of translation between the global south and the global north, using our linguistic and cultural experiences to expose the blindspots created by the structures Anglo-Saxon roots of gendered and sexual terminology, and re-theorizing queer and trans\* experiences based on these new perspectives.

Limited in its scope as this dissertation is to visual materials, its main scholarly and activist claim is that close readings and critical analyses of "local" queer materials that emerge from linguistic, national, cultural, political, artistic and religious contexts of regions outside of the global north can help us rethink the assumptions, concepts, terminology, aesthetics and theory of gender and queer studies writ large. I argue that paying attention to the particularities of these regions both enrich local queer archives that are still underresearched, and make possible new critical perspectives that allow us to interrogate our own and each other's assumptions regarding gender and sexuality. As rich as the field of queer scholarship has grown

over the past few decades through its engagements with a range of different fields like animal studies, digital humanities and disability studies, it can only retain its critical, provocative and subversive edge if it is willing to step outside of the epistemological and archival confines of the global north, and engage with area studies and translation studies as a new frontier. What the present work attempts to do is one such engagement. By bringing together close readings of queer cultural productions from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia with a consideration of their linguistic, political, national, cultural and religious contexts, I aim to go beyond monolingual, monocultural and North American/Western European scholarship of gender and sexuality. I emphasize the local, regional, national and transnational discourses in which these texts are embroiled in order to highlight the complexity of the ways in which scholars, activists, artists and writers conceptualize gender and sexual identities and to point at new avenues of research in queer studies and theory that take their bearings from these conversations.

## **Bibliography**

2 Gemi Yanyana. Directed by Atıf Yılmaz. Efe Film, 1963.

2 Genç Kız. Directed by Kutluğ Ataman. Yalan Dünya, 2005.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998.

Akçam, Taner. From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide. London: Zed Books, 2004.

Aksu, Sezen. "Lale Devri." Yürüyorum Düş Bahçeleri 'nde. 2009.

Altınay, Ayşe Gül. *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism, Gender and Education in Turkey*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Altınay, Rüstem Ertuğ. "Reconstructing the Transgender Self as a Muslim, Nationalist, Upperclass Woman: The Case of Bülent Ersoy." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36:3&4, 2008.

Altman, Dennis. "Rupture or Continuity: The Internationalization of Gay Identities." *Social Text* 48, 1996, pp. 77-94.

Amer, Sahar. "Naming to Empower: Lesbianism in the Arab Islamicate World Today." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 16:4, 2012, pp. 381-397.

Anayasa Mahkemesi Kararı. [Constitutional Court Decision]. (2015) T.C. Resmi Gazete [Official Gazette], 29330, 18 April 2015.

And, Metin. A Pictorial History of Turkish Dancing. Dost, 1976, pp. 141.

Arman, Ayşe. "Dürüst olmak mı önemli hayatta kalmak mı?" *Hürriyet*, 25 September 2011. www.hurriyet.com.tr/durust-olmak-mi-onemli-hayatta-kalmak-mi-18820704. Accessed 30 December 2017.

Arondekar, Anjali and Geeta Patel. "Area Impossible: Notes toward an Introduction." *GLQ* 22:2, 151-171, 2016.

Arsić, Branka. "Queer Serbs." *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* edited by Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić, 2002, pp. 254-277.

Arslan, Savaş. Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010.

"AYM'den Genel Ahlak Kararı." *Sendika*. 20 April 2015. www.sendika62.org/2015/04/aymdengenel-ahlak-karari-dogal-olmayan-iliskiye-dair-ses-yazi-ve-goruntu-bulundurmaya-hapis-cezasi-258336/. Accessed 8 March 2018.

Babuscio, Jack. "The Cinema of Camp (aka Camp and the Gay Sensibility)." *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, edited by Fabio Cleto. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1999.

Baderoon, Gabeba. "'Gender within Gender': Zanele Muholi's Images of Trans Being and Becoming." *Feminist Studies* 37:2, 390-416, 2011.

Bakić-Hayden, Milica. "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia." *Slavic Review* 54:4, 1995, pp. 917-931.

Başaran, Oyman. "'You Are Like a Virus:' Dangerous Bodies and Military Medical Authority in Turkey." *Gender and Society* 28:4, 2014.

Bellour, Raymond. "Psychosis, Neurosis, Perversion," Camera Obscura 3/4, 1979, pp 97.

Bereket T and Adam B. "The emergence of gay identities in Turkey." *Sexualities* 9:2, 2006, pp. 131–151.

Bereket T and Adam B. "Navigating Islam and same-sex liaisons among men in Turkey." *Journal of Homosexuality* 55:2, 2008, pp. 204–222.

Berktay, Fatmagül. "Dream and Reality or the Endless Journey to the Reality of Dreams." *Hayal ve Hakikat: Türkiye'den Modern ve Çağdaş Kadın Sanatçılar* [Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey]. Ed. Eskinat Esin. İstanbul: İstanbul Modern, 2011, pp. 26-41.

Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry* 24:2, Intimacy, 1998, pp. 547-566.

Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?" *PMLA* 110, 1995, pp 343-349.

Birch, Nicholas. "Was Ahmet Yıldız the victim of Turkey's first gay honour killing?" *Independent*, 19 July 2008.

Boone, Joseph A. *The Homoerotics of Orientalism: Mappings of Male Desire in Narratives of the Near and Middle East.* Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 102.

Bora, Aksu and Koray Çalışkan. "What is Under a Headscarf? Neo-Islamist vs. Kemalist Conservatism in Turkey." *The Arab Studies Journal* 15/16:1/2, 2008.

Clarke, Cheryl. "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance." *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua. Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1981.

Chugtai, Ismat. The Quilt and Other Studies. Bronx: Sheep Meadow Press, 1990.

Core, Philip. "From Camp: The Lie That Tells The Truth." *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* edited by Fabio Cleto, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1999.

Çakırlar, Cüneyt, and Serkan Delice, eds. *Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye'de Queer Kültür Ve Muhalefet*. Beyoglu, Istanbul: Metis, 2012.

de Certeau, Michel. The Writing of History. New York: Columbia UP, 1988.

de Lauretis, Teresa. "Film and the Visible." *How Do I Look?: Queer Film and Video* edited by Bad Object Choices. Seattle: Bay, 1991.

---. "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation." Theatre Journal 40:2, 1988, pp. 155-177.

Diawara, Manthia. "Black British Cinema: Spectatorship and Identity Formation in Territories." *Public Culture* 3:1, 1990, pp. 33-48.

Diner, Çağla and Şule Toktaş. "Waves of Feminism in Turkey: Kemalist, Islamist and Kurdish women's movements in an era of globalization." *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12:1, 2010.

Diši duboko. Directed by Dragan Marinković. Norga Investment, 2004.

Doane, Mary Ann. "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator." *Screen* 23: 3-4, 1982, pp. 78.

Dönmez-Colin, Gönül. *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance, Belonging*. London: Reaktion Books, 2008.

Dul Bir Kadın. Directed by Atıf Yılmaz. Mine Film, 1985.

Dumančić, Marko. "Dalibor Matanić: Fine Dead Girls (Fine mrtve djevojke, 2002)." *Croatian Film Today*. Croatian Film Association, 2012, pp. 153.

Durakbaşa, Ayşe. "Türk Modernleşmesinin Kamusal Alanı ve 'Kadın Yurttaş'" in *Birkaç Arpa Boyu...21. Yüzyıla Girerken Türkiye'de Feminist Çalışmalar* edited by Serpil Sancar. Istanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011, pp. 461-474.

Durmuşoğlu, Övül. "Nilbar Güreş." *Her Yerde, Evinde* [At Home, Wherever]. Beyoğlu, İstanbul, Turkey: Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık Ticaret ve Sanayi A.Ş., 2011.

El-Rouayheb, Khaled. *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Erdoğan, Nezih, and Deniz Özturk. "Turkish Cinema." *Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film*, edited by Oliver Leaman., Routledge, 2001, 533-74.

Filimlerin ve filim senaryolarının kontrolüne dair nizamname. [Ordinance regarding the control of films and film scenarios]. (1939) *T.C. Resmi Gazete* [Official Gazette], 4272, 31 July 1939.

Fine Mrtve Djevojke. Directed by Dalibor Matanić. Alka-Film Zagreb, 2002.

Foucault, Michel. Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Vintage Books, 1995.

---. "Of Other Places." *Diacritics* 16:1, 1986, pp. 22-27.

Gledhill, Christine. "Pleasurable Negotioations." Female Spectators: looking at film and television edited by Deirdre Pribram. Verso, 1988.

Gopinath, Gayatri. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. Print.

Go West. Dir. Ahmed Imamović. Comprex, 2005.

Göçek, Fatma Müge. *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence Against the Armenians, 1789-2009.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014.

Göle, Nilüfer. "Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries." *Public Culture* 14:1, 2002, pp.173-190.

Gramofon Avrat. Directed by Yusuf Kurçenli. Varlık Film, 1987.

Grewal, Inderpal and Caren Kaplan. "Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality." *GLQ* 7:4, 2001, pp. 663-679.

Güçlü, Özlem. "Maksadını Aşan Yakınlaşmalar: 2 Genc Kız Ve Vicdan'da Kadın Homososyalliğinin Sınırı." *Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye'de Queer Kültür Ve Muhalefet* edited by Cüneyt Çakırlar and Serkan Delice. Beyoğlu, İstanbul: Metis, 2012, pp. 427-48.

Güreş, Nilbar. A Promise. 2010. C-print, diptych. *Nilbar Güreş: Who Is The Subject?* By Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, and Nilbar Güreş. S.I.: Osmos, 2013.

- ---. Ayshe Loves Fatma. 2010. C-print. *Nilbar Güreş: Who Is The Subject?* By Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, and Nilbar Güreş. S.I.: Osmos, 2013.
- ---. Breasts. 2010. C-print. *Nilbar Güreş: Who Is The Subject?* By Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, and Nilbar Güreş. S.I.: Osmos, 2013.
- ---. Demand More!. 2010. C-print. *Nilbar Güreş: Who Is The Subject?* By Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, and Nilbar Güreş. S.I.: Osmos, 2013.
- ---. Pattern. 2010. C-print. *Nilbar Güreş: Who Is The Subject?* By Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, and Nilbar Güreş. S.I.: Osmos, 2013.
- ---. The Gathering, 2010. C-print. *Nilbar Güreş: Who Is The Subject?* By Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, and Nilbar Güreş. S.I.: Osmos, 2013.
- ---. The Living Room. 2010. C-print. *Nilbar Güreş: Who Is The Subject?* By Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, and Nilbar Güreş. S.I.: Osmos, 2013.
- ---. Women Only Section. 2010. C-print. *Nilbar Güreş: Who Is The Subject?* By Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, and Nilbar Güreş. S.I.: Osmos, 2013.
- ---. Worship. 2010. C-print. *Nilbar Güreş: Who Is The Subject?* By Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, and Nilbar Güreş. S.I.: Osmos, 2013. Print.

Gürler, Hülya. "Türkiye Sinema Tarihinde Lezbiyenler." *Kaos GL*. 24 July 2007. www.kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=1284. Accessed 23 April 2015.

Güven, Sevgi Kesim. "Zenne: 'Erkek'(çe) Ölmek Üzerine Bir Ağıt" *Gözdeki Kıymık: Yeni Türkiye Sinemasında Madun ve Maduniyet İmgeleri*. Metis Yayınları: İstanbul. 2016.

Haremde 4 Kadın. Directed by Halit Refiğ. Birsel Film, 1965.

Halberstam, Judith. The Queer Art of Failure. Duke UP: Durham. 2011.

Hall, Stuart. "Encoding, Decoding." *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Simon During. London: Routledge, 1999. 90-103.

Hoesterey, Ingeborg. *Pastiche: Cultural Memory in Art, Film, Literature*. Indiana UP: Bloomington. 2001.

Hollinger, Karen. Feminist Film Studies. London: Routledge, 2012. Print.

Howell, Martha C., and Walter Prevenier. From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001.

Iğsız, Aslı. *Humanism in Ruins: Entangled Legacies of the Greek-Turkish Population Exchange.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 2018.

"I Made a Film for Homophobes." *Spiegel*. 15 February 2012. www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/hit-serbian-comedy-at-the-berlinale-i-made-a-film-for-homophobes-a-815527.html. Accessed 9 March 2018.

İhtiras Fırtınası. Directed by Halit Refiğ. Erler Film, 1983.

Jenkins, Keith. Re-thinking History. London: Routledge, 1991.

Kajinić, Sanja. "'Battle for Sarajevo' as 'Metropolis': Closure of the First Queer Sarajevo Festival according to Liberal Press." *The Anthropology of East Europe Review.* 28:1, 2010.

Kandiyoti, Deniz. "Some Awkward Questions on Women and Modernity in Turkey." *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, edited by Lila Abu-Lughod. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1998, pp. 270-88.

Kaplan, E. Ann. "Is the Gaze Male?" *Film Theory Reader: Debates & Arguments*, edited by Marc Furstenau, Routledge, 2010, pp. 209-221.

Karaca, Banu. "Images delegitimized and discouraged: Explicitly Political Art and the Arbitrariness of the Unspeakable." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 45, 2011, pp. 155-184.

Kévorkian, Raymond. The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.

Kıral, Erden. "Yol Ismarlama Bir Filmdi." Interview by Sema Denker. *Hürriyet*.19 June 2008. www.hurriyet.com.tr/magazin/haber/9221294.asp. Accessed 7 Dec. 2014.

Kırkpınar, Dilek. *12 Eylül Darbesinin Gençlik Üzerindeki Etkileri*. 2009. 9 Eylül Üniversitesi, PhD dissertation.

Kontovas, Nicholas. *Lubunca: the historical development of Istanbul's queer slang and a social-functional approach to diachronic processes in language*. 2012. Indiana U, PhD dissertation.

Köçek. Directed by Nejat Saydam. Acar Film, 1975.

Kracauer, Siegfried, and Thomas Y. Levin. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995.

Kraliçe Fabrikada. Directed by Ali Kemal Güven. Digital Film Academy İstanbul, 2008.

"Kraliçe Fabrikada Değil, Sansürde." *Gecce*. 3 March 2009. www.gecce.com.tr/haber-kralice-fabrikada-degil-sansurde. Accessed 8 March 2018.

Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. Columbia UP, 1982.

Kuzniar, Alice A. The Queer German Cinema. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000.

Massad, Joseph Andoni. Desiring Arabs. Chicago: U of Chicago, 2007.

Massad, Joseph Andoni. "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World." *Public Culture* 14:2, 2002, pp. 361-385.

Mayer, Tamar. "Gender ironies of nationalism: setting the stage." *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, edited by Tamar Mayer. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, pp. 88-110.

Mädchen in Uniform. Directed by Leontine Sagan. Deutsche Film Gemeinschaft, 1931.

Mikdashi, Maya and Jasbir K. Puar. "Queer Theory and Permanent War." *GLQ* 22:2, 2016, pp. 215-222.

Mikus, Marek. "'State Pride': Politics of LGBT Rights and Democratisation in 'European Serbia." *East European Politics and Societies* 25, 2011, pp. 834-851.

Miller, D.A. "Anal Rope." *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* edited by Diana Fuss. Routledge, 1991, pp. 119-141.

Mircan, Mihnea. "Visiting the Viewpoints of Others: On the Camouflaged Portraits of Nilbar Güreş." *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 36, 2014, pp. 75-85.

Moraga, Cherrie. "La Güera." *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua. Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1981.

Moss, Kevin. "Queer as Metaphor: Representations of LGBT People in Central and Eastern European Film," *Beyond the Pink Curtain: Everyday Life of LGBT People in Eastern Europe* edited by Kuhar, Roman and Judit Takacs. Peace Institute (Politike Symposion): Ljubljana, 2006, pp. 249-267.

Moss, Kevin and Mima Simić. "Post-Communist Lavender Menace: Lesbians in Mainstream East European Film." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 15, 2011, pp. 271-283.

Mosse, George. *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998.

Mostov, Julie. "Sexing the nation/desexing the body: Politics of national identity in the former Yugoslavia." *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, edited by Tamar Mayer. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, pp. 88-110.

Mulvey, Laura. "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and the Narative Cinema' inspired by Duel in the Sun." *Feminism and Film Theory*, edited by Constance Penley. London: Routledge, 1988. 68-79.

---. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16:3, 1975, pp. 6-18.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1999.

Mutluer, Nil ed. *Cinsiyet Halleri: Türkiye'de Toplumsal Cinsiyetin Kesişim Sınırları*. Istanbul: Varlık Yayınları, 2008.

Otvorena. Directed by Momir Milošević. Cinnamon Production, 2016.

Öktem, Kerem. "The nation's imprint: demographic engineering and the change of toponymes in Republican Turkey." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 7, 2008.

Özbay Cenk. "Nocturnal queers: Rent boys' masculinity in Istanbul." *Sexualities* 13:5, 2010, pp. 645–663.

Özgüç, Agâh. Türk Sineması Sansür Dosyası: Sinema. Ankara: Koza Yayınları, 1976.

Öztek, Aydın. "Türkiye Sinemasında Eşcinsellik." *Kaos GL*. 7 September 2007. www.kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=1350. Accessed 23 April 2015.

Özyeğin, Gül. "Reading the closet through connectivity." *Social Identities* 18:2, 2012, pp. 201–222.

Parada. Directed by Srđan Dragojević. Filmstar, 2011.

Parla, Taha. Türkiye'nin Siyasal Rejimi, 1980-1989. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016.

Pierpoint, Claudia Roth. "Another Country: James Baldwin's Flight from America." *New Yorker*, 9 February 2009, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/02/09/ another-country. Accessed 16 March 2018.

Puar, Jasbir. "Rethinking Homonationalism." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, 2013, pp. 336-339.

Puar, Jasbir. Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times. Durham: Duke UP, 2007.

Radicalesbians. The Woman Identified Woman. Pittsburgh: Know, Inc., 1970.

Rich, Ruby. "From Repressive Tolerance to Erotic Liberation." *Jump Cut* 24-25, 1981, pp. 44-50.

Robins, Kevin and Asu Aksoy. "Deep Nation: The national question and Turkish cinema culture" in *Cinema and Nation* edited by Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie. London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 191-208.

Rumi. *The Book of Love. Poems of Ecstasy and Longing*. Translated by Coleman Barks. Harper Collins, San Francisco, 2003.

Savcı, Evren. "Who speaks the language of queer politics? Western knowledge, politico-cultural capital and belonging among urban queers in Turkey." *Sexualities* 19 (3): 369-387. 2016.

Shay, Anthony. *The Dangerous Lives of Public Performers: Dancing, Sex, and Entertainment in the Islamic World.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 25.

Simić, Tanja. "Kako shvatiti ličke redikule" *Nacional*. 30 June 2006. Arhiva.nacional.hr/clanak/46924/kako-shvatiti-licke-redikule. Accessed 12 May 2017.

Sinema Filmlerinin Değerlendirilmesi ve Sınıflandırılması ile Desteklenmesi Hakkında Kanun. [Law Regarding the Evaluation, Classification and Support of Films]. (2004) *T.C. Resmi Gazete* [Official Gazette], 25529, 21 July 2004.

Sinema Filmlerinin Desteklenmesi Hakkında Yönetmelik. [Regulations Regarding the Support of Films]. (2004) *T.C. Resmi Gazete* [Official Gazette], 25642, 13 November 2004.

Sinema, Video ve Müzik Eserlerinin Denetlenmesi Hakkında Yönetmelik'in Bazı Maddelerinde Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Yönetmelik. [Ordinance Regarding Certain Amendments to the Ordinance Regarding the Regulation of Works of Cinema, Video and Music]. (1988) *T.C. Resmi Gazete* [Official Gazette], 19957, 12 October 1988.

Sinema, Video ve Müzik Eserleri Kanunu. [Law Regarding Works of Cinema, Video and Music]. (1986) *T.C. Resmi Gazete* [Official Gazette], 19012, 7 February 1986.

"Sinemacilar Sansüre Karşı Özgür Sinema İçin Yürüyecek." *Kaos GL.* 17 April 2015. http://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=19217. Accessed 23 April 2015.

Smith, Michael P. Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001.

Stokes, Martin. *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music.* Chicago: Chicago UP, 2010.

Suny, Ronald Grigor. "They Can Live In the Desert But Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015.

Şenova, Başak. "Nilbar Güreş." İstanbul: Rampa İstanbul, 2012.

Teslimiyet. Directed by Emre Yalgın. Şafak Film, 2010.

Türk Ceza Kanunu (Turkish Penal Code). T.C. Resmi Gazete (Official Gazette), 26 September 2004.

Türk Medeni Kanunu (Turkish Civil Code). T.C. Resmi Gazete (Official Gazette), 8 December 2001, Article 56.

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası (Constitution of the Republic of Turkey). T.C. Resmi Gazete (Official Gazette), 7 November 1982, Article 41.

Üngör, Uğur Ümit. "Confiscation and Colonization: The Young Turk Seizure of Armenian Property." *The Armenian Weekly*, April 2011.

Ver Elini Istanbul. Directed by Aydın Arakon. Acar Film, 1962.

Vicdan. Directed by Erden Kıral. Fono Film, 2008.

Von Mitterstaedt, Juliane and Daniel Steinvorth. "The Gay Sons of Allah: Wave of Homophobia Sweeps the Muslim World." *Spiegel Online*. 17 September 2009. Accessed 30 December 2017.

Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books, 2002.

Yaşamın Kıyısında. Directed by Fatih Akın. Anka Film, 2007.

Yeğen, Mesut. "Prospective-Turks" or "pseudo-citizens": Kurds in Turkey." *The Middle East Journal* 63(4): 597-615, 2009.

Yosef, Raz. Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004.

Zengin, Aslı. "Violent Intimacies: Tactile State Power, Sex/Gender Transgression, and the Politics of Touch in Contemporary Turkey," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 12:2, 2016.

Zenne. Directed by Caner Alper and Mehmet Binay. CAM Films, 2011.

"Zenne Filmine Sansür Mü?" Nazlı Ilıcak. *Sabah*. 15 November 2011. www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/ilicak/2011/11/15/zenne-filmine-sansur-mu. Accessed 23 April 2015.

Zeydanlıoğlu, Welat. "The White Turkish Man's Burden": Orientalism, Kemalism and the Kurds in Turkey." *Neo-colonial Mentalities in Contemporary Europe? Language and Discourse in the Construction of Identities* edited by Guido Rings and Anne Ife, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008, pp. 155-174.

Zürcher, Erik. Turkey: A Modern History. London: IB Tauris, 2004.

Žarkov, Dubravka. *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-up of Yugoslavia*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007.