



**TURUN
YLIOPISTO**
UNIVERSITY
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INTIMATE HAPPENINGS

Uses of porn and other sexual media in Turkey

Ihsan Can Asman



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The originality of this publication has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

ISBN 978-951-29-9931-6 (PRINT)
ISBN 978-951-29-9932-3 (PDF)
ISSN 0082-6987 (Print)
ISSN 2343-3191 (Online)
Painosalama, Turku, Finland 2024

To Arman

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

Faculty of Humanities

School of History, Culture and Art Studies

Media Studies

IHSAN CAN ASMAN: Intimate Happenings. Uses of porn and other sexual media in Turkey

Doctoral Dissertation, 168 pp.

Doctoral Programme in History, Culture and Arts Studies (Juno)

October 2024

ABSTRACT

Studies on porn audiences and the uses of porn in non-Western contexts remain limited to this day. Embarking to address this theoretical gap, this article-based dissertation studies the uses of porn and other sexual media in Turkey, while further exploring the Turkish context through a historical lens. The study asks how to understand normativity and pleasure pertaining to sexual media in Turkey. It demonstrates the different ways of using porn as a spectator, which oscillate between pleasure and normativity in the Turkish context.

The dissertation is a qualitative study built upon Foucauldian understandings of power, actor-network theory, porn, and media studies. It analyses the uses of porn through eighteen interviewees' accounts but also sheds light on the governance of sexualities and sexual media through historical accounts. The Foucauldian framework informs how the study handles the notions related to power, such as norm, normativity, normalizing tendencies, and so forth, while actor-network theory is crucial for making sense of the spatiality of power's dispersal, which is pivotal to illuminate the networks through which the experiences of porn come into being. These networks not only include human actors, but they also cover a vast array of immaterial and inorganic entities, which for example, make internet infrastructure like underground cables and modems, or like traditional furniture and household objects that can ignite desires unexpectedly. Also, the notion of play was deployed to have a more nuanced understanding of the pleasure aspect. Thus, through these frameworks, the study elucidates not only how individuals navigate themselves between pleasure and normativity, but also how power exerts itself through the aggregation of different actors and networks. Finally, the dissertation uses narrative and thematic analyses for making sense of the interview data.

The dissertation mainly focuses on the narratives of the informants as well as the different historical periods in the late Ottoman period and modern Turkey. The analysis of the interviews reveals that the uses of porn in Turkey are multifaceted, echoing the findings of the recent scholarship on the mismatches between identity categories and desires, along with the multiplication and intensification of desires even when faced with the negative and dark affective registers. Also, an actor-network theory-informed approach to these interviews lays bare how constraining norms are enacted through different networks and how nonhuman actors can restrain pleasure or on the contrary, can make it blaze. Turning focus to the different

historical periods like the 19th century Ottoman Empire or the 70s “notorious” sex influx presents the peculiar and original dimensions of the Turkish context to the reader.

The dissertation offers to see online porn as a toy-like phenomenon by deploying a play-based agency and thus argues that consuming porn is often for the sake of pleasure, which can be intensified and/or blocked by different normative configurations. Therefore, the study concludes that online porn spectatorship is not a dull consumption, instead an imaginative, interpretive but also haptic experience that can lead to further sexual exploration. This argument also explains the reasons behind the potential and sometimes surprising mismatches between the sexual identity categories and the “pleasurable” content. It similarly debunks the overemphasized effects, of the so-called Islamization of Turkey and the Justice and Development Party’s censorship mechanisms, for the uses of porn and other sexual media in Turkey. Through these findings, the study challenges the idea that porn spectators are passive consumers by default and reveals the processes by which norms come into being.

KEYWORDS: porn studies, play, toy, actor-network theory, Turkey, normativity

TURUN YLIOPISTO

Humanistinen tiedekunta

Historian, kulttuurin ja taiteiden tutkimuksen laitos

Mediatutkimus

IHSAN CAN ASMAN: Intiimit tapahtumat: Pornografian ja muiden seksuaalisen median käyttö Turkissa

Väitöskirja, 168 s.

Historian, kulttuurin ja taiteiden tutkimuksen tohtoriohjelma (Juno)

Lokakuu 2024

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tutkimukset pornoyleisöistä ja pornon käytöstä muissa kuin länsimaisissa konteksteissa ovat tutkimuskirjallisuudessa vielä rajallisia. Tässä artikkelimuotoisessa väitöskirjassa tutkitaan pornon käyttöä Turkissa ja laajennetaan turkkilaista kontekstia historiallisesta näkökulmasta täydentäen katvetta tutkimuskirjallisuudessa. Tutkimuksessa kysytään, miten seksuaaliseen mediaan liittyvä normatiivisuus ja nautinto voidaan ymmärtää Turkissa sekä esitellään erilaisia tapoja käyttää pornoa katsojana, jotka vaihtelevat nautinnon ja normatiivisuuden välillä turkkilaisessa kontekstissa.

Väitöskirja on laadullinen tutkimus, joka pohjautuu Foucauldilaiseen käsitykseen vallasta, toimijaverkkoteoriaan, pornoon ja mediatutkimukseen. Siinä analysoidaan pornon käyttöä kahdeksantoista haastateltavan kertomusten avulla ja avataan seksuaalisuuden hallinnointia ja seksuaalista mediaa historiallisten kertomusten kautta. Valtaan liittyvät käsitteitä, kuten normi, normatiivisuus tai taipumuksien normalisointi käsitellään Foucauldilaisessa viitekehyksessä. Toimijaverkkoteoria on puolestaan ratkaisevassa asemassa vallan tilallisuuden sekä pornoon liittyvien kokemusten ja niistä muodostuvien verkostojen havainnollistamisessa. Näihin verkostoihin ei kuulu vain inhimillisiä toimijoita, vaan ne kattavat myös laajan joukon aineettomia ja epäorgaanisia kokonaisuuksia, jotka esimerkiksi muodostavat internetin infrastruktuurin, kuten maakaapelit ja modeemit, tai perinteiset huonekalut ja kotitalousesineet jotka voivat yllättäen syyttää halut. Lisäksi, tutkimuksessa käsitellään leikin käsitettä, jotta pornon nautintonäkökulmasta saadaan syvällisempi käsitys. Näiden viitekehysten perusteella tutkimuksessa selvennetään, miten yksilöt navigoivat nautinnon ja normatiivisuuden välillä, mutta myös miten valta ilmenee eri toimijoiden ja verkostojen yhdistymisen kautta. Lopuksi haastatteluaineiston tulkitsemiseksi tutkimuksessa käytetään narratiivisia ja temaatteja analyyssejä.

Väitöskirja keskittyy pääosin haastateltavien tarinoin, historiallisiin ajanjaksoihin myöhemmältä Ottomaanien ajanjaksolta ja nykyiseen Turkkiin. Haastattelujen analyysit paljastavat, että pornon käyttö Turkissa on monipuolista, ja se heijastelee viimeaikaisten tutkimuksien tuloksia identiteettikategorioiden ja halujen välisestä epäsuhtaisuudesta sekä halujen moninkertaistumisesta ja voimistumisesta, jopa kohdatessaan negatiiviset ja synkät affektiiviset rekisterit. Haastatteluiden käsitteleminen toimijaverkkoteorian näkökulmasta paljastaa kuinka pakottavat normit toteutuvat eri verkostoissa ja kuinka ei-inhimilliset toimijat voivat hillitä

mielihyvää tai päinvastoin saada sen syyttymään. Keskittyminen eri historiallisiin ajanjaksoihin, kuten 1800-luvun ottomaanien valtakuntaan tai 70-luvun "pahamaineiseen" seksivirtaan esittelee lukijalle Turkin kontekstin omituiset ja omaperäiset ulottuvuudet.

Väitöskirja tarjoaa hahmottamaan verkkopornon leumaisena ilmiönä leikki-pohjaisen toimijuuden avulla ja esittää että pornon kuluttaminen on usein nautintoa, jota voidaan tehostaa ja/tai estää erilaisilla normatiivisilla asetelmilla. Siksi tutkimuksessa todetaan, että verkkopornon katsominen ei ole tunnotonta kulutusta, vaan kekseliäs, tulkitseva, ja myös haptinen kokemus, joka voi johtaa seksuaaliseen etsintään. Tämä argumentti selittää myös syyt mahdollisiin ja joskus yllättäviin eroihin seksuaalisen identiteetin luokkien ja "nautinnollisen" sisällön välillä. Se kumoaa Turkin niin kutsutun islamisaation ja Oikeus- ja kehityspuolueen sensuuri-mekanismien ylikorostetut vaikutukset pornon ja muun seksuaalisen median käyttöön Turkissa. Näiden havaintojen kautta tutkimus haastaa ajatuksen siitä, että pornon katsojat ovat oletuksena passiivisia kuluttajia, ja paljastaa prosessit, joilla normit syntyvät.

ASIASANAT: pornotutkimus, leiki, lelu, toimijaverkkoteoria, Turkki, normatiivisuus

Acknowledgements

When I first became interested in doing a Ph.D. and while considering my options, I learned that doing a Ph.D., particularly in humanities, can become a very isolated experience in some European countries. And Finland was one of them. Even though in the end, it has been a bit of an isolated experience, mainly because of my introverted nature combined with Finnish winters, and the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the world in the middle of my research, I have not been lonely at all. Yes, it involved certain hardships and struggles, but several people have rendered this journey instructive, explorative, fulfilling, and even joyful and wondrous.

First, I would like to thank my marvellous supervisor, Susanna Paasonen. Dear Susanna, you are not just a brilliant, imaginative, and the most productive scholar that I have ever known; but also, a very humble, patient, and thoughtful advisor and teacher. Neither could this work have been completed, nor it would be as it is now if it were not for you. I have incredibly benefited from your vast knowledge, suggestions, encouragement, and any kind of support that a Ph.D. advisor could have ever given. Your scholarship started to guide and inspire me through your articles and books already when I was still in Istanbul ten years ago and never ceased to continue since then. Also, I cannot thank you enough for introducing me to like-minded scholars, pointing out countless other academia-related things, and of course, not letting me drown in the dreads of Finnish bureaucracy! There are many more things to thank, but briefly, you made my Ph.D. easier and certainly more fun than it might have been.

I also want to thank my co-advisor, Laura Saarenmaa. Although you became my advisor at the final stage of my Ph.D., I am nevertheless grateful to you for your help and always encouraging comments. The same concern goes for your kindness, which was always the case, even before you became my advisor. Similarly, I also want to express gratitude to my ex-co-advisor Kaarina Nikunen.

I am profoundly grateful to the pre-examiners of this dissertation Rebecca Sullivan and Giovanna Maina for their encouraging comments and insightful remarks. Their feedback not only made this dissertation better, but it has been equally motivating for me, as someone who is arguably in the early stages of his career. I

would also like to thank Professor Sullivan for accepting the invitation to act as the opponent in my public defence.

Special thanks go to all participants of this research. This dissertation has been inspired and built upon the valuable experiences that you were brave enough to share with me. Without you, there would not be any research at all.

The funding of my Ph.D. project was of course crucial, and I was privileged enough to receive multiple funding from different foundations and institutions. Therefore, I should express my gratitude to the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Turku University Foundation, and Turku University's Juno program which funded me for a year. Sincerely, without their financial support, this project's implementation and completion would have been impossible. I appreciate the efforts made by the editors and reviewers of the journals in which I have published my articles. Their valuable commentary on my work has been substantially helpful.

There are other people from the University of Turku to be mentioned both within and outside of our media studies department. First, I want to express my indebtedness to the participants of media studies research seminars: Mari Lehto, Valo Vähäpassi, Kaisu Hynnä-Granberg, Miia Siuttila, Heidi Mikkola, Golnar Gishnizjani, Mayara Araujo Caetano, Alekski Rennes, Lin Zhang, Aymeric Pantet, Mari Pajala and all other scholars/colleagues who have been present in the seminars throughout these last six years. Your collegial support and helpful insights have moved this research forward. Likewise, I am very grateful to Kaisu for agreeing to share her texts with me as an example anytime I asked, and to Sanna Spišák for her valuable contribution to the first sexuality course that I taught in the University of Turku. I also remain thankful to all the students who took that course and from whom I have learned a lot as well. That course, in many ways, has influenced this Ph.D. project in a good way and not only in terms of study credits.

I feel very fortunate to get to know amazing visiting scholars like Caroline Bem and Angelica Spampinato. Caroline, I want to thank you not only for your constructive criticism but also for your friendship during your time in Turku. And to Angelica: Although I got to know you after completing this dissertation, we have collected many lovely memories in such a short period! Your friendship and constant encouragement made the final days of the Ph.D. better!

Additionally, a special thanks go to Meri Heinonen, our program coordinator, who has been always there to help and ease the bureaucratic hassles in times of crisis, and all the fair-natured Finnish teachers I came across during my studies, who moved me a bit closer to the Finnish society, namely Veera Kaski, Niina Kekki, Emilia Hongisto and Päivi Paukku.

During my Ph.D., I have attended several conferences and workshops, from Gorizia to Paris which have all been helpful and informative, and thus put my dissertation in a good direction. Therefore, I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers of the MAGIS – International Film Studies Spring School, Giovanna Maina, and Federico Zecca; of the 3rd Sexual Cultures Conference, Susanna Paasonen; and finally, of Masculinities in Modern Turkey Workshop, Cenk Özbay, and Ozan Soybakış. My heartfelt greetings go to all the amazing scholars whom I have met during those trips. Also, thanks Ozan, not only for your invitation but also for your friendship that dates to the days of Galatasaray and all our occasional yet inspiring discussions about our research.

The emotional support of my dearest friends outside of the academy was decisive for the continuation of my dissertation and I am full of gratitude to all of them whose company kept me sane during all these years. To Timo, Sanna, Matti, Adriana, Arttu, Larisa, and Kalle: Thank you all for your friendship, for making my time in Turku way better, and for all our fun and pleasant times. And Hannah and Alekski, I am grateful for all our adventures so far and cannot wait for more to come. You have been wonderful friends all these years and have always been there whenever I needed your company. I feel like we will be heading back to the rough streets of Pori -or to Yharnam with Alekski- real soon! In addition, thank you Alekski very much for assisting me with the Finnish abstract, when no one else did! Beril, Hasan, Ayşegül, and Virginie thanks for your long-lasting beautiful friendship. Amazingly, we can always take up where we left off every time we meet. Also, an exceptional thanks go to all members of the Aral family, whose generosity kept me grounded when I was stuck in Turkey for six weeks due to the wonders of Migri. And of course, Kerim, my dear oldest and closest friend. Thanks for enduring me all these years. Our bromance has an exclusive place in my heart.

I feel so lucky to be born into the Asman family. Thanks to my sisters for their moral support. Zeynep and Aslihan, despite all our occasional problems, I love being your brother. Much love to my incredible parents Gülin and Mustafa. Thanks to you, I have grown up in an environment full of joy and love and have never been let down because of my curiosity. On the contrary, I have always felt your endless support, even when my dreams and goals sounded way too farfetched. There is simply no way to repay for all you did. I love you. You are literally the *raison d'être* of this whole dissertation.

Of course, my deepest gratitude goes to my beloved spouse Neşe, who has been the greatest companion -and köfte, meatball, lihapulla- ever. To share this life with you fills my heart with joy and soothes my restless soul. Thank you for believing in me and embracing all my different versions, including exceedingly dark ones. I could

not have achieved anything without your infinite love and tenderness. Seni çok seviyorum!

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my dearest friend Arman Soldin, who was killed in Chasiv Yar last year while covering the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a journalist. His sacrifice and bravery are grim reminders of the cost of freedom.

Turku, October 2024

Ihsan Can Asman

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List of Original Publications

This dissertation is based on the following original publications, which are referred to in the text by their Latin numerals:

- 1 Asman, Ihsan Can. 'Any performer you pick!' Playful manifestations of porn spectatorship. *Sexualities*, 2023; Volume 26, Issue 8: 893-908.
- 2 Asman, Ihsan Can. Root Rot: Obscenity and the Turkish Context. *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies*, in review.
- 3 Asman, Ihsan Can. 'How am I supposed to enjoy that?' Assemblages of porn spectatorship. *Porn Studies*, 2023: 1-14.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2023.2197912>
- 4 Asman, Ihsan Can. Once upon a time in Turkey: the sex influx, gender inequality, and revisiting past pornographies. *Porn Studies*, 2023; 10(4): 358-367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2023.2187870>

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1 Introduction to the research problem

When I first decided to get a master's degree in sociology, I knew it was also a decision of pursuing an academic career, a milestone that has to be achieved in order to continue with the Ph.D. However, sexuality was not one of my primary research interests in the first place, let alone online pornography, which is the main focus of this article-based dissertation. Daunted by the never-ending turmoil in the Turkish political landscape, I was more eager to study something "less politicized." I had already been intrigued by the symbolic interactionists and their way of executing micro-sociology during my earlier studies, and my research direction was leaning towards something similar, but this time in the online environment. At first, I was interested in MMORPG¹ video games. Yet, following the first year of my master's studies, I realized there was no one who could help me with MMORPGs at Bilgi University. Thus, after participating in many sexuality-centred courses,² I ended up choosing the uses of porn in Turkey as my research topic. Yes, it all started with my master's studies.

From the VCDs of (Bulvar) erotic newspapers³ in the late 1990s to porn aggregator sites in the 2010s, porn has always been in my life as a subsidiary to masturbation and other sexual acts. Similarly, but to a lesser extent, it has also been a means to dig out my own sexual self. It was with me in different periods of my life. In that sense, it was not that different from my relationship with video games, and considering its (social) prevalence, it was no doubt attractive sociologically. On top of that, porn seemed to be a "safer" topic to work with, for example, compared with studying the everyday interactions of the ethnic minorities in Turkey. However, this

¹ Abbreviation for massive multiplayer online role-playing games.

² Although it was called sociology, the master's program I completed at Bilgi University had a shared curriculum with cultural studies. It is worth noting that these courses come from that shared curriculum. Also, my current take on online porn is interdisciplinary, rather than building solely on sociology.

³ The Bulvar newspaper was an erotic/pornographic magazine/newspaper, which came with free softcore porn VCDs. Although I remember they were called Bulvar, it is highly possible that Bulvar became an umbrella term for all such magazines.

idea of hierarchy of safety originated from my inability back then to grasp how power relations function within a society, probably as a result of my self-identification as a heterosexual cis male.⁴ As Michel Foucault (1994, 240) put it, power relations are deep-rooted within the whole social network, thus there is not only one type of fundamental or primary power that dominates the society as a whole all the way to its lesser and lower elements. I was always interested in social inequalities, but perhaps unwittingly, I tended to attribute more importance to some than to others. Following Foucault, I soon realized this was troublesome: Prioritizing certain inequalities over others was misleading at best, because all of them are interlinked and formed by the same normative techno devices at the macro level. Once I started to work on the uses of porn and initially to sink into the sexual inequalities, the ways in which I had been misled became even more apparent.

The sole reason I ended up studying porn was not the sexuality courses I have been taking. My advisor at that time mentioned how porn provided new and arguably positive perspectives on the taboos around interracial relations back in the day among the American public. This intrigued me and set me on the course. Still, the sexual inequalities, the power relations in which they dwell and appear and their representations in contemporary porn were only my departure point. Later, I read more about porn and was supervised by Susanna Paasonen for this article-based dissertation; on one hand, I started to grasp that I have only scratched the tip of the iceberg: The different aspects, and dimensions of the uses, of contemporary online porn to analyse were almost limitless. As empirical inquiry has already documented, audience engagement with porn is far from being uniform (Smith, 2007; Barker 2014; Robards 2018; Neville 2018; Attwood et al. 2018; Attwood et al. 2021). For instance, porn consumption could be thought of as a response to boredom, a means for exploring “forbidden” domains and/or desires as well as sexual identity, a leisure choice and so on. What is understood as porn is contested too (Paasonen 2024).⁵ Moreover, seeing the theoretical endeavours for framing its involvement of affective engagements, from varying and contradicting emotions, playfulness to thrilling desires, visceral connections, bodily sensations, unexpectedness, and even dark and horrid feelings, fascinated me. So, there was a lot to explore, but maybe most importantly, I had become really motivated to understand what online porn spectatorship might be doing to the prevalent sexual norms in Turkey. Was it as

⁴ On the other hand, it is true that there is some sort of covert academic morality that implies that pornography fails short of being a part of more worthy and important vectors of social life (see: Nathaniel Burke, “Positionality and Pornography,” *Porn Studies* 1, no. 1–2 (January 2, 2014): 71–74); therefore, my take on my earlier stance might be an overstatement.

⁵ This is partly why I wanted to include “other” sexually explicit media in the research.

profound as the impact back in the US? Or did it have no impact at all? Maybe something in between—a bit of grey compared to the possible black-and-white, yes or no responses to these two questions? Curiosity was taking over.

This exploration, on the other hand, was difficult to say the least, ever since the first steps of the research. Above all, at the beginning of this process, porn studies was a nascent field and even sexuality studies in Turkey was scarce. These two points, especially the scarcity within the Turkish context, could have been thought major setbacks, and from time to time, I also thought so, because there were not many pioneers whose footsteps to follow. But this circumstance had its advantages too. First, I realized that the Turkish context was essentially a convenient setting for expanding the empirical focus beyond Western examples (albeit coming with some degree of uncertainty). Second, porn studies being a nascent but also an interdisciplinary field heralded a variety of paths this research could take. Inevitably, there was more space to experiment here than in more established disciplines.

However, one of the major reasons that porn studies was a nascent field is that online porn is a young phenomenon itself, and it has its own challenges when it comes to studying it. Maybe the most significant challenge was the technology itself: the constant change. Contemporary online porn cannot be thought about outside of the technological developments of the last four decades, such as the world wide web, and then the web 2.0, the advent of social media and prevalence of smart phones and many more. And just as Paasonen (2015, 703) underscores, these sorts of technologies alter and modify our everyday routines and embody potentialities. Because these technologies are fast-paced and ubiquitous, they are often difficult to track and study. Understandably, like many other social institutions, the academic world could lag technological developments that enable porn to thrive, in the sense of struggling to theorize about online porn and its everyday effects. Yet, our altered and modified routines and the potentialities they presage, of course, not only fed into the uncertainties but also pointed out the abundance that porn studies might possess, as porn was adapting itself in various forms to these developments. In short, there were many things to be curious about and it was, certainly becoming a lot more interesting than the MMORPGs.

In a way, my research inquiry was born out of this abundance, i.e., experimenting in a nascent field,⁶ countless possibilities, ways of analysing (online) porn due to the never-ending technological changes and the freshness of an understudied context and

⁶ Of course, at this point, it is lot more difficult to define porn studies as a nascent field. Porn Studies journal has been being published for more than a decade and Williams' *Porn Studies* anthology came out 20 years ago. However, when I started developing initial thoughts for this research, it was only 2014, and things were more “nascent” compared to today.

a bit of curiosity. However, although I emphasize the abundance and variation of paths that this research could have taken, I was always more interested in individuals' quotidian uses of porn rather than the porn itself or its ecosystem. This is probably due to my sociology background, and I believe my fondness for symbolic interactionists was decisive as mentioned. Certain scholars and what they did, such as Erving Goffman's take on stigma (1963) or Howard Becker's (1963) contributions on labelling theory through his research with jazz musicians and "potheads," have had a profound influence on me. Yet at the same time, as I discuss many times in this dissertation, the lack of spectators' voice in porn studies was being pointed out (Paasonen et al. 2015, 396; notable exceptions are Attwood 2005; Smith 2007; McKee et al. 2008; Barker 2014; Mondin 2014; Böhm et al. 2015; Ryberg 2015; Vörös 2015; Wood and Mowlabocus 2015 [whole Porn Studies issue]; Neville 2018; Robards 2018; Attwood et al. 2018; Henry and Talbot 2019, Attwood et al. 2021, and for non-Western contexts, see Jacobs 2012 and Goh 2017). These earlier influences and the problem of the lack of spectators in the previous scholarship are what committed me to studying the everyday uses of porn of "ordinary" people.

Building its foundations upon such a picture, this research sets out to answer the question of how to understand/conceptualize normativity and pleasure pertaining to sexual media in Turkey. By doing that, it not only contributes to the everlasting discussions within the gender/feminist (see Göle 2013; Direk 2007; Sancar 2009; Ozyegin 2009; Erdoğan and Gündoğdu 2020) and queer studies (Çakırlar and Delice 2012; Yardımcı and Güçlü 2013; Görkemli 2014; Darıcıoğlu 2015; Kramer 2022) fields in Turkey, as well as the scarce research on history of sexualities (Doğan 2019; Sarıtaş 2020) but is also incorporated into some current discussions in porn studies, such as bringing play conceptualizations to sexuality studies (Paasonen 2018) and the place of certain sociotechnical affordances of online porn that involves nonhuman entities (Martins 2019; Hernández 2019). Its general contribution to the audience studies regarding porn is also explicit.

In this first part of my article-based dissertation, I define and explain my research problem. However, it is built on a vast question, and it needs certain sub-questions to limit and disambiguate its scope.

1.1 Objectives and research questions

This research inquiry, through which I examine the very ways of individuals' engagement with online porn and other sexually explicit media, as noted, emphasizes the complexity and/or the non-uniformity of porn spectatorship experiences, and it must cover many different aspects and dimensions while being concise and specified. To do so, I ask four substantial sub-questions (SQ1, SQ2, SQ3 and SQ4) to cement the main research question (RQ). They are all presented in detail in Figure 1.

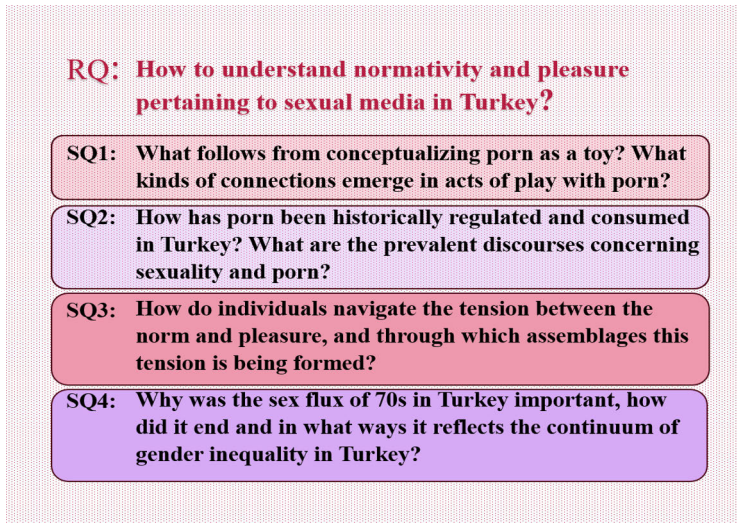


Figure 1.

SQs 2 and 4 set a departure point for introducing and surveying the Turkish context. Local histories and understandings, both the contemporary and the historical, are important to make sense of experiences of porn. Especially considering most of the work is being done within the North American context, the role of local histories and individual understanding in making sense of porn become even more important. Establishing the Turkish context and how normativity and pleasure dwell within also eases the hardships of studying the relationship between pleasure and norm, as well as affectivities that porn involves, by extending the empirical analysis through localities that are mostly unknown to readers from the Western world.

When it comes to questions like how sexualities are lived and experienced, there is an almost invisible line between the norm and the pleasure. The thin and often confused distinction between these two necessitates nuanced research. To capture this nuance, following Paasonen's (2018) recent call, I bring the theorizations of play to online porn and see what follows from conceptualizing porn as a toy. The theorizations of play and approaching porn as a toy crystallize the pleasure aspect of porn and help readers to make sense of the sexual likes of, for example, a feminist homosexual male porn spectator who fancies explicitly heterosexist porn content for the masturbatory desires of watching "raw male desire."

At the same time, the relationship between the norm/structure and the agency is a long-standing and heated debate in social sciences. The social power and its exertion through norms often appear in a self-styled manner in various research, as mysterious concepts function almost akin to some sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.

According to Bruno Latour (2005), this type of research should be called sociology of the social. For him, and other scholars who are affiliated with actor-network theory, “social” is not a substance like wood, etc., but is being formed within the associations that comprise alignments between humans, nonhumans, and non-living objects alike. In that sense, there can be no social existing before the associations; thus, a researcher should first focus on them to unravel the social. This type of approach, along with Alfred Schütz’s conceptualizations of sub-realities, gives me a space for exploring the connection between sexual likes, embodied sensations, and fleshy memories—i.e., all bodily intensities (which can be disgusting, offensive, and so on as well). This approach is also useful for understanding various practices of norms, as well as the ways of linking the fantasy/play world with the real, material world. Therefore, it can be said that SQ1 and SQ3 are formulated for making visible that invisible line between the pleasure and norm. Last but certainly not least, another purpose of asking these SQs is to better grasp how the bridge between the spectators and performers is being formed. Although online porn provides the spectator with a hygienic distance from performers’ bodies in action (Paasonen 2011), it nevertheless evokes affective responses in all parties’ bodies, i.e., performers’ and spectators’ bodies.

SQ1 is based on the departure question of Article 1, SQ2 in Article 2, SQ3 in Article 3 and finally, SQ4 in Article 4. However, as my articles deal with the data from Turkey, it can be argued that SQ2 is addressed to different extents in all articles, as underlined. Therefore, it is true that the Turkish context and local histories/perceptions of porn consist of a substantial part of this article-based dissertation; however, it is equally arguable that Articles 1 and 3 offer major contributions to porn studies in general. In what follows, I discuss the transformations of research and sub-questions, as well as the background of this research and the context in more detail.

1.2 Changes of RQ and SQs during the research project

Although the main research question remained the same throughout a huge part of the research process (except its paraphrasing once and a small addition), SQs were constantly revised and changed. Looking back at my initial research proposal, it is indeed astonishing to see how much my sub-questions have changed.

As mentioned, at first, I was more interested in sexual inequalities, and the initial SQs reflect this very interest. As the RQ illustrates, I have always been focused on normativity. But after I started to read—and think—more about conceptualizations of play and what they might bring to porn studies, I wanted to make a clear distinction: Even though normativity is crucial within the uses of porn, one should

still tread carefully in order not to reduce sexual likes and preferences to the mere outcomes of the normativity. In addition, this line of thought has been endorsed all along by my interview material; it has been always there to be discovered or realized through a new theoretical lens. Consequently, instead of concentrating on sexual inequalities through notions like sexual hierarchy (Rubin 1984) or theories like sexual script theory (Simon and Gagnon 1984), I decided to pursue what follows by bringing play theorizations to porn studies. I then formed the SQ1 and added pleasure next to normativity in the RQ as well.

Here, it is also imperative to unpack how normativity (along with related notions) is ultimately (i.e., following the process of forming SQs and so on) understood within this dissertation. Norm, normativity, and normalizing tendencies within a society are all approached through a Foucauldian framework. Foucault (1978, 144) highlights that a normalizing society is a historical result of a technology of power centred on life, and its advent is a forerunner of the juridical regression era. “Juridical” here refers to the juridical mode of governance of pre-17th-century societies, which are “notorious” for their corporeal punishments. For Foucault, the sorts of normalization on the other hand, are the reflections of biopower, a more “positive” conceptualization of power, which eventually assigns productivity to it, as opposed to the crude violence of the pre-17th-century judiciary. As François Ewald (1990, 138) highlights through Foucault, “in the age of biopower, the *juridical*, which characterized monarchical law, can readily be opposed to the *normative* [emphasis in original].” Hence, this normalization could be perceived as a dilation of legislation to further areas of everyday life without displaying its “murderous splendour,” but through its productive functioning in nonviolent ways, which “aims to produce, develop, and order social strength” (Ewald 1990, 30). In short, I also tackle the normativity and related vocabulary that includes norm, normalization, normative, normalizing, and so on, through such a theoretical frame.

Another substantial transformation of SQs is related to my initial interest to include porn performers in my research. The inclusion of performers became more and more complicated in the process. Besides practical matters like the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in the middle of my research and the time-consuming preparations for the fieldwork and reaching out the performers, I also realized the need for a (historical) contextualization. This was also present in the research plan, albeit maybe a bit more latently, as I have always advocated for the freshness of the Turkish context. In sum, instead of giving voice to performers along with the spectators, I chose to study the context more closely.

1.3 Background and context

Mentioning Turkey, it is noteworthy to state the current situation, as it is quite different than what it had been when the data for this research were first collected back in 2015. As of June 2023, with Erdoğan securing his presidency for five more years, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, and (sexual) freedoms in general can be expected to remain in decline. Even though this research is beyond the Turkish context and refrains from reductive approaches to individuals' sexual likes, it nevertheless gives voice to people whose ideas are constantly being undermined by Erdoğan governments, especially during the last decade.

This past decade has witnessed decisive incidents in the Turkish sociopolitical landscape: The Syrian civil war and the Syrian migration to Turkey since 2011; the public uprisings of Gezi Park in 2013; the breakdown of the government-initiated peace process with the PKK⁷ and the escalated violence following the June general elections in 2015; the coup attempt in July 2016; a regime shift with the 2017 constitutional referendum; the increase of non-Syrian migration from different countries, such as Afghanistan, since 2017; the military offensives of the Turkish Armed Forces in the last decade in several countries in the Middle East, including Iraq and Syria; the currency crisis since 2018; the deadliest earthquakes in modern Turkish history in 2023; and finally the 2023 elections that resulted in Erdoğan's decisive victory. All these developments had huge and distinct impacts on the different cohorts of Turkish society, and some of the long-term effects remain to be seen in the near and far future. However, initially, it can be said that Erdoğan's recent electoral success has solidified his political power and encouraged him even further to limit civil liberties. This solidification is expected to make things worse, allowing the reduction of democratic civil society's policy-making capacities and leaving the scene completely to Islamic NGOs and faith-based organizations, or as they are mostly known, *tariqas* (Arslan Köse 2019). All these events also triggered emigration of the urban middle class to Western countries (Danis 2024), but this trend is not limited to them.⁸ This recent emigration has echoed among my interviewees as well; at least six of them have left the country during the research

⁷ Abbreviation for Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers Party in English) a militant group. It is designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States, the European Union, and several other countries. It has conflicted with the Turkish state since 1979.

⁸ "Refugees from Turkey: Figures and Development," Worlddata.info, accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.worlddata.info/asia/turkey/asylum.php#:~:text=68%2C421%20people%20from%20Turkey%20fled,refugees%20in%20Nigeria%20and%20Luxembourg.>

process. Unsurprisingly, all these emergences and developments have also reinforced the popular belief in a societal-level Islamization of Turkey (Ertit 2018).

However, this conclusion is, at best, contested. For instance, Volkan Ertit (2018) opposes the idea of a more Islamized Turkish society and points out an accelerated secularization of Turkish society through examples like the decline of praying rates; increased out-of-wedlock relationships and divorces; decreasing numbers of children; increased homosexual visibility (both on societal and organizational levels); Islam's declining prestige; higher appropriation of a European dress code; disappearing folk beliefs; and the rise of a secular discourse that encapsulates justifications of certain religious practices, such as restraining from pork meat and/or fasting, via secular arguments like hygiene for the former and health issues for the latter. Even before Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (hereafter referred as JDP), the potential risks of an Islamization of Turkish society have been a matter of heated debate for many (Göle 2013).

As I explain at length in the second article, I have a similar leaning, in terms of the overemphasized societal impacts of Islam. This dissertation avoids the overemphasis of Islam's societal influences, while not reproducing binaries like West/East (Islamic) and offers different theoretical and methodological approaches to having a more nuanced and subtle understanding of how various sexualities are lived, experienced, and felt through the uses of porn in such context. Given the fact that inquiries on the uses of online porn remain limited in Muslim-majority countries, highlighting this type of understanding becomes even more important to make a good example of implementation out of this research project.

But where are sexualities (in our case, particularly porn and sexually explicit media content) and policies concerning the sexualities centred in these Islamization debates? Historically, Turkey (and the Ottoman Empire) has exercised liberal policies on sexuality and sexually explicit content. For example, as Arat and Nunez (2017, 8) underline, neither the Republic of Turkey nor the Ottoman Empire ever criminalized same-gender love or non-heterosexual gender identities. Unexpectedly for some, it was Turkish modernization that fortified heteronormativity, not the so called "Islamic" Ottoman Empire. As Hawkins (2018, 102) points out, it was the Turkish national movement ideology that rejected "gender-fluid habits of Ottoman society such as court poetry, cross-dressing zenne dancers, and homosocial communalism." As a result, previous outlets of non-heterosexual practices were substantially reduced, if not eliminated, within Westernization and then in the revolutionary context. Although the non-heterosexual sexual practices were disregarded and stigmatized, they were never criminalized during the Republican era, in line with the Ottoman legacy (Arat and Nunez 2017, 8). In respect to sexually explicit content, Zafer Toprak (2015, 105) refers to the numerous obscene publications in the Second Constitutional Era of the Ottoman Empire. Toprak defines

these publications as “the porn of the day” and highlights their prevalence and popularity. For the following period, Özgür Yaren (2018, 13-17) mentions sex film screenings during the Turkish sex influx in the late 1970s and ‘80s, which also included exclusive sessions for women and was explored in Article 4 and partially in Article 3. He argues that sex films enjoyed a state of quasi-liberty and never went underground because the policies of regulation were not “harsh” (Yaren 2018, 20-21).

However, the non-credibility and/or contested nature of “a more Islamized Turkish society” and the past continuum of relatively loose and tolerant policies towards non-heterosexuality and sexually explicit media do not mean Erdoğan and his JDP take no action against sexually explicit content and porn. On the contrary, they take every possible legal measure and deploy all censorship mechanisms at their disposal against porn and other sexually explicit media. Over a decade, relevant state authorities have been issuing bans on all sorts of porn sites. These authorities are very effective and meticulous in their labor; they even target very specific sexual niches. In some situations, the content they censor is not even graphic and/or explicit. As an example I really like to give all the time, even Wikifeet, a photo-sharing website dedicated to sharing photos of famous people’s feet, is not accessible in Turkey. The most recent incident was the ban of OnlyFans, a subscription-only website that also includes content from sex workers.

On the grassroots level, the overall picture is a lot more complicated, especially in terms of sexuality politics. For example, during the first thirteen years of the JDP, namely, between 2003 and 2015, Pride parades were being organized (the peak was 100,000 participants in Istanbul Pride back in 2013) without an interruption, and these events were considered the largest in the region and in Muslim-majority countries.⁹ Similarly, up until its closure in early 2023, there were many Turkish OnlyFans content producers, even some well-known celebrities. Furthermore, as many researchers (Ozyegin 2015; Ertit 2018; Cöbek and Ergin 2021; Ozbay et al. 2023) have already shown, the perceptions of premarital sexuality and non-monogamous intimate relationships (such as open relationships, one-night stands, etc.) are changing, at least in some significant cohorts of the society. In this sense, sexual identities and certain sexualities also take their part within the polarization of the Turkish society, which is mainly attributed to the two-decade rule of the JDP. Some also attach this polarization to the culture wars of Turkey (Gürpınar 2023). As will be detailed more in Chapters 2 and 4, and as argued in Article 2, I propose to approach these discussions through the counter-conduct concept of Foucault (2009).

⁹ Deutsche Welle, “Gay Pride March in Istanbul – DW – 06/29/2014,” dw.com, June 29, 2014, <https://www.dw.com/en/tens-of-thousands-take-to-the-streets-in-istanbul-gay-pride-parade/a-17745525>.

In short, one of the most distinct specificities of my research is that it has been done on the front lines of these supposed culture wars in Turkey. Therefore, the Turkish context not only provides uncharted territory for the reader, but it can be also thought of as a battleground, in which different parties are operating through specific, uncompromising semantic worlds and have different takes on sexuality and in which porn appears as a crucial front.

1.4 A small note on the terminology

In this research I often use the words porn and pornography interchangeably, but for most of the time, I chose to use porn. This is not only because porn is shorter than porno and pornography, but it has made its way into mainstream language, and I believe its current connotations are more than slang. Moreover, my informants have always used the term “porno” in Turkish, which is the uncountable noun equivalent of “porn” in English that refers to all kinds of pornographic content. And this makes extra sense for my research because it does not limit its scope to certain types of porn but is more concerned with spectators’ voice.

Even though it might seem a bit unnecessary to clarify the terminology, the rationale behind picking the term porn is not approved by everyone, such as Linda Williams, who was one of the first academics to study porn. In her piece in the first issue of the journal *Porn Studies*, she claims the term porn is not neutral and jeopardizes the critical stance that every researcher must take vis-à-vis the subject they study (Williams 2014). For her, by embracing the term, the researcher acknowledges that she will not be “shocked” by the content she will study, and building her argument upon certain conflicts, which are solely local, i.e., North American, Williams claims that it is only the term pornography that manages to retain a critical distance from the materials and the industry in large. Yet, as I just mentioned, the conflicts she refers to are mainly North American, and this over-generalization, and even the over-imposition of the North American context itself, is a major obstacle to the development of porn studies as a scientific endeavour. Besides, online porn production is ubiquitous today; porn is being made not only by the big players of the industry but also by different parties, including end users who shoot porn for their own casual usage and pleasure. As Paasonen (2009, 588) argues elsewhere, discussions of feminism were heavily influenced by the sex wars and by the positions taken in the North American context, to the point where they even started to dictate feminist work all over the globe. Feminism is not an exception: similar dictation is valid for porn studies too.

Having said that, the term porn has also its limits, especially when it comes defining what constitutes porn. In relation to these limitations, I would like to elaborate on the “sexual media” in the title of this dissertation as well as in the main

RQ. Paasonen (2024, 3-5), through her discussion of dick pics, points to the limits of the term porn for defining a myriad of contemporary material that is circulated online for sexual arousal, ranging from WhatsApp/Snapchat sexting to Zoom group sex parties, as well as dick picks and the diverse content on OnlyFans. Thus, even the current validity and usefulness of the term porn is a matter of debate, let alone certain sexually explicit material from the different chapters of Turkish history. That is why, in this dissertation, although the focus is on porn, in its basic sense of depicting sexual acts (even if they are not acts of penetration/coitus/copulation), the very existence of material from past and current sexual practices depicted in online environments such as those listed above that are not easily coined as porn,¹⁰ necessitated a more expansive term like sexual media. Therefore, it should be noted that hereafter, whenever I use “other sexual media,” I refer to the material from past, like the erotic novellas that are detailed in Article 2, or films from the sex influx era, or to the sexual acts that are made possible by the affordances of platforms like Chaturbate, Zoom, OnlyFans and so on. In short, disagreeing with Williams’ argument against using the term porn, for most of the time in the dissertation, I consciously use the term *porn*, as it is widely used in the interviews. But whenever this term falls short, I switch to *sexual media*, *sexually explicit media*, or *other sexual media*.

1.5 Articles and the structure

This dissertation consists of the thematic introduction and four journal articles. Three of these articles have been already published in academic, peer-reviewed journals and the other one, Article 2, is still in the review process as of writing this introduction. I briefly present the articles below and then explain the structure of the dissertation.

Article 1, “Any performer you pick!” Playful manifestations of porn spectatorship, studies experiences of porn spectatorship via self-reflective sexual narratives of eighteen Turkish porn spectators, who are “unashamed” and “open” about their spectatorship. The article explores how watching porn shapes one’s sexual identity and its connections to the changes in sexual desires, fantasies, and pleasures. In accordance with this dissertation’s research objectives, it applies the theorizations of play and specifically conceptualizes porn as a “toy” and porn spectatorship as “a finite province of meaning” (a term borrowed from Alfred Schütz) to think about the complex links between the uses of porn and norms without undermining the pleasure aspect of the experiences. The article also documents the

¹⁰ Despite not being central as much as porn, these types of acts are also uttered during the interviews by some informants.

contingencies that constitute an integral part of porn spectatorship. These contingencies can be experienced as disgusting and bizarre; thus, the article evidences that porn spectatorship does not always come with mere enjoyment. Watching porn can be enjoyably thrilling while hurting, offending, teasing, or grossing out the spectators.

Article 2, Root Rot: Obscenity and the Turkish Context, as its title suggests, sets out to illustrate the understanding of obscenity in the Turkish context in detail. It investigates different historical periods of Turkey (including the last two decades of JDP rule), as well as the late imperial Ottoman period in order to study the meanings attached to obscenity. The article traces the continuities and discontinuities between distinct and sometimes rival sexual discourses and their coexistence ridden with instability. The article also criticizes the applications of the repressive hypothesis, which Michel Foucault had rejected for the Catholic part of the Western world, to a self-evident so-called “Muslim East” by historians like Dror Ze’evi and in general, the over-simplicity of placing Turkey in this “Muslim East” and unproductive and even misleading and wrong outcomes of the West-East binary. Finally, by drawing upon Foucault’s particular take on power relations, the article offers to frame the governmentality¹¹ of the JDP and more broadly, Islamist movements in Turkey, as counter-conduct.

Article 3, “How am I supposed to enjoy that?” Assemblages of porn spectatorship, zooms in on the affective dynamics of online porn and the assemblage formation in connection to it, again through the accounts of eighteen study participants. By exploiting the conceptualizations of the social and nonhuman from actor-network theory, the article sheds light on what has been assembled by porn consumption and on the materialization of certain sexual norms. The article also argues that through resorting to actor network theory, it is possible to avoid purifying and pruning the research setting, as human actors are not the only ones that are considered. The inclusion of objects, animals, in short, all forms of nonhumans that could have agency, presents a whole new network of relationships, which are crucial for a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of porn spectatorship. The conclusions of the article exhibit a range possibilities of perception of porn spectatorship in relation to sexual norms. The perception and acceptance of these norms can be weakened and entrenched separately or concomitantly.

Finally, *Article 4, Once upon a time in Turkey: the sex influx, gender inequality, and revisiting past pornographies*, focuses on the sex influx era of the Turkish cinema from the mid-1970s. While painting a general picture of the era, it also questions some aspects of its aftermath, like the gendered realities that appeared onscreen and

¹¹ An expression formulated by Foucault. The term is a combination of government and rationality.

offscreen, thus the fate of its (female) performers, and the recent resurrection of the era in the popular culture and on porn aggregator sites. In the final part, the article proposes some future research directions, considering the diversification of public sexual discourses on par with the changing landscape of online sexual platforms¹² and other existing media.

Each of these articles can be read separately because they stand on their own. Still, the aim of this introductory part of the dissertation is to acquaint the reader with the central concepts and present them with the theoretical frameworks that lie behind, the methodological concerns like the validation of selection of certain methods, further insights about the arguments made, and of course, a detailed discussion of the findings, to strengthen the integrity of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical background where I validate the operability and other beneficial aspects of my theoretical choices and leanings in comparison to some others, and where I discuss certain important concepts like counter-conduct. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology, including a subsection about ethical reflection. This part brings ethical considerations in relation to the data/materials analysed and the overall research design on the table. It also emphasizes the limitations and other obstacles that these choices bring alongside the advantages they nevertheless have. Chapter 4 introduces the findings and details them while highlighting and opening new research directions, which are already partly mentioned in the articles. And finally, in Chapter 5, I draw conclusions.

¹² When I first finished writing the article and even throughout the review process, OnlyFans, which is one of the most important online sexual platforms mentioned in the article, was accessible in Turkey. Ironically, not long after the article's publication, it has been banned in Turkey.

2 Theoretical framework and important concepts

Throughout my university studies (undergraduate and master's) in Turkey, I have always been struck by how different theoretical tools, which arose from specific – and most of the time, Western – contexts, were being imported and used directly without really considering local specificities, sometimes even in a reckless manner by both my professors and other scholars from Turkey whose articles and or books were in my possession. Also, strangely, some scholars seemed to be acting like flag men and women for certain theories and treating them like they can be used for almost any case. However, I soon started to realize that how they operated was contested, because their operations risked turning a blind eye to many different aspects of a given case or phenomenon, to say the least. And accordingly, I did not want to reproduce a similar less nuanced research project myself. Similar to my personal experience, for Levent Ünsaldı, in Turkey, the social sciences field appears as a giant theoretical tool park, where different theoretical frameworks are exposed and explained to the extent that audiences are satisfied that the demonstrator knows the given theory enough, and this demonstration is to the end of producing some extra symbolic capital (Ünsaldı 2019, 20). This “theory problem” in Turkey forced me to be extra cautious from the very start.

Ünsaldı (2019, 21) likens the theoretical tools and frameworks to projectors that translate the social reality into knowledge, but during the process of the projecting, some nuances get lost. Every projector has its downsides and upsides when it comes to projecting a visual to a cadre: Some details will be more accentuated than others, depending on many different factors such as brightness, resolution, and lens ratio, as well as some other, less important details like light source and lamp life, etc. Theoretical frameworks also have their specificities like normal projectors. Depending on the dimension of social life a researcher wants to unravel, different (theoretical) projectors can be put to use. It is equally important that the same projector be functional in a distinct social morphology, like Turkey. Then, what a researcher should do for more nuanced research depends especially on the selection of certain theoretical means via meticulous calculations of what would be left behind and what would be brought to the fore of a given social reality. This was my main

rationale when I was determining what theories to use. Furthermore, in my case, nuanced research requires even more punctiliousness. As highlighted in the previous section, online porn is subject to fast-paced technological developments, particularly certain changes concerning the Internet ecosystem, which includes the contemporary social media ecosystem as well. The versatility of online porn and porn studies being a multidisciplinary endeavor make it even more imperative to experiment with different theoretical frameworks in order to take a more detailed picture.

Leaning heavily on theoretical premises that do not necessarily speak to empirical data may create unproductive binaries like west/east, secular/Islamic, local/global, and so on. The over-emphasizing of societal effects of Islam, for instance, which I discuss particularly in Article 2 but also in different parts of this dissertation, is a convenient example of such (unproductive) research's outcome. In much (sexuality) research about Turkey, Islam always appears as a mysterious substance through which power gets to function and which is always "located at particular points and in particular individuals" (Couldry 2008, 100). For example, although their results affirm most of my findings that relate to the interview data in this work, Özbay et al. (2023) lean on similar "substances" and dichotomies. Even though they claim the merits of such dichotomies, like west/east, modern/traditional, and secular/Islamic, as they appear to be "useful and dynamic interpretational devices" to "read the landscapes of tension and change in Turkey" (Özbay et al. 2023, 41), I argue that, as long as these notions remain unexplored, they function merely as descriptive tools and fall short of understanding how the normativities come along. Similar research, that is, which appeals to such substance-like notions and relies on unproductive dichotomies, is abundant (see Bereket and Adam 2008; Tzankova 2015; Sehlikoglu 2016; Phua 2021). As a sociology student who was partially under the influence of this over-emphasis during my initial master's years, I was quite shocked when I first started to conduct my interviews with people, because no one was mentioning Islam as much as I was expecting. Such examples can be multiplied.

Therefore, different theoretical approaches can be – and maybe even should be – deployed, especially when the usefulness and, more importantly, application of various theories are this much contested in a distinct social morphology when it comes to the volatility of the research object. That is one of the reasons why, in this dissertation, by following Ünsaldı's warning about the misuse/misapplications of "imported" theoretical tools in Turkey, I experimented with different "projectors," some of which belong to very distinct theoretical traditions. That is why I tampered with actor-network theory as much as I dealt with Schütz's phenomenological approach, Foucault's particular understanding of power, and so on. The ultimate goal was to ensure the attunement between the "projector" and the "social landscape" it set out to take a picture of.

In a way, this dissertation also contributes to certain discussions within Turkish-speaking academia via its critical stance towards using theories that are incompatible with the specificities of the Turkish context. For example, a similar discussion is present in Turkish queer studies: In their introduction to *Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye’de Queer Kültür ve Muhalefet*, a prominent Turkish queer anthology, Serkan Delice and Cüneyt Çakırlar (2012, 33) elaborate on the necessity to take a critical stance to West-centric sexual theories and sexual categories they offer, while highlighting the importance of their local appropriations. Of course, in the case of queer studies, where scholarship and activism go hand by hand, certain theories can ultimately have repercussions in local communities as queer scholars appear as intermediaries between the imported theory and the local – nonacademic – activists. Therefore, in such cases, it is crucial to seek out how certain concepts are being translated to the Turkish context, the new meanings they get, and so on. However, in some other cases, like the ones pointed out by Ünsaldı, importing certain theoretical concepts for the sake of (identity) politics can produce misleading outcomes.

In relation to this, another problem appears through using certain concepts in a self-evident manner. In that sense, Ünsaldı aptly remarks that certain words like “Kemalist,” “Islamist” or “modern” possess a “somniferous quality” in most sociological research focusing on Turkey (Ünsaldı 2019, 23). For him, what is at stake here is neither denying theory and being stuck in empiricism, nor sinking into the micro and avoiding all structural elements. Through referring to Alfred North Whitehead’s (1928) notion of “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness,” he warns fellow scholars not to confuse abstraction with reification. Certain concepts, which might be useful in certain cases, should not appear as the absolute and only way of analyzing things. That is one of the most important reasons why I wanted to use actor-network theory at some point for this dissertation, to see and unpack certain dimensions that would not be possible with other theoretical approaches. In any case, through all these respects, this dissertation contributes to this “theory problem” discussion while being in dialogue with feminist and queer research in Turkey.

Another priority and a contribution (to porn studies in general) of this dissertation is to give voice to porn consumers/spectators because they have remained invisible in porn research. As Mowlabocus and Wood (2015) underline, although there is outrage about the supposed ill-doings of porn to the society (also see Smith 2010), often the spectators’ detriment is taken for granted, especially when it comes to the female consumers of porn (Mowlabocus and Wood 2015, 120). My motivation for studying audiences is fuelled by the exact same point: I not only am contributing to audience studies and oppose this taken-for-grantedness but also abstaining from approaching to women as “cultural dupes,” as subtly articulated by Mowlabocus and Wood (for such research, see Juffer 1998; Smith 2007; Ramsay

2017; Spišák 2020). Of course, my interest not only stemmed from this pornification of the society rhetoric but also was inspired by the lack of sex education and recent over-imposition of an Islamic sense of (sexual) decency in Turkey. I was curious about how people were navigating themselves and negotiating sexual norms with each other in such a society.

In this second chapter, I tell my story of twiddling with different theoretical projectors via unpacking the decisions concerning the theoretical framework. First, I will discuss the theories of play and their application to online porn, as well as Alfred Schütz's phenomenological concepts, such as finite province of meaning and his understanding of the relation between the listener and the musical performer and how it can be compared to the uses of online porn and the attunements of bodies of performers and spectators in an online porn context. In what follows, I introduce actor network theory and underline its merits for understanding online porn. These first two sections will cover how I handled my interview data theoretically and to what ends. Then, in the last section, I scrutinize and discuss the issues around Islam and Islamist movements in Turkey, mainly through Foucault's conceptualization of counter-conduct. And lastly, I will briefly underline the reemergence of vintage porn and its reception. This last part, on the other hand, will be about the historical contextualization of the dissertation.

2.1 Play, toys, phenomenology, and porn!

2.1.1 Uses of porn as play

When I first started working on my dissertation,¹³ I wanted to start with an article that would unfold the very rich dataset that I had; but deciding on what parts of this dataset I would bring forth and thus coining the most useful theoretical framework for Article 1 have proved to be very challenging in many ways. At first, I was very keen to exploit the sexual script theory of William Simon and John Gagnon (1973, 1984) which I did partially in my master's thesis.¹⁴ Although the theory has been criticized for having a simplifying manner to explain how people are as if inscribed into normative practices (Paasonen 2018), there have been several remarkable conciliation attempts through the "queering" (Mutchler 2000), "fluidness and openness" (Jackson and Scott 2007, 109) and "carnal thickness" (Vörös 2015) of sexual scripts. However, after going back and looking the research material again

¹³ At this point, I had already written a research proposal that granted me the right to study for the Ph.D. at the University of Turku, so my research questions and potential directions were set.

¹⁴ I have also used some parts of these data in my M.A. thesis.

and again, it was very striking to realize that all the interviews were signalling certain bodily desires, visceral connections/sensations, and contingencies more than Islamic and other dominant societal norms – in this case, through the lenses of Simon and Gagnon, prevalent cultural scripts, structured patterns of interpersonal scripting, and so on. Soon I understood that if I were to take their path, there was a significant risk that I would end up making the same mistakes that Ünsaldı was pointing out all along, which would lead to less nuanced research.

Likewise, during this period, which coincides with the first year of my Ph.D., I participated in several conferences and workshops, from which I got plenty of feedback, along with the research seminars of the media studies department at the University of Turku. Most of this feedback stressed that Simon and Gagnon's theory was not fit to honour the rich interview material I collected. Although I was convinced that Simon and Gagnon were no more in the picture, I was still struggling with how to approach the material at hand. And without any doubt, the quest for illustrating the normativity and pleasure pertaining to sexually explicit media in Turkey was more complex than I imagined. The relation between norm and pleasure was intriguing but demanded a more subtle approach to fully comprehend it. One of these conferences, namely, the 3rd Sexual Cultures Conference: PLAY, was very beneficial for me to familiarize myself with the theorizations of play. I was already aware of Paasonen's (2018) call to bring the theorizations of play to the field of sexualities, but I particularly learned a lot in this conference, not only as a speaker and by presenting my findings but also as a participant, by listening to how others were putting these theorizations into use. And ultimately, I decided to delve further into these play theorizations. There has been a lot of merit to thinking with play.

As Paasonen (2018, 6) aptly details, there are two substantial reasons for framing sex with play: a) to focus on contingency over repetition and sameness without considering a priori distinctions between different identity categories and b) to situate the enjoyment and bodily pleasures in the very focus of sexual research, as they often tend to be left out (Plummer, 2003, 525). This type of approach seemed a convenient way to avoid the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Looking at my interview material, although identity categories were mentioned every now and then, conventional understandings of these categories were challenged all the time: a gender-fluid feminist enjoying the pleasures of on-scene choking, a homosexual man fancying hardcore maledom heterosexual depictions, a heterosexual male discovering the thrills and excitement of cuckold porn after being cheated on by his partner in real life, and last but definitely not least, a heterosexual female savouring acts like hair pulling and face slapping both in her real life and in her porn preferences. In a similar vein, very little of Islam or its clash with secularism had come up unless I asked about it, but even then, it was not always seen as central. A similar unconcern or disinterest goes for the censorship mechanisms of the Turkish government, which

could have been bypassed relatively easily. Even if some Islamic norms and other conservative aspects of different cultures in Turkey, at least for some interviewees, can come with their own thrills or put the excitement in ambivalence in relation to porn spectatorship, their bits were complementary rather than being central.

As I have said, the interest in play theorizations started with reevaluation of the interview data and was due to my struggles for finding the best working “projector” for this case. However, participants also sometimes spoke of their porn spectatorship as if they were playing with a toy. At the same time, there were many unpleasant aspects, and relatedly, these toy-plays involved many frustrations along with manifestations of shame and so on. As someone who personally loves to play, ranging from video games to board games, I know from experience that play involves lots of frustrations and does not always come with positive affective registers. Reading and becoming familiar with Miguel Sicart’s understanding of play, framing these “unfunny” occurrences with play became more meaningful; he suggests that play can be seen “as variations of pleasure that can be dark and deep” (Sicart 2014, 3). Play opens many new doors for individuals to experience, in his words, “the immense variations of the pleasure in this world” (Sicart 2014, 3). Sicart cites more features of play, which all, to a certain degree, resonate with how I understand the uses of porn. Looking from all these perspectives, it indeed made profound sense in the context of a porn audience. Also, as a porn spectator and a consumer myself, I was always interested in the autotelic features of the uses of porn.¹⁵

Similarly, Paasonen (2020, 2) details how she was struck by the resonances of play with the conceptualizations of sex. As she elaborates, this resonance not only stems from the increasing usage of the term “play” within the lexicon of sexual cultures, like bondage, age play, pony play, party and play, sex parties, sex toys, and so on. For her, there is more to sexualities than simply describing them as playful or binding them with different sorts of play. Sicart’s approach to play, as something that could be not indeed fun, was also influential. Play stands for the actualizations of playfulness, and from there, she claims that the notion of playfulness not only covers and crosscuts the denotations of notions like improvisation, experimentation, curiosity, and exploration, but also brings pleasures and bodily intensities to the front and frames them as key motivations for sexual activities without prioritizing categories of sexual identity (for more research on “mismatches” between sexual identities and sexual likes see Albury 2015; Carrillo and Hoffman 2018; Scoats, Joseph, & Anderson 2018). The hazards of defining identity categories’ impact and

¹⁵ Heljakka nevertheless argues that play is both autotelic and allotelic activity. See Katriina Irja Heljakka, “More than Collectors,” *Games and Culture* 13, no. 3 (May 3, 2018): 241.

other structural influences on sexual pleasures as central and exclusive to the formation of sexual pleasures, especially in the light of autotelic sexual activities (the uses of porn and mostly masturbation in this case) were starting to become more apparent to me. In such a picture, conceptualizations of play were, theoretically, what I was looking for, because they permitted me to study and frame the normativity and pleasure pertaining to porn and other sexually explicit media in Turkey, without reducing sexual likes to mere outcomes of the norm.

2.1.2 Porn as a toy

Another issue was to think about online porn's position in this play context. In that sense, one must make a distinction between games and toys, which is even built into English grammar as Alan Levinovitz (2017, 267) highlights: one plays games but plays *with* toys (emphasis in original). As Sicart (2014, 43-44) puts it, toys are tools for play, and more importantly, they constitute the props of "semi formalized embodiments of elements of the play activity." Thus, to understand the ecology of play, toys are substantial because they open ways for perceiving the technological and physical elements of the contexts of play (Sicart 2014, 47). Levinovitz (2017, 270) remarks on another important and distinct trait of toys, compared to games: an emphasis on non-constrained play and increased agency of the player. This is somewhat rippling with Sicart's take on toys, which for him, facilitate appropriation, can be understood as an expression and exploration of who we are, an extension of a playful mind, and maybe most importantly for my case, an element for getting the fantasy started, a gate to the world of imagination (Sicart 2014, 40). For him, anything can become a toy, and not all toys are designed as toys from the very beginning. Through such a perception of toys, in the context of sex and play, porn becomes a toy, not only as a spark that ignites or a torch that light the ways for the fantasies, but also a way of express oneself, an embodiment of the sexual playfulness.

Framing online porn as a toy is not a mere descriptive metaphor. To concretize this framing, some examples from the interviews can be held up. This particular toy provides its players with the means for all sorts of fantasy role play, from being a voyeur (this applies to almost any type of porn in the case of my interviewees) to a dominated slave (particularly in contexts of JOI¹⁶ porn) and to be able to present in uncharted grounds where a vortex of different sexual encounters is within reach, and so on. Finally, by borrowing Heljakka's (2018) term toyification, I claim that contemporary porn appeals to the toyification of contemporary media and

¹⁶ Abbreviation for jerk off instructions.

communication technologies, which becomes apparent through the toyish elements and aesthetics of certain devices like computers, tablets, smartphones and many more, which are also commonly used for conveying pornographic images to their spectators and consumers.

However, toys, instantiations of playfulness and spaces of play, seem to revolve in another social reality. Paasonen highlights Johan Huizinga's notion of a "magic circle" that depicts these spaces' apartness from other realms of everyday life, the suspension of the rules and codes associated with those realms (Paasonen 2018, 18-19). Online porn also has its own modalities, affordances, and dynamics (Paasonen 2011, also, Vörös 2015, 139), which in my opinion, deepen and emphasize its apartness from everyday life. Still, online porn has another important feature, which often tends to go unnoticed: there is a strong connection and communication between the performer and the spectator, albeit being latent most of the time. Being a performer in porn also heralds the thrills of exhibitionism, of being watched.¹⁷ Likewise, to be able to watch someone engaging in sex, to respond to the invitation of the "exhibitionist" is the other end of this communication. This is where sociologist Schütz's conceptualizations of lifeworld, the finite province of meaning where specific and distinct cognitive styles are present, and his further thoughts on intersubjectivity come into the picture.

2.1.3 Schütz's phenomenology and the communication between the performer and the spectator

What is intriguing about Schütz's thinking is the fact that these finite provinces of meaning, which make realities of their own while being tied to the everyday life world within a universe of multiple realities, are not limited to playgrounds. For Schütz, these different realities range from dreams, phantasms, the world of art and religious experience to the play world of a child, the world of scientific contemplation and even to the world of the insane. In these worlds or sub-realities, specific cognitive styles reign, not only to be able to function alone but also for communicating with others. All of them have their own temporality, which is different than the outer time, the temporality of the everyday life world. Again, I found this way of thinking very suitable for explaining the communication between a performer and their audience. As Paasonen explains, the uses of porn give shape to the somatic reservoirs of its spectators while establishing a hygienic distance between the performer and the audience (Paasonen 2011, 203). These

¹⁷ Although performing porn might have its own exhibitionist thrills, it does not mean porn is solely done with exhibitionist intentions. There are many different motivations for producing porn.

transformations, in return, affect and direct the ways in which spectators watch and feel the pornographic images and motion. These synesthetic traces and echoes, their circulation amongst the performer and the audience while maintaining that sterile distance, are the manifestations of the cognitive style that rules the sub-reality of porn spectatorship. Hence, I define porn spectatorship, or playing with porn, as a finite province of meaning, which consists of a unique reality with its own functioning logic and temporality.

Yet, there is more to this communicative aspect and the pleasures associated with it within the relation of production and consumption of porn and the specific cognitive style of porn spectatorship. Especially in mainstream porn, which is produced by companies under big corporations like Aylo (formerly MindGeek), authenticity of pleasures is often questioned. In that sense, a specific epoché, or in other words, the suspension/bracketing of doubt comes into play. Bracketing of doubt secures that some little fiction and exaggeration do not spoil the mutual pleasures of the performer and viewer. It also makes sure that sexual orientation does not get in the way in sharing others' pleasures: as such, one can attune to the pleasure being conveyed from an image of a wet tip of an erected penis of a stranger, even if he "is not into men" or similarly, one can attune to visible clitoral pleasures onscreen by mimicking similar moves and share the same intensity of pleasures, even if she "is not into women."

Schütz's phenomenological analysis of musical performances (1970, 209-217) can illustrate even further how this specific cognitive style becomes crystalized. For him, musical performer and listener do not need to share the vivid present in a face-to-face relation; the immersion in the musical performance can be experienced by both even through intermediaries such as a radio or a recorder. There is a countable/measurable outer time of a musical record or composition, like ten to fifteen minutes, but the immersion in a piece actually takes place within the flux of the inner time of the performance, through which performer and listener are tuned to each other. It is this simultaneity, and this particular temporality, which make possible the mutual experiencing of a musical piece. And more importantly, being aware of other's attendance is key for the establishment of this simultaneity. Turning back to online porn, as mentioned, performers are always aware of the spectator.¹⁸ The pleasures of various sexual acts onscreen translate to the spectators' masturbatory pleasures. Again, the outer time of the given acts is not relevant; pleasures ranging from sexual encounters onscreen to masturbation/sexual encounters offscreen are simultaneously shared and experienced in their own particular temporality.

¹⁸ Unless the pornographic material is non-consensual and/or made for personal use.

Although I believe in the merits of bringing Schütz's conceptualizations to the uses of porn, in this dissertation they are mostly used in an introductory and limited way. As I underlined at the end of my first article, one of the most important aspects of tackling the uses of porn, and in particular the communicative relationship between the performer and the spectator, is the fact that it permits one to explore further how normativities and pleasures connect to each other. In Schütz's perception, although there are sub-realities that exist and function in their own cognitive styles and temporalities, they are somehow connected to the everyday life world through various getaways and transitions. Therefore, at first, I was more eager to scrutinize the ways in which normativities and pleasures connect with each other through Schütz's framework, but then I started having doubts about using a "projector" that was manufactured decades ago, even predating the advent of the Internet. Later, just like at the beginning of the first article, I decided to search for a more suitable and, if possible, more recently manufactured projector to focus on this particular connection between normativities and pleasures. This is where actor-network theory¹⁹ came into the picture.

2.2 Actor-network theory and online porn

Approaching the uses of porn and porn spectatorship with actor-network theory was risky. Its merits are contested in academia, which is not surprising, considering Bruno Latour's (2005) rather "radical" views on what he defines as the "sociology of the social," i.e., more or less the traditional sociological/anthropological

¹⁹ I first became acquainted with actor-network theory back in my master's studies with Bruno Latour's *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* and indirectly with Timothy Mitchell's *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* published in 2002, in which he explores the role of a mosquito, specifically *Anopheles gambiae*, in the disasters of 1942-44 in Egypt, which he calls "some of the most powerful transformations of the twentieth century" (See Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 2002, 20). Needless to say, I was fascinated by the inclusion of nonhumans as actors/agents into the "social" right from the start. Also, there is an intellectual liaison in the ways that ANT and Foucault regard and comprehend the dispersal of power (see Nick Couldry, "Actor Network Theory and Media: Do They Connect and on What Terms?," essay, in *Connectivity, Networks and Flows: Conceptualizing Contemporary Communications*, ed. Andreas Hepp et al. (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 2008), 102).

inquiry²⁰ or Mol's bold definition of actor-network theory (ANT) as not a theory, or if it is, as one that does not necessarily offer a coherent framework (Mol 2010, 265). Moreover, in particular, its merits for media studies are also often questioned. For example, Nick Couldry (2008, 101-103) argues that the biggest obstacle set by ANT for media studies is its emphasis on a certain temporal dynamic of networks that enable actants, at the expense of any other. For him, ANT does not have the same emphasis on the long-lasting effects/consequences of the networks' aggregation, faltering or reformation; rather, it is interested in a snapshot of a network in its course of initial formation. Another paradoxical stance of ANT is its indifference to the different outcomes of power differentials for humans and nonhumans, as these differentials have the potentiality to form and shape humans' ways of mattering whereas they often do not have the same potentiality for nonhumans (Couldry 2008, 102).

Having highlighted all that, Couldry still believes in the merits of using ANT for its approval of spatiality of power's dispersal and emphasis on its workings in "stretched out networks" (Couldry 2008, 100). This spatiality and emphasis on networks are influenced by Foucault's thinking on the very functioning of power. I believe that what I did in this dissertation, i.e. using ANT for a snapshot of networks through which the uses of porn are being enabled, while appealing to Foucault for contextualization and historicization, makes complete sense, especially considering the intellectual liaison present here. But then, the deconstruction of human agency, or rather, the fact that it does not get the central focus it used to get, is not a criticism directed solely to ANT but also to Foucault himself (Couldry 2008, 102). However, as I detail in the following subsection, such criticisms toward Foucault, especially in the sense that his conceptualization does not leave any room for resistance, are elaborated in greater detail. For this subsection though, it is sufficient to say that Couldry still argues that ANT is very useful for media research, particularly if one asks the question in the following way: how are people's cognitive and emotive frameworks shaped by the underlying features of the networks in which they are situated? (Couldry 2008, 104). For Article 3, I set out to explore the exact same question, while still being interested in the particular temporal dynamic that ANT emphasizes the most: the snapshot of the network's formation. This means that I was studying the instantiation of a network, and I was still interested in the initial after-effects of these networks, the ways how they enable certain actants, and so on. However, to this end, I overlooked

²⁰ In Turkey, where I took the first steps of my academic career, what is perceived as sociology was akin to North American understandings of anthropology. In the same North American tradition, sociology always seems to be more statistics-based. Regarding these different understandings and perceptions according to different academic traditions, I wanted to point them both out.

certain long-term consequences and outcomes that these networks might have created. Yet this is a conscious decision, as I claim that before anything else that one first has to understand how these networks are coming together and help the materialization of norms or dismantle them (or both). Still, the risks were present.

When I got the reviewers' comments on the manuscript of my third article (How am I supposed to enjoy that?) which builds on the actor-network theory, this risk became more visible and concrete: One of the reviewers argued that actor-network theory was failing the task of offering a clear and explanatory approach and even leading to a "total dismiss[ing] of class and gender." Here I explain my rationale for choosing to look at my material through an actor-network lens despite its risks.

The main reason that I chose to use ANT as my epistemological framework, albeit not a coherent and consistent one, is hidden in that tiny hyphen: The usage of this hyphen between actor and network is not a mere coincidence; in this line of thought, actor can only exist when forming a network, and networks cannot be thought outside of actors' ability to act (Latour 2005, 180; Mol 2010, 255-258). To be able to perceive how actor-networks work or what do they do exactly, one can look at Mol's example of French chemist and microbiologist Louis Pasteur and De Saussure's semiotics (Mol 2010, 256-257). As Mol details in her piece, although Pasteur was the inventor, many actors were behind this achievement: Journalists, farmers, technicians, and veterinarians were involved in the discovery of anthrax and the vaccinations against this illness. Nonhuman agents such as blood and cows and objects like petri dishes and transportation systems were involved and acted too. In an ANT-informed approach, Pasteur appears like a general in a war, yet there is a whole army behind his operations: A general cannot fight without an army.

Or take De Saussure's version of semiotics. According to him, "fish" is never understood as a fish, as the swimming creature. The sense it gets is possible through what it relates with, like sea, meat, scales, and so on. For Mol, ANT extends this understanding of relatedness to the whole rest of reality. Actors are being enacted, being enabled by the network they find themselves in, but this does not mean that this dependency on others and the network determines what the actor really is. No, in ANT, actors are being enabled while they are still able to act. They are active, they escape from a causal force and can still make things work. Meanwhile, they can shutter, misfire, and stop to work, if somehow the network they dwell in falters as well (Mol 2010, 258). What is more, actors can be present in various networks, which are in tension with each other while coexisting together. And there are modes of ordering, logics and realities that keep those networks without faltering (Mol 2010, 263). This lays bare that when the norms are there, they will not directly lead to normalization; something must be done to establish this normalization and, as I have said, something must also be done to avoid faltering. This is what Latour (2005) suggests as well. A final note about this faltering: Not every actor is working. Some of them, who were

working in the past, can stop working in a given moment due to a faltering, say, if a whole network stops working and loses its capacity to enable the actors within it. But it can also be the other way around. Through an accident, a breakdown and/or a strike, an object, or a nonhuman actor, who previously had no capacity to make things move, can become a gamechanger. This led Latour to differentiate between mediators and intermediaries (Latour 2005, 79). A mediator is something that has the capacity to make things move, and it is they that are worth analysing.

This simultaneous occurrence of actor and network and their mutual sense of functioning seemed crucial to understand the uses of porn – from a perspective, to quote Mol (2010, 255), for making “specific, surprising, so far unspoken events and situations visible, audible, sensible.” As mentioned in above sections, the relationship between pleasure and norms, how they connect to each other with different openings, getaways, and transitions, is very complex to perceive and even sometimes, the distinctions in this relation covers go unnoticed. One cannot think of contemporary online porn without the platforms through which it is being delivered, the technological infrastructure, including algorithms that make it work, of these platforms and in general, the Internet ecology. However, there is more to that, as I show in Article 3. Even tiny and supposedly trivial objects like carpets, webcams, even the ergonomics of a headphone can change things on the end users’ and porn consumers’ part. To understand the normativity and pleasure pertaining to online porn and other sexually explicit media in Turkey, one should study the actors and networks and how they hold up rather than confusing the explanandum with explanans, to quote Latour (2005, 238). That is why, when looking at pornography, it does not suffice to say identity categories or Islamic norms shape sexual norms and pleasure, if the goal is to comprehend how the tension between norm and pleasure is unpacked and comes into the being. Although he does not refer to ANT, I felt like Ünsaldı’s warnings were coming from a similar sensitivity: I read his emphasis on an epistemological break in such a vein (Ünsaldı 2019, 23). There are more parallels between Ünsaldı and ANT scholars: Elsewhere in her article, Mol likens ANT to “the props, equipment, knowledge, and skills assembled by amateurs” (Mol 2010, 262). I argue that this comparison echoes how Ünsaldı thinks of theoretical frameworks: different projectors that would be put in use for different pictures and landscapes.

For Mol, ANT is not a theory in the sense of offering casual explanations and being a consistent framework and method. To be linked with ANT, one does not need to repeat and confirm others’ previous work but rather to search for contrasts with them (Mol 2010, 261). In that sense, considering some less-nuanced research in terms of the exaggerated emphasis on the effects of sexual identity categories, or certain Islamic and other conservative norms in the making of sexual pleasures, linking with ANT was the most feasible way for me to approach to dig further potential connections, getaways and transitions between norm and pleasure. Also,

when approaching porn as a toy, which is a central object of play (Sicart 2014, 35) and thus, very important for the ecology of play, being linked up with ANT helps a lot. Like other things, a toy also becomes enacted by different networks and in return, contributes to the functioning of these coexisting networks.

Here, another issue comes to the fore: Assemblages, associations, and many more similar concepts were used in Article 3, but I want to elaborate on the choosing of these particular terms. For scholars who are affiliated with ANT, strict definitions of terms, let alone their consolidation, is not the right way. As Mol conveys, over the years, many ANT-informed scholars have been tinkering with different terms by borrowing, adapting, and inventing new terms. This act of tinkering and experimenting with new words, terms and notions opens up new possibilities for understanding very distinct cases. Therefore, I borrowed the term assemblage, which involves different human and nonhuman entities' associations, because I thought it was very suitable for understanding the case at hand: As Müller (2015, 30) argues, the conceptualization of assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari's version as well) considers both the centrality and productivity of relations between human and nonhuman entities, which I believe is crucial to the uses of porn.

In sum, linking with ANT enabled me to uncover many interesting actors that were not seen as important or worse, went unnoticed for most of the time, as well as illustrating the associations and assemblages that make up the networks. A household carpet with certain traditional design patterns can appear as a stimulant that boosts horniness, or many coexisting networks that are being filled with different human and nonhuman actors, can cause lots of frustrations for my interviewees. Going back to the example of Pasteur being a commander in a warfare, Erdoğan's censorship mechanisms are there, but they are enabled not only by some imams (for sure, they also play their part in condemnation of "non Islamic" sexualities) but also via distinct nonhumans such as paid VPN services, low-quality Internet modems and Internet services in general in Turkey, and virus-ridden porn sites, as well as paid anti-virus software that appeared as contributors to JDP's crackdown on online porn in Turkey. In a way, Erdoğan and his censorship mechanisms were often there, but there were more in the background that made it possible for Erdoğan and his censorship mechanisms to act.

While such interesting outcomes can be explored further in Article 3 itself, I would still like to concretize the very sense of them via the household carpet (and a cheap webcam) example, which I have already been insistently highlighting. In this case, where one of my interviewees is chatting online with a potential partner whom he has met on Grindr, the household carpet that is wall-hung and the "shitty" webcam that provides "shitty" visuals²¹ appear as manifestations of Turkishness, familiarity and

²¹ Here this is sensed through the perception of "ordinary Turks cannot afford expensive stuff."

proximity, as similar objects being present in other “ordinary” households in Turkey. All these three notions, Turkishness, familiarity, and proximity, are being sensed and materialized through that particular carpet and cheap low-quality webcam, which both in turn boost my interviewee’s prurience. At the same time, the very carpet becomes a crossroads where traditional and prevalent sexual norms and the pleasures associated with the violation of them come together. The carpet is only the tip of the iceberg; there are more examples presented in Article 3, and there will even be potentially more that will be revealed, if future scholars decide to be linked up with ANT for studying porn in Turkey and/or elsewhere.

2.3 Conclusion on the theoretical handling of interview data

Thus far, I have explained the rationale behind my theoretical choices in relation to the interview data. To return to the beginning, these projectors I chose to work with were strictly related to certain ends and directions that I wanted to extract and highlight out of the interview data. Therefore, they were very deliberately chosen, and certainly certain aspects and dimensions of this rich interview data were left out.

In this regard, I had two substantial epistemic priorities: first, to focus on porn spectators/consumers/audiences as there was a knowledge gap, and second, to introduce a new context, namely the Turkish context, without reproducing less nuanced outcomes of the past scholarship from different disciplines. For that, I not only struggled with several theoretical tools and frameworks, but I also put substantial thought into methodology, which I explain in detail in the following chapter. The first priority, my tendency to focus on audiences, is more obvious and less personal: although it has been ameliorated a lot more since I began this research almost a decade ago now, the audience research on porn was relatively scarce. The second one is more personal, though: As explained, throughout my studies, both master’s and Ph.D., I was always baffled by the perceptive difficulties of different scholars and professors, both inside and outside of Turkey, about the societal impacts of Islam in Turkey. I think the difficulty comes not only from unfamiliarity or ignorance about Islam, but also from the fact that (political) Islam is a loaded subject for many, again both inside and outside of Turkey. I think very similarly when it comes to unproductive sexual identity categories and their impact in the Turkish context.

In a sense, my moot with Dror Ze’evi in Article 2 follows the same bafflement. Yet disagreeing with some scholars’ conclusions on the societal impacts of (political) Islam in Turkey does not mean that I underestimate its effects or argue that Islam has no effect whatsoever when it comes to sexual norms. On the contrary, in both Article 2 and Article 4, which serve, respectively, the purposes of SQ 2 and 4, the complexity of heterogenous sexual discourses in this historical context, which

harbors a copresence of conservative and secular stances, is scrutinized. In the next part of this theoretical background chapter, I tackle the historicization, more contextualization, and why I chose to work with Michel Foucault's framing of power and in particular, his notion of counter-conduct.

2.4 Repressive hypothesis and the counter-conduct: Implications in Turkey

Turkey's transcontinental position between Europe and Asia, West and East and of course, its (socio-political) history in direct relation with this position have always been puzzling for many. Although this statement might sound like it concerns only non-academic environments (like the struggles of some international media outlets when it comes to whether Turkey should be categorized under Europe or the Middle East), I am also referring to academic settings. One of the fields where this confusion can be explicitly observed is colonial and postcolonial studies, in which Ottoman Empire's position (colonizer or colonized?) is often ambivalent. As Selim Deringil (2003, 313-314) rightly remarks, many substantial texts on colonialism ignore the Ottoman Empire. As he conveys, even in the works of major figures such as Edward Said, the Ottoman Empire is dismissed as "a sort of epiphenomenal creature." Another layer that adds to these confusions about the positionality of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey regarding colonialism is the neglect of Christian schism and Orthodoxy within European historiography (as it is generally more concerned about Catholicism and Protestantism), which are both substantial parts of the Ottoman Empire and its history. One cannot fully understand the socio-political and historical developments that took place in the Ottoman Empire, and even the developments taking place today in contemporary Turkey, without taking into consideration the country's Christian and other non-Muslim heritage and past.²²

The indecisive position of the Ottoman Empire and later on, of Turkey, extends well beyond the colonialism debates. Scholars like Fleming (2000, 1230) highlight that before World War I, Turkey was decidedly positioned within the Balkans, thus in Eastern Europe, but it no longer is (and Fleming wrote this almost twenty-five years ago). The geographical designator term "Balkans" has also entirely shifted between East and West (Deringil 2003, 313). Meanwhile, Turkey is still an official

²² There is often a tendency to approach the non-Western historiographies in reference to European historiography, as Deringil ("'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 02 (April 2003), 314) underlines via quoting Dipesh Chakrabarty. Thus, the neglect in European historiography concerning Christian schism and Orthodoxy can also become a problem for non-Western historiographers when tackling their own historiographies.

EU candidate country as of 2024, so on the political (and partly on the social) level it has been a European country for some time now. This Europeanness goes back to the 19th century, to the Paris Treaty in 1856, in which Turkey (then the Ottoman Empire) was admitted to the European group of nations (Wood 1943, 262). When one adds the reforms of the 19th century, such as the edict of Rearrangement (Tanzimat), establishment of the first Ottoman constitution (Kanun-i Esasi), the proclamation of constitutional monarchy and of course, the Turkish Revolution and the foundation of the modern Turkish republic in 1923, this indecisiveness grows even more as these reforms pulled Turkey over to a most Western-influenced semantic world. For Margot Badran (2009, 304), these reforms created an exception amongst the Muslim-majority Middle Eastern countries. According to her, Turkey is the only country in this group where the de-linkage between the state institutions and religious institutions has really happened. And as Ayşe Öncü (1997) emphasized almost thirty years ago, “whatever” was left from the Ottoman past was sealed off in a sense, with the language and alphabet reforms: as she explains further, if one really wants to understand the Ottoman past and do research about it, they would have to learn not just a new alphabet, but also a new language, namely Ottoman Turkish, which is a synthesis of Arabic, Persian and vernacular Turkish. In terms of the conduct, this has had substantial consequences.

However, in this subsection, I will not be focusing on the ambivalent perceptions of contemporary Turkey or its past. The reason that I provided this historical outlook and the discussions around Turkey’s nebulous positionality originates from my tendency to understand the coexistence of contradicting sexual scripts and governance of sexualities in Turkey throughout its last two hundred years through Foucault’s approach on power. To understand how sexualities have been handled and governed in Turkey, I deployed a Foucauldian framework and asked the following questions to begin: In Foucauldian terms, what type of conduct is in question when one looks at Turkey? Is it some sort of Western/secular conduct²³ similar to contemporary Europe, or somewhat alien Islamic conduct when compared with Europe? We can ask the same question in reverse. And if it is the former, what difference does it make for the coexistence of various sexual discourses and governance of sexualities in Turkey? Or to put it differently, how does this specific conduct affect the meanings attached to sexualities in Turkey?

To find the answers to these questions, in Article 2, I offer thinking about JDP’s governance on sexualities (and Islamist movements at large) as a counter-conduct (Foucault 2007, 191). In fact, Article 2 was inspired by one of Erdoğan’s speeches

²³ Here by referring to Western conduct, I mean the secularization of the whole life, thus all sorts of individual behaviors as well as the strategies of governance of different sorts of populations in Turkey.

where he acknowledges his and his party's failure to establish their "intellectual power" (*fikri iktidar* in Turkish), which appears to be a combination of social and cultural power, and from time to time, it is deemed even more important than political power. In my opinion, this was a significant confession on Erdoğan's part: Despite the immense power he has been accumulating for the last twenty years, despite the numerous violations of law, he and his party JDP still failed to successfully penetrate and modify these spheres. Of course, for Erdoğan, this failure was not his fault and/or originating from his and his circle's wrongdoings. This was "destined to happen" as society has been cut out from its origins, from its roots. According to Erdoğan's narrative, corrupted Westernized statesmen of the Ottoman Empire and subsequently the founders of the Republic have been doing everything to cut the nation from its true and authentic Islamic roots. Not surprisingly, I set out to explore where and how sexualities were positioned in relation to this "intellectual power." It was a convenient opportunity for historicization.

2.5 Counter-conduct and Muslim nation project: seeking other shepherds

Michel Foucault, despite being an acclaimed philosopher, particularly for his insights on the functioning of power, was also criticized for supposedly leaving too little room for individual agency (Davidson 2011, 32). However, his lectures in the late 1970s in Collège de France, in particular his lecture of 1 March 1978, brought two important notions to the fore to make more sense of how power operates: conduct and counter-conduct. As he explains, in French the word "conduct" has a double meaning; it both means an activity of conducting an individual, i.e., its relational dimension between individuals but equally also the ways in which individuals conduct themselves, so conduct as a behavior for self-navigation (Foucault 2007, 193). While detailing the rationale behind choosing the word "counter-conduct," Foucault clearly points out the active sense of the word, "in the sense of struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others" (Foucault 2007, 201). He then concretizes the notion of counter-conduct briefly via the example of the anti-pastoral movements in Europe throughout different periods (Foucault 2007, 193-201). Foucault has also dealt with homosexuality in regard to counter-conduct, which becomes apparent in his famous note on "horrors" of homosexuality in one of his interviews: For him, it is not the sexual act, the sodomy, but it is the very homosexual mode of life that people find disturbing about homosexuality (Foucault 1994).

What is crucial about counter-conduct is the fact that it is part of the functioning of conductive power (Siisiäinen 2016, 302). To understand this further, Davidson (2011, 28-29) draws attention to Foucault's idea of studying power as a multiplicity

of force relations which “are unequal but also local and unstable” and which give rise to “states of power, and modifications of these same relations transform those situations of power.” What counter-conduct essentially does is the modification of these relations, counter, revolt, disdain from the locally stabilized organizations of power, and by all these, to bring new possibilities for others to act (Davidson 2011, 29). It is a simultaneous work on self and power (Demetriou 2016, 226). Or in other words, it is about finding another, different shepherd to manage “the herd” by opposing a specific type of conduct and demanding to be conducted “differently.” I believe that the circular manner of co-appearance of conduct and counter-conduct within the power relations is significantly useful for understanding the history behind the recent (Islamic) governance of sexualities and for designating the continuities and discontinuities between noncompromising sexual discourses and narratives, as well as understanding their unsteady coexistence throughout the recent past and today.

When I contemplate Islamism in Turkey and Islamists’ strategies of governance, counter-conduct makes perfect sense to illustrate the limits of their field of action, or to express differently and through Erdoğan’s point of view, the failure of setting their intellectual power. These limits do not only concern sexualities, but they also include many different dimensions/layers of everyday life. Although it goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, I would like to briefly discuss Erdoğan’s Muslim nation project (Morgül 2022), which I argue reflects Islamists’ notable efforts for eradicating the Western conduct that they even struggle at the peak of their political power. For instance, Erdoğan and his JDP have been accused of demographic engineering²⁴ in favor of a Sunni Muslim identity by supporting and catalysing non-

²⁴ Demographic engineering can be termed an intentional effort to shift the ethnic balance in a given region to create ethnically homogeneous populations. JDP’s end goal is slightly different, as its imagined Muslim nation is multi-ethnic. Having noted that, Erdoğan has also been accused of demographic engineering and ethnic cleansing in northern Syria for a while now, especially in certain Western media outlets: see Nick Ashdown, “Erdogan Wants to Redraw the Middle East’s Ethnic Map,” *Foreign Policy*, November 8, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/08/erdogan-wants-redraw-middle-east-ethnic-map-kurds-arabs-turkey-syria/>. Besides, even for the narratives concerning northern-Syria, Pan-Islamic tones are always present: see Rikar Hussein, “How Turkey’s Erdogan Portrayed Syria Offensive as a Pan-Islam Struggle,” *Voice of America*, November 13, 2019, https://www.voanews.com/a/extremism-watch_how-turkeys-erdogan-portrayed-syria-offensive-pan-islam-struggle/6179309.html. It is also ethically important to make note of JDP’s role, like arming militant groups, in the Syrian Civil War and the fact that its popular support remained unchanged, if not increased. Lastly, demographic engineering is not an alien concept in Turkish/Ottoman history. In famous Dutch Turkologist Erik Jan Zürcher’s words, “in the 19th and early 20th century, the Ottoman Empire was the largest laboratory of demographic engineering in Europe.”

Turkish Sunni immigration²⁵ to Turkey via their multilayered immigration policy, which could be deemed even more pro-migration than some of the most liberal regimes in the West, as some political commentators put it.²⁶ These policies of migration not only coincide with, but also reinforce and constitute an important component of Erdoğan's populist and civilizationist "Muslim nation project" (Morgül 2022; also see Danis and Sert 2021, 202),²⁷ whose implementation

²⁵ Although it is impossible to be certain of trustworthy statistics, because the Turkish government's transparency is often questionable, according to the official numbers there are 5.1 million foreign residents (3.8 million of them are refugees) in Turkey as of 2023. The official statistics can be explored here: <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/turkiye-migrant-presence-monitoring-situation-report-march-2023>. The illegal immigrants, as labeled by the government, are not included in these statistics. In addition, information on the naturalized foreigners is often ambiguous, and it is known that some change their original names to Turkish ones, so their statistics are not part of these above numbers. On the other hand, some, like 'the general secretary of Istanbul Municipality (which was won by the opposition in the last local election), estimate that there are around seven to eight million foreigners and refugees in Turkey (see "Buğra Gökce: Türkiye'de 8 Milyona Yakın Yabancı Var, Bulgaristan Nüfusundan Fazla," T24, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/bugra-gokce-turkiye-de-8-milyona-yakin-yabanci-var-bulgaristan-nufusundan-fazla,1140545>). Most of these people are from the Middle East and Afghanistan, with different statuses (see Murat Erdoğan, Syrians Barometer SB 2021, accessed February 19, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2022/12/SB-2021-English-01122022.pdf>, 186). The dominance of the same ethnic groups among the migrants can also be found on the Ministry of the Interior website: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/#>. Certain right-wing politicians such as Ümit Özdağ even give rather exaggerated estimations of 13 to 15 million foreigners/refugees/naturalized citizens (see Antoinette Radford, "Turkish Elections: Anti-Immigrant Leader Endorses Erdogan Challenger," BBC News, May 24, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65693118>). Even though I think these numbers are indeed an exaggeration, the JDP governments' lack of transparency makes any sorts of statistics considerable. No matter which statistics are true, what is interesting and worth mentioning about them is that they cover only the last decade. In the end, through comparing different statistics, it is safe to say that Turkey has received millions of non-coethnic foreigners in only a decade, which almost amounts to 10% of its whole population.

²⁶ Selim Kuru, "Can Turkey Be a Melting Pot?," Can Turkey be a melting pot? - by Selim Kuru, September 27, 2023, https://kulturkampfr.substack.com/p/can-turkey-be-a-melting-pot?utm_medium=email.

²⁷ There have been less than 10,000 asylum seekers/refugees in all of Turkey before 2011: zero for temporary protection (see T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı, "Geçici Koruma," T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>.) and 8932 for international protection (see T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı, "Uluslararası Koruma," T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/uluslararasi-koruma-istatistikler>). Almost in a decade, Turkey has received millions of refugees and migrants, predominantly from Middle Eastern countries, that amount to almost 10% of its whole population.

accelerated in this last decade as well. As Morgül (2022, 10) details, this project has run counter and antagonized the secular and pro-Western ethos of Kemalist nationalism, the founding ideology of the modern Turkish republic on several fronts: elevation of Sunni Islam as the core pillar of Turkishness, situating modern Turkey in its Ottoman past and finally, forming bridges with the former (and in my opinion, arguably Sunni) territories of the Ottoman Empire. This civilizationist discourse, coupled with the accommodation of non-Turkish Muslim migrants and foreigners, became a substantial part of this project (Çınar 2018; Yanaşmayan et al. 2019, 48). Here, there is a substantial and resistant disposition for building an ummah, or in other words a Muslim nation, instead of an ethnically Turkish dominant nation, which goes against every core value of the modern Turkish republic.

In brief, I argue that this whole Muslim nation project is itself possessed of many different instantiations of counter-conduct, such as the altered demographic outlook of Turkey that I have underlined above, but it is not only limited to that. Other instances include increasing religious tones and interventions in the national education system that not only includes the increased number of Imam Hatip schools in the country, but also projects like CEDES and various agreements with faith-based organizations/tariqas²⁸ for so-called educational purposes; exclusion of the army, which once was seen as the guardian of secularism in Turkey, from all internal politics and its transformation to a “tool” which is mostly used for achieving JDP’s civilizationist and maximalist goals abroad (especially according to a new report by German SWP²⁹) in regard to reestablishing the Ottoman past; and so on. Yet inevitably, this Muslim nation project also includes the governance of sexualities, as (Islamic) decency is a substantial pillar of this Sunni Muslim identity. Therefore, in the next subsection, I will be discussing the governance of sexualities in relation to repressive hypothesis and prevalent sexuality discourses in relation to counter-conduct. However, I will elaborate more on this counter-conduct discussion in Chapter 4 and in Article 2.

One last important remainder about this Muslim nation project and its immediate impact on sexualities is that it was still in its initial steps when this research first started, and the reconfigurations in power relations and their future outcomes are still in progress. The counter-conduct against Western conduct is a matter of progression and thus more related to the future than to the present (except its historical roots, of course), let alone to the timespan of this dissertation.

²⁸ Role of Islam in Turkish education fuels secularist fears | Reuters, accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/role-islam-turkish-education-fuels-secularist-fears-2023-12-14/>.

²⁹ Sinem Adar and Nebahat Tanrıverdi Yaşar, “Rethinking Civil-Military Relations in Turkey,” Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2023C55/>.

2.6 The foundation of heteronormativity: the coexistence of contradicting sexual discourses and meanings attached to them

Once Western conduct is acknowledged for the Turkish context, the societal impacts of Islamism and political Islam become more contested, because some of these impacts are often evaluated as if the Turkish society had become more religious/Islamic. However, when one historically situates Islamism in Turkey to the nexus of resistance, a more nuanced perception of power relations can be grasped. Because all governance of sexualities and coexistence of distinct and contradicting sexual discourses come into being within these power relations, it is a substantial task to unveil them. That is why I discourage the uses of umbrella terms/broader categorizations related to Islam for Turkey: they are bound to fail at understanding the local specificities. Thus, once the power relations in Turkey are unpacked and dominant/hegemonic and resistant parties and discourses are mapped onto certain coordinates, one should become more competent for a journey to trace the continuities and discontinuities of sexual discourses throughout the last two hundred years of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. In this last subsection, I also detail my beef with a certain academic tradition, which was mainly presented by Dror Ze'evi's argumentation of a "repressive hypothesis" for the (Islamic) East while scrutinizing these discourses in different historical periods.

Article 2 explains and opposes his arguments further with greater elaboration, but to summarize, Ze'evi (2006) claims that existing sexual scripts (Gagnon 1984; Weeks 1986) in the Ottoman Empire disappeared or lost their efficacy, especially due to the interactions between locals and Westerner travellers in the late Ottoman period, though later on, for Ze'evi, the new scripts failed to emerge and take the place of the old ones. In other words, the repression of sexualities was achieved within the East, while it failed in the (Catholic) West, as Westerners were able to replace the old sexual discourses with new ones. I assert there are two significant problems in Ze'evi's approach: First, as Sarıtaş (2020) rightly remarks, it undermines the agency of locals and the internal dynamics of Turkey, as it allocates the disappearance of Ottoman scripts to travellers' denunciation of the locals. Second, it does not acknowledge that these old scripts and discourses were being replaced with new and original ones, as I show from different historical periods, even if there are lots of contradictions between these newly diffused coexisting sexual discourses.

If one tackles the first problem, it will become apparent that a further genealogical inquiry is necessary to comprehend the transition to the foundation of heteronormativity. Sarıtaş (2020, 65) frames the 17th century schism between Sufis, whose belief and philosophy permitted a libidinal continuity between homoerotic love and the love of God, and Kadızadeli, who were considered puritans of their time, as an important cornerstone for heteronormativity's foundation in Ottoman-

Turkish history. Kadızadeli's were critical of everything that was after Mohammed's era, and their influence on Sultan (thus their impact on policymaking) and on some segments of the Ottoman society gradually increased in the mid-17th century.

The second important milestone for Sarıtaş, was the homosocial panic in the 19th century. Here, Sarıtaş deliberately coins the term "homosocial panic" instead of "homosexual panic," which was the term used in Western Europe. In the Ottoman society, on the other hand, marginality and stigmatization were related to particular places rather than individuals and groups. Sarıtaş further engages in dialogue with Ze'evi, and by appealing to different sources, like memoirs and city encyclopaedias, she claims that the transition from Ottoman sexual discourses that were often inclusive of (male) homosexuality to modern heteronormativity was not straightforward, at least not as Ze'evi pictured it. For example, although it is true that certain homosocial settings had started to lose their homoerotic potentialities, these potentialities did not disappear completely but rather revived in more private spaces. Also, as she highlights, even in more recent periods like the late 19th century, male homosexual relations were still acceptable in certain institutional settings (Sarıtaş 2020). Along with the modern homoerotic settings within the new state institutions, new intergender relations were also emerging (Sarıtaş 2020). In Article 2, I have also underlined the prevalent obscene literature in the late Ottoman and early Republican eras, as well as pointing out the sex influx in the 1970s in Articles 2 and 4, and more recent trends within the new media scenery, like OnlyFans content production and so on, again in these two articles. These examples, which expand through different periods, I believe, unsettle Ze'evi's claim of blank page that is devoid of new sexual scripts, as they are ridden with "new" sexual scripts.

Finally, in Article 4 where I zoom in to the sex influx and its aftermath, I also discuss the continuum of gender inequality in Turkey through gendered perceptions about the porn performers in Turkey. The sex influx refers to a particular period in Turkish cinema when industry workers, from theatre owners and directors to actors and actresses, shifted towards producing sex movies: first, Italian-like sex comedies; then, softcore and occasionally hardcore pornography. The shift took place in the face of certain socioeconomic and political developments, both within Turkey and around the globe. I will be detailing the findings in the next and last sections of the dissertation, but to summarize, it was the female performers who were downtrodden within the process, while male performers who took part in the influx managed to continue their careers without any interruptions. It was not only the careers of the sex influx women that were ruined, but their whole lives were also devastated, and in some cases, like the murder of Feri Cansel, they became the victims of femicide.

Scrutinizing the sex influx was important for a couple of reasons more. As Larsson (2022) affirms, there is recent interest in bygone porn and it is worth studying, but at the same time, this whole corpus should be approached cautiously

because it comes with risks of feeding into anti-porn activists' arguments via its more "ruthless, violent and degrading" gendered depictions (Larsson 2022, 35). The sex influx certainly had similar stiff, gendered content (Atakav 2013, 45) that Larsson warns the future porn studies researchers about, but as Yaren (2018) suggests, there is more to it. For him, sex influx movies managed to create their own vernacular discourse, not only by taking on the social and class-based fault lines in the 1970s Turkey but also by articulating a sex-positive femininity (Yaren 2018, 12). For Yaren, this peculiar articulation had long-lasting effects in Turkish cinema, even after the sex influx's decline (Yaren 2018, 13). However, it is equally important to acknowledge that this sex-positive femininity did not prevent the ruination of female performers' careers and lives. All in all, I think the sex influx was an important phenomenon to bring to the table because it presents a discursive threshold regarding sexualities in Turkey.

In this last subsection, I argued that placing the Turkish context under some umbrella terms like "Islamic" is not only unproductive, but it also undermines the differences of conduct between different Muslim-majority countries. To that end, I introduced and discussed Foucault's framing of power. Partly, I also believe that Ze'evi's argumentation suffers from its appeal to such umbrella terms. In the picture Ze'evi provides, one can make little distinction between Ottoman Turkey/Balkans and the Ottoman Arab-world. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology of this work.

3 Methodology: A reflection on the research material, methods, and ethical considerations

In the previous chapter, I exhibited the theoretical frameworks and important concepts that were manifested in the articles and discussed the advantages of their inclusion compared to some other ones. In this chapter, I discuss my research material, methods and certain ethical considerations. When approaching the data, I picked more of an inductive approach (or a less theory-driven approach), and through re-readings of the (interview) material, I let my data content lead me in potential directions. From there, I found myself scrutinizing certain theoretical and methodological tools to work with in accordance with those directions. In the end, I took the liberty of choosing the research material and methods according to different epistemic priorities within the different stages of my dissertation, while respecting the specificities of the social morphology at hand (Ünsaldı 2019, 21), just like I did for deciding on the theoretical tools that I would deploy.

The risks associated with the Turkish context and the specific social morphology it sits on are a significant issue related to the research design because they revolve around the question of “how to study.” The other most important aspect is “what to study,” i.e., the exact dimension/aspect of online porn to investigate: The spectators’ voice and their lived experiences of porn and certain discourses around sexuality and porn were chosen to analyse. As such, I wanted to understand the normativity and pleasure pertaining to sexual media in Turkey, first via the spectators’ ways of perceiving porn and their uses, and second, by tracing the continuities and discontinuities between certain discourses on sexuality and various sexual media. Of course, these two distinct aspects that I look at relate to each other on many levels.

The main research materials of this dissertation are the interview data (Article 1 and 3). Although there are some other materials present in the articles – the film material and comments from porn aggregator sites (Article 4), old (erotic) magazine covers from both the Republican and Imperial eras of Turkey (Article 2), and finally, other material concerning certain public debates (about the sex influx in the 1970s, or porn in general), like the testimonies of performers and statements of politicians

– they are not analysed as such³⁰. The focus is rather to build a historical context to comprehend the later developments and values connected to porn and other sexually explicit media in Turkey through the extant research. In the following two subsections, I first explain the logic behind the selection – and also the exclusion – of certain research material, and then elucidate the methods I used for analysing the interview data.

3.1 Research material

As noted, my research material consists of interview data, and therefore spectators' words. And accordingly, I would like to clarify my choice concerning the spectators. Investigating spectators' voice and their lived experiences is crucial yet often missing in porn studies. As Paasonen et al. (2015, 396) point out, in earlier scholarship porn consumers have long suffered from an absence, as well as being reduced to an abstract figure through which the differences between spectators are flattened and certain popular images like "men in dirty raincoats, motivated by lust and susceptible to direct 'effects' (of online porn)" are reproduced. These concerns on how little space has been given to the spectators' perspective in previous porn scholarship were still valid when I first started my doctoral research back in 2018. Moreover, my previous master's dissertation was also partially about porn spectatorship, and I already had a fairly rich dataset from that earlier research. In this dataset, fourteen informants (seven men and seven women, while two of the men self-identified as homosexuals, and one self-identified bisexual woman and one genderfluid individual) were involved, and I conducted additional interviews with five of them. These interviews were collected between 2015 and 2016. Relooking at the diversities in my informants' interview data, not only in regard to their gender variations and sexual preferences, but also the length and content of their narratives, and considering the absence of spectators in earlier research, this old dataset from my master's dissertation was a convenient starting point. After deciding to use these data, I nevertheless continued to conduct new interviews, some with new informants

³⁰ Because the materials on porn aggregator sites are way too scattered and disorganized, and sometimes even incomplete, I have not analysed them as cultural objects. Rather, I have focused on the depicted sexual acts and investigated their comment sections. When it comes to the erotic magazine covers from the Ottoman era, a similar picture appears: Most of these magazines can be only found randomly in bibliopoles ("sahaf" in Turkish) scattered throughout Turkey. Because I was mainly interested in the depictions on the covers, I used Güven Erkin Erkal's (2014) study on pin-up models, in which he exhibits his selection of covers, so the magazines are again not analysed as cultural objects. Likewise, erotic novellas were written in Ottoman Turkish, so the content was impossible for me to read and analyse, and I had to rely on secondary sources.

and some follow-up with the old participants. I was already familiar with the diverse nature of the porn spectatorship, a familiarity that comes both from my insider position (I am also a porn spectator myself³¹) and from the fieldwork.

All things considered, I became certain to go on with what I had already started in my master's and concentrate on porn spectators and their uses of porn and other sexually explicit media. While writing research proposals and forming the initial articulations of the SQs, I was already convinced that the spectators' voice was a very fit and engaging means to explore all the SQs, including the fourth one about the local histories. Since conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews gives space to informants to shape and direct the conversation, it seemed the most efficient way for pulling out the meanings attributed to the uses of porn and articulations of bodily pleasures, as well as the ways for navigating between the norm and pleasure, which are all within the scope of all SQs. Just like in the beginning of my research, I still believe that it is crucial to resort to spectators' voices and to illustrate their diverse preferences and tastes in order to have a better and more nuanced understanding of the uses of online porn and any other sexual media, along with how normativity and pleasure pertain to them.

I had to deal with certain obstacles while thinking about what to analyse other than the interviews. In that sense, one of the most significant problems was the lack of archives. As many scholars have already pointed out, the lack of proper archives is a common and serious problem for porn studies (Williams 2014; Bull 2014; Mercer 2014; Larsson 2022; Maina and Zecca 2022: 121). For instance, even when I was trying to find material from the sex influx, I struggled with the same problem and the full-scale destruction policy orchestrated by the military junta back in the 1980s did not make the search easier. Thus, I had to look at what was already available on porn aggregator sites. Another obstacle about choosing material was, of course, the language barrier. Most material that predates 1923, hence the foundation of the modern Turkish Republic, is often incomprehensible to the modern reader, including me. To understand such material, one needs to be able to read Arabic script and have a command of the bygone Ottoman language³² a whole different language than modern Turkish, as also mentioned in the previous chapter. In this sense, as Öncü (1997: 269) claimed a long time ago, "there is no Turkish history more than seventy years" – and now, not more than ninety years-. Thus, the lack of a proper

³¹ This information has been given to some participants in accordance with the dynamics of the interaction.

³² However, the very existence of this language barrier was influential when forming some of the arguments present (namely, the ones about conduct and counter-conduct) in Article 2. I discuss them in more detail in the second part of this introduction and obviously, in Article 2.

archive from the sex influx and my insufficient Ottoman language skills, have both prevented the study of a certain type of material for me.

Nonetheless, the presence of these obstacles and limitations does not mean that I could not identify the proper means to answer my SQs. Although choosing certain materials to analyse for building a historical context (specifically to answer SQ4) would probably lead to some exciting results, I was not the proper researcher to do so, as just discussed above. Furthermore, the already existing scholarship on past perceptions of sexuality and obscenity in Turkey was engaging. That is why I chose to work with the extant research in the end. Through this choice, I was able to build a historical context while scrutinizing the continuum of gender inequality, different parties' distinct valuations of certain sexual identities/practices and porn/porn spectatorship in the Turkish context. It is again worth noting that YouTube-like porn sites' prevalence and their large video base were favourable in terms of retrieving some video material from the sex influx, because most of the video cassettes were destroyed by the military and/or police after the military coup in 1980. Getting my hands on this material was crucial to discuss the outcomes of the extant research.

At the same time, one may wonder why I decided to include the sex influx. How was it relevant and why is it still this important? Throughout my research, I endeavoured to select a suitable case that would reflect contemporary perceptions of (online) porn and in general, perceptions of sexual media throughout the last two hundred years in Turkey, and I had a couple of exemplary cases on my mind. But the recent debates on the sex influx were even more promising for the sake of the historicization and contextualization because they were connecting past discussions with recent ones. Also, the contemporary interest in vintage porn (Larsson 2022) has positively impacted the sex influx's inclusion in my research. Last but not least, the release of Erşan Kureri, a 2022 Netflix series that focuses on a ex-director (but fictive) from the sex influx and the debates it sparked, as well as OnlyFans' unexpected advent amongst the Turkish content producers in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the discussions that compare them with the sex influx labourers, all proved that the sex influx was that "suitable" case and led to Article 4. The influx is still partly scrutinized in Article 2 and reappears in the utterances of informants in Article 3. Yes, some informants have also been vocal about the sex influx too, and in this sense, they played their part for its inclusion. In short, the sex influx and the debates it carries from past to present exhibit the older and the more recent perceptions of porn and other sexual media in Turkey. Thus, in Article 4, I did not analyse the films or the production culture but rather inquired what the films and the ways through which they are remembered today telling us about the gender dynamics and sexual cultures in general in Turkey.

Other than the sex influx and the related debates, as I detailed in the previous chapter, I critically approach to the idea of an overarching Islamization of Turkey

and repressive hypotheses in Article 2. Through this critical stance, I explore the traces of different discourses on obscenity and porn by focusing on different historical periods like the late Ottoman era when the erotic stories were rampant, the sex influx, and JDP's recent policies of (sexualities') governance. Different sources from these periods, like politicians' statements and newspaper interviews with performers, permit me to zoom in to these debates. The strength of this kind of (research) design choice, which was present in Articles 2 and 4, lies within the historical contextualization, which also covers the illustration of the coexistence of contradicting and complementary discourses on sexuality and porn in the Turkish context.

3.2 Research methods

The methods that I use in my research are prevalent in media studies, but how these methods are applied can be very varied, distinct, and sometimes, even false. For instance, Clarke and Braun (2021) claim that their thematic analysis is widely cited and used, although not always in line with what they have been arguing/suggesting. Bearing these differences and similarities between different methods in mind, I mainly used a combination of thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun 2006; 2019; 2021) and narrative analysis (Reissman 1993; 2008) when examining the interviews. And as stated many times, the interviews are semi-structured and in-depth. While I applied these methods in different articles to different extents, I also pondered the ways to detect affect (Paasonen 2011) and assemblages (Latour 2005) in my dataset.

Doing semi-structured in-depth interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews are proven to be beneficial when gathering more sophisticated information and knowledge, at least compared to what is sought in surveys, informal interviews, or focus groups, because information provided by semi-structured interviews concerns "very personal matters, lived experiences, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, perspective and so on" (Johnson 2001; also, Galetta 2013). Similarly, they are useful when investigating hidden populations like mine. Also, when conducting an interview, leaning on certain types of open-ended questions produces more narrativization (Reissman 1993, 54). For these reasons, semi-structured in-depth interviews appeared to be one of the most suitable methods for gathering potentially very promising data for my research. Yet the proper applications of semi-structured in-depth interviewing and analysing its data are far from being simple, and I sometimes struggled with these complexities too. Here I address them and explain the semi-structured in-depth interviews with greater elaboration.

The first significant challenge was to locate the convenient informants. When I first started to think about with whom I should conduct interviews for my master's dissertation, my back-then advisor suggested I focus on a meaningful study sample and also think about the vaster universe of porn spectators. Even though I knew almost everybody was watching porn (in other words, online porn's widespread circulation overruns almost every identity marker like race, class, gender, and sexuality), through a pilot study that was designed as a multiple-choice survey on Google Forms, I wanted to verify and validate this prior knowledge.³³ I used social media networks like Facebook but also appealed to a multipurpose announcement site called EkşiDuyuru. More than 400 participants from different backgrounds filled out the online form. Through this pilot study, I was able to confirm that the existing universe of online porn spectators was vast enough that it was not possible to define a meaningful study sample based on specific socio-economical traits. Hence, I adopted a different strategy.

Taking into consideration (sexual) tensions present in the Turkish context, which I explain in more detail in Article 1, I decided to reach out to people who were explicit and open about their spectatorship. After locating the primary informants, I then moved on with a combination of purposive and snowball samplings. In total, I conducted interviews with eighteen informants with different sexual orientations but similar socio-economic backgrounds. Among these eighteen informants, there were eight cisgender women, nine cisgender men, and one genderfluid individual, all with different sexual leanings: Among the men, four self-identified as homosexual, while the rest as heterosexual. Of the women, three self-identified bisexuals, and one who had identified herself as heterosexual initially, later informed me that she had discovered her bisexuality. In a similar way, the individual, who was identifying as a cis woman, later started to speak of themselves as a gender fluid person. With purposive sampling, I mainly tried to establish a gender balance among the participants. Snowball sampling, on the other hand, has indeed produced similarity, which I detail later in this part, and it is obvious from the close socio-economic traits of the participants.

Agreeing with Reissman's (1993, 55) preferences on the less structured interview instruments, I prepared an interview guide that consisted of broad questions on the topic, supplemented with some probe questions if needed. The interview guide's overall structure remained more or less the same, although I did some comprehensive modifications throughout the process. Therefore, some informants also went through follow-up interviews. The final version of the interview guide commences with open-ended questions on sexuality, then moves on

³³ Unfortunately, this pilot study is not available to me as of October 2023.

to the informants' histories of porn spectatorship, porn preferences, and their connection (in terms of continuity/discontinuity) within their lived experiences. Through these topics, I investigated the quotidian uses of porn in relation to certain contextual cues like gender, sexual preferences, and meanings attached to sexuality.

The interviews were conducted over a quite long period (from 2015 onwards, although there have been some gaps) as they were first used to gather data for my master's thesis. After I moved to Turku, Finland, in 2018 for my Ph.D. research, the interviews continued. The first interviews often took place in offline real locations such as cafes or university canteens, while follow-ups have moved to online environments like Skype, FaceTime, or WhatsApp. This shift from face-to-face interviews to webcams was first and foremost practical due to my relocation to Turku. The interview times range from as short as half an hour to longer sessions, like three hours. All interviews were semi-structured, tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized by me. Any detail that could lead to the disclosure of my participants' identity was removed or pseudonymized. Interviews were conducted in Turkish and translated to English by me. All informants gave informed consent to take part in the research and were briefed that they could stop and leave the interview if they desired to. Finally, there was no ethical clearance needed by the ethical board at the time of the start of my Ph.D. research because the criterion was to work with vulnerable groups, and this was not applicable in my case. After the EU's GDPR law came into effect in 2018, and TENK published new guidelines in 2019, the topic of sexuality was included in the class of "sensitive data" requiring ethics review, yet this did not apply retrospectively to research projects already underway. It is imperative to state that in all stages of my dissertation, relevant TENK guidelines were followed, and good research practices were maintained throughout.

The second most crucial aspect of the semi-structured interviews was my background as a researcher. This not only has a huge impact on how I conduct the research: I am the only one to approach and work with the interview data through certain practices like transcribing (Reissman 1993, 13), and coding (Maclure 2013, 167), but also on the interview, which is a social interaction itself (Plummer 1995; Johnson 2001). The fact that these interviews were being conducted by a cis male, straight researcher, and the possession of such identifiers, particularly in the Turkish context, may have affected the disclosed information and the other potential revelations from the interviewees as I discuss more in Article 1 and the last subsection of this part. Still, my researcher position, especially my affiliation with one of the most liberal (at least back in the early 2010s) universities in Turkey and the presence of reliable – and most of the time, female – intermediaries have been helpful in the sense of building trust, which is significant in such interviews (Johnson 2001). Building trust is substantial as the meaning arises from an interaction between "self, teller, listener and recorder, analyst, and reader" (Reissman 1993, 15).

Once I collected a considerable amount of data, I started to think about how many interviews would be enough. Although the number of interviews needed to be able to explore the research problem is debated, Johnson (2001, 114) argues that even though it depends on the nature of the research question and the type of knowledge that the researcher seeks to learn, the data should often be enough if the interviewer concluded that they got the maximum out of the interviews. There are also other additional actions that a researcher can take to validate this saturation, like verifying the sufficiency of data with key informants or some follow-up interviews. In my case, follow-up interviews had a similar function. After completing the interviews and having a huge chunk of data in my hands, I was full of thoughts on how to analyse it. What I was certain of was reflexivity, and so I wanted to study my data as reflexively as possible. Ultimately, I decided to use a combination of narrative analysis (Reissman 1993) and thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun 2006; 2017; 2021).

Analysis of data

As noted earlier in this subsection, using these methods is fairly common and popular in qualitative research in general, even to the degree of using them unsuitably, as Clarke and Braun (2021) warn us. In addition, most of these methods share similarities, while there is no clear consensus on what specific method is what (Clarke and Braun 2006, 80) and thus it may lead to confusion both for the applicant and the reader. Hence, a clarification on how I used these methods in my research is imperative here. I mainly used thematic analysis in order to reach a thematic description of my entire dataset, not only one data item. This means seeking particular themes or patterns across my whole dataset. Clarke and Braun (2006, 87) provide their readers with a step-by-step guide to successful thematic analysis, which includes six separate phases. I myself have also gone through these same phases and as they suggest, this is a recursive process where one has to go back and forth between the phases, so the progression is never linear.

Transcription of data, as they suggested, allowed me to familiarize myself with my data. I did not use any codebook or a similar tool (see also Clarke and Braun 2021) because I do not believe in the merits of neopositivist concerns around “objective” and “unbiased” coding. On the contrary to being objective, according to Deleuze and Guattari, coding should be understood as “a matter of cutting into flows of difference and intensity to produce systems of meaning and order – systems that are never culturally or politically innocent” (Maclure 2013, 167). Instead, my coding phase was “open and organic,” as said with no use of any coding framework, a phase very akin to what Clarke and Braun (2021, 333-334) define as reflexive TA’s coding procedure. As noted, once the researcher’s situatedness is acknowledged, it does not

make much sense to rely on strict coding frameworks. Then, of course, the final phases concerning the themes: the search for them, their revisions and in the end, their ultimate naming and defining. In my own research, some of the themes have gone through some changes or some new themes were added throughout the process, so the non-linearity was always apparent.

Another method I use is narrative analysis (Reissman 1993). As I already noted in Article 1, I take the interview material as a sexual story told to a researcher or, in Ken Plummer's words, "personal narratives that are socially embedded in the daily practices and strategies of everyday life" (Plummer 1995). Thus, it is never a mere interview, it is a form of social interaction that sheds light on those details about one's quotidian life through narrativization, i.e., the specific way of telling their processes of interpretation of sexual norms, lived experiences and the uses of porn. However, different from my application of thematic analysis to the whole dataset, the narrative analysis method I used in this dissertation includes only certain data items. This is very relevant to retain "a sense of continuity and contradiction through any one individual account" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 96). Thematic and narrative analysis used for making sense of this interview data certainly allowed me to respond to SQs 1 and 3 in greater detail. In short, while thematic analysis allowed me to determine common themes and patterns that are present throughout the dataset, the narrative analysis paved the way for more rich details and descriptions of lived experiences of informants and how they perceive and interpret these experiences.

As highlighted in the beginning of this section, I was also attentive to reading my data through affect and assemblages. For example, during the narrative analyses of my interview data for Articles 1 and 3, I often looked at certain audio-visual cues narrators use in interviews, like elongated vowels, emphasis, pitch, repetitions, and so on. Similarly, when looking at newspaper interviews in Article 4, like the ones made with some sex influx labourers like Karaca Kaan, I paid special attention to the specific articulations of emotions like pain and anger. In Article 3, on the other hand, where I look into the assemblage formation and the materialization of norms within the porn consumption through an actor network-informed lens, I had to identify mediators (Latour 2005) too. In Latour's understanding, mediators are entities whose course of action can conduce to someone's and something's doing; in other words, they can put other people or things to work. In my case, a mediator sometimes appeared as traditional furniture and decoration, at other times, as Internet modems and a headphone set and so on. Being aware of and also being able to detect mediators mean being able to keep oneself updated and to trace innovations, changes, and so on in the networked landscapes. As I explain in more detail in Article 3, online semi-structured in-depth interviews were very useful for this because this particular format permits the listener and the teller to interact with each other via links, folders, and so on. My insider position also helped. However, it should be

noted that there is no conventional ANT methodology (Mol 2010, 261). Rather, it might be understood better in terms of a toolkit for contemplating and mapping the heterogeneity of associations that include nonhuman actors as well. As can also be seen in Article 3, I think Mol's (2010, 261) comparison of ANT with kaleidoscopes aptly conveys this idea: To link up with ANT means embracing the ever-changing colourful patterns of a social phenomenon and detecting the nonhuman actors within.

3.3 Ethical considerations and porn studies

Studying the uses of porn comes with its own challenges, and I believe these challenges necessitate an ethical reflection to clarify and discuss both the limitations and my potential biases (and/or lack of shared vulnerabilities). I also discuss the current rigors and obstacles that porn scholarship has to overcome in order to thrive as an established discipline (see Burke 2014).

Every time I think about who gets to write about pornography, I become certain of the following statement: I always had the privilege to study pornography. Self-reflexivity depends on various classed, gendered, and raced resources to which not every individual has the same access (Skeggs 2003). I identify myself as a middle class, heterosexual man.³⁴ I have had a personal computer since age nine and always had access to pornography without being seriously stigmatized. Of course, there was a certain level of forbiddance, but I have never experienced my spectatorship as a stigma; on the contrary, through homosocial bonding with other boys, it even became a means for socializing. Similarly, when I first set out to research pornography, nobody around me, at least overtly, criticized or condemned me, even in a so-called "Muslim" context. Even my parents have supported me, and they knew the details of my research, which, I suppose, would be considered a privilege in many places. All my friends, colleagues and professors were supportive and found the topic very interesting and even mind-opening. Even though it might sound like a disadvantage,

³⁴ Following Skeggs ("Techniques for Telling the Reflexive Self", in *Qualitative Research in Action*, ed. Tim May (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2003)), I object to using certain categories in order not to reproduce the problematic history of classifications. Therefore, although I look "white" and fall into the racial category of "white" in places where there are such classifications like USA, UK and/or elsewhere, I avoid defining myself as white, as Whiteness has very limited meaningful repercussions in the Turkish context. Besides, the Turkishness' position within the social construct of Whiteness is ambiguous (see Deringil, "They", ; Murat Ergin, *Is the Turk a White Man?: Race and Modernity in the Making of Turkish Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Nuray Karaman, "Coding Whiteness and Racialization: Living in the Space as an Insider-Outsider," *Journal of International Students* 13, no. 1 (April 15, 2022). Finally, there is a term called "White Turk" which is widely used, but its connotations are mostly class-related rather than ethnicity or racial identity.

I enjoyed being one of the first to study porn in Turkey. People to whom I explained my research topic, even the most conservative ones, who normally would not be comfortable in engaging in sexuality-related conversations, were making jokes about my work (though they did not always know the details and my departure questions).

Most likely, none of this would be possible if I was a female researcher or someone who belonged to a sexual minority. I agree with Burke (2014, 72), who claims there is a less diverse demographic group of researchers who would be able to study pornography without being stigmatized. When one looks at porn studies, one sees a striking over-representation of queer researchers, but these scholars are often from North American and Western European contexts, hence signalling a limited demographic group. In 2024's Turkey, LGBTIQ+ visibility in public spheres comes with risks of violence, let alone being able to work on porn openly and hassle-free in university settings. Likewise, it is safe to say a similar picture is true for female scholars. If nothing else did, the accounts of the study participants proved to me that uses of porn were never this simple and hassle-free for anyone who was not identifying as a straight male. Being a male researcher conducting research on sexualities also comes with advantages in the fieldwork. As the previous scholarship has shown, female scholars are more vulnerable doing fieldwork to study sexualities (Huysamen 2020). In brief, I had access to the necessary resources for conducting research on pornography, but this particular access has inevitably brought some limitations to my research. The most apparent limitation was the lack of shared vulnerabilities and similar affective intensities with female and non-heterosexual informants. Although I define myself as feminist and have certain kinks that fall on the outer limits of the charmed circle (Rubin 1984), or in other words, less privileged against the hierarchical valuation of certain sexual acts (especially in the Turkish society, but not limited to it), the inability to attune myself to the affective intensities that some of my study participants may have been experiencing, risked – and might even resulted in – some important stuff going unnoticed.

Beyond these affective intensities, there are some limitations in terms of research data. Small sample sizes of in-depth interviews can seem like a limitation (Riessman 1993, 70). Furthermore, personal narratives that also include the interview data like mine, are social constructs, which stem from the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Goffman 1959; Riessman 1993, 15-17); they reflect fragments of a lived experience, are situated (see also Plummer 1995), and are therefore always partial. Beyond that, there is always the risk of non-disclosure of certain details by the participants. Interviewees can lie and/or alter the events (Reissman 1993, 64), so overall their narratives should be seen as a construction of an event by an active subject (Reissman 1993, 70). As I already mentioned in the material subsection, the responses given to me might have been influenced by my identity, a cis male

researcher, and so on.³⁵ I nevertheless tried to set the balance between the “neutrality/objectivity” and my situatedness, while being aware that I, as a researcher, am not “in charge of the world” I set out to study (Haraway 1988, 594). In sum, my privileged position in these respects might have produced certain biased approaches/limitations, and I argue that it is important to acknowledge this possibility.

A further limitation, as I mentioned earlier, was caused by the particular academic positioning of online porn. Sexuality is still considered as a sensitive topic and highly regulated. There has also been a long tradition of suspicion and distrust against the potential sexual desires of researchers, which has been partially labelling the research topics on sexuality (and in particular, on porn) with a stigma (Atwood 2010; Irvine 2014), and which still affects and reinforces such perceptions of sensitivity around exploring sexualities in the academic settings. As Thomas and Williams (2016) argue, researchers’ own sexual desires are often left out of the picture for obvious reasons. Moreover, in some cases, interviews in sex research can be thought of as a disguise for looking for sex (Vörös 2015) or can be experienced as a sexual encounter (Huysamen 2020). These were not the case in my own fieldwork; however, the potential menaces around detailing one’s own sexual desires in the research I believe are still valid concerns. This is why I did not feel comfortable listing my kinks just a couple of paragraphs ago. A fruitful discussion on how my sexual desires might have affected my research design could have been very productive.³⁶ All these issues have forced me to make some tweaks in the research design. In relation to this, the flexibility given by the article-based dissertation could have been ameliorated and accentuated even more by the introduction of new research materials and/or by a more experimental and affect-informed research design (see Knudsen & Stage 2015). Still, disclosing one’s embodied experiences within the fieldwork is debated beyond porn studies, mainly by affect scholars

³⁵ On the other hand, identity markers such as sexuality, gender, race, and class do not always guarantee access to the ways of knowing. As Skeggs (“Techniques”) warns us, there are always risks of falling upon mere political claims for a superior epistemological authority, which eventually replace the critical interrogation. Thus, reflexivity should be seen as a “practice and process” that are related to resources and positioning, instead of a rhetorical strategy to convince the reader of one’s authorial power.

³⁶ Having noted that, there are examples of subtle corporeal-driven scholarship like Jacobs; however, the prevalent perceptions about female/queer scholars’ (sexual) intentions in fieldwork, compared to straight males are different, for better or worse. (see Katrien Jacobs, *People’s Pornography: Sex and Surveillance on the Chinese Internet* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012); Katrien Jacobs, “The Pornographic Mirror: Sexual Performances and Sexual Personas in Academia,” *Sexualities*, August 13, 2019, 136346071986183, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460719861834>.;

(Knudsen & Stage 2015). In this regard, another limitation was the GDPR law amendment in 2018. This actually put me in a situation where I got stuck in the middle of two different research policies, in the sense that my possibilities for gathering further interview material or thinking about different affective designs as outlined above were immediately limited. Hence, unfortunately, sexuality and porn's position in the academy and the limited possibilities for further research material and affective design opportunities for subsequent articles were major obstacles/hassles for my design.

Of course, my personal reluctance about disclosing my sexual preferences, desires, and so on applies even more to the informants whose interview data are used in Article 1 and Article 3. As I have already detailed in the first article (Asman 2023, 896), the intimate and private affairs explicit verbalization in the Turkish context carries the potentiality of certain tensions, especially for female informants who have been revealing important details of their sex lives and sexual-selves to me, a cis-male straight researcher, so this has constituted an extra layer on top of the overall "sensitive" understandings and perceptions around sexuality, porn, and other sexual media. Understandably, privacy and data protection were crucial for the informants, and accordingly, all interviews are conducted with fully informed consent, and good data management practices are followed throughout. They have been also informed about the nature of the research, that their data would be anonymized and pseudonymized (translations that are mine from Turkish to English also increased the anonymity), and that they could stop and/or leave the interview any time they wanted. Fortunately, I did not experience any such cases with the interviewees. In two interviews, despite my earlier efforts about being explicit and informative about the nature of the research, I realized that my researcher position was misunderstood and taken for something akin to a sexologist's. I went over the functioning of a semi-structured in-depth interview and reassured the informants that there were no correct or wrong answers, and only their opinions and experiences mattered. When requested, I have shared the final versions of my work, including my master's thesis. However, the dialogue between me and some of the informants could have been a lot more engaging. Unfortunately, I have also lost contact with several of the informants and have not been able to do follow-up interviews with them.

There are still some final issues to address. As noted, although the variety among the informants was respected, especially in terms of the gender balance via purposive sampling; relying mainly on snowball method for recruiting, often through my personal networks inevitably produced certain socioeconomic similarities, like their educational level and middle-class belongings. Moreover, the data I used for Article 4, which was available via public sources, involved the testimonies of deceased performers, including some victims of femicide. Already, deceased research subjects' posthumous interests lay serious ethical responsibilities on researchers'

shoulders, but retaining these responsibilities become even more significant and crucial in a context where the femicide rates are still considerably high. I endeavoured to do my best to honour the legacy they left. In terms of future research, it would be wondrous to hear their own voices in respect to the contemporary developments, not only in sense of growing violence against women and sexual minorities in Turkey, but also their take on the current stage of the prevalence of the sexually explicit content online, as these people were the among the firsts to experience what to be a porn/erotic film performer in such context³⁷.

Another issue that porn researchers have to be aware of is, of course, the ethics of porn production and consumption. While the way porn materials are being produced necessitates an ethical consideration (Sullivan and Mckee 2015), i.e., inquiring whether parties involved were treated fairly and respectfully, the meaning of fairness and respectfulness tends to change with each individual. Certain informants have voiced uncertainties about their consumption ethics, which is imperative to address briefly here. These participants were indeed concerned about how the materials they were looking at had been produced and whether it was ethical to consume them or not. However, just like PJ Macleod (2021)'s study of London feminists' articulations on what constitutes ethical porn consumption, I also found that the informants' definitions of "ethical enough" vary a lot. As PJ Macleod (2021: 70) argues, this variation stems from different parameters such as participants' attitudes, beliefs, and understandings; the context and conditions they are in; their knowledge of and information on the topic; and of course, their sexual preferences and tastes. In this study, the common red lines were drawn around the questions of consent, possible exploitation and work conditions, and whether performers' pleasures onscreen are authentic or not.

³⁷ The only thing I would think of as an obstacle for such future research is the fact that most female performers of the sex influx are already deceased or in some cases that the performers might prefer not participating in the interviews because some of them consciously prefer a very private lifestyle, away from the outside gazes for obvious reasons.

4 Findings

To understand normativity and pleasure pertaining to sexual media in Turkey, I tinkered with different theoretical frameworks, experimented with distinct methodological tools, appealed to porn spectators/viewers/consumers' voices, went through historicization and contextualization, and explained and discussed why I took this path. Now, in this section, I will be putting forward the findings reported in the articles.

Each subsection of this chapter is named after an SQ, and all the findings are expounded on in more detail and in regard to the main research question. And while doing so, I also underline the ideas and arguments that are substantial for coming to conclusions and relevant for future research. I first start with the SQs that are answered through the study of interview data and then I continue with the SQs that are for the sake of historicization and contextualization. The main corpus of this work is research articles. I strongly advise the readers to become familiar with the articles to get the most out of this chapter and make more sense about this Ph.D. dissertation in general.

4.1 What follows from conceptualizing porn as a toy? What kinds of connections emerge in acts of play with porn?

As mentioned several times, Article 1 follows Paasonen's (2018) recent call about bringing play to the realm of sexualities. While doing so, it relies on the rich data gathered by multiple interviews that were conducted with eighteen informants from different gender variations and sexual orientations. The thematic and narrative analyses of these interviews revealed utterances of play and playfulness, along with understandings and perceptions of porn as something akin to a toy from what the informants said. This has led me to think about the uses of porn as some playful phenomenon and porn as a toy to play with.

To understand what follows after such conceptualizations and the connections that emerge within the acts of play with porn, I first concentrated on how informants' porn spectatorship forms the sexual self and the ways through which it connects to the changes, modifications, transformations in the sexual fantasies, likes, and

pleasures. Just like in some other research (Atwood et al. 2019; Barker 2014; Neville 2018; Robards 2018; Smith 2007), audience engagement with porn was also complex in my data. This complexity necessitated a caution against overemphasizing the effects of different identity categories and reducing fantasies, preferences, and pleasures to mere outcomes of norms. Once this complexity and the requirements of its study are acknowledged, many interesting findings were made without pushing either normativity or pleasure into the background. Article 1's sub-question contributes to the main research question by its consideration of both normativity and pleasure, which both appear as fundamental to the uses of porn and other sexual media.

As Sicart (2014, 3) defines it, play is something that is not always necessarily fun but also can be dark, offensive, and hurtful. And a toy is not only an appropriation of play's freedoms, but a means to explore oneself and a gate to the world of fantasy and imagination. Also, toys, different than games, are often rule-free. In line with these definitions, Article 1 evidences different instances of the simultaneous existence of pleasure and discomfort; or mismatches between self-declared sexual identities and sexual acts onscreen that are masturbated to for having an orgasm. For most of the cases, the discomfort and/or unpleasant thoughts are barred from appearing, or as articulated by some informants, "some parts of the brain shut down during the masturbation" or the pleasure of playing with porn is "like listening to terrible but catchy songs or as watching poor-quality soap operas, which are both enjoyable, as long as you don't think about them much." Then, some of the connections that emerge during the toy-play might require a suspension of doubt, as sociologist Schütz (1962, 230) puts it, or as in Agamben's words, play's tendency to "break the connection between the past and present, emptying the object of all meanings and all previous evaluations (Levinovitz 2017, 278)." Thus, when one frames porn as a toy in the realm of play, genderfluid and/or male homosexual feminists who are fancying sexual acts like choking and/or maledom porn start to become more perceivable in many ways.

Having highlighted that, informants' empathy towards the performers is one of the primary reasons why negative affective registers start to appear once toy-play is concluded. Sometimes, some informants have expressed their repulsion at certain depictions (especially heterosexist ones) onscreen once the orgasm was reached (see also Macleod 2021). On the one hand, it is worth mentioning here that empathy was most commonly present in non-men's articulations. On the other hand though, lack of empathy or less empathy in men's accounts does not mean that their toy-play is always fun. Men, both those self-identified as heterosexual and as homosexual, are often hurt, harmed, or offended by hyperbolic body depictions, for example, like exaggerated penis sizes and super muscly bodies, or they can basically feel guilty, not because they empathize with performers as non-men do, but because of the

normative perceptions of certain sexual acts or certain porn categories. For example, one informant explained how he used to regret watching abusive porn in the past.

As hinted again by the definitions of the above paragraph, toy-play also involves experiments and contingencies that thrill the players (spectators). The article proves that playing with porn results in sexual exploration, expressivity, and creativity, as well as appropriation. Many informants have discovered new sexual niches, learned how to perform sexual acts like blow jobs/hand jobs, and experimented on their playmates (partners), or were surprised that they were enjoying some “disgusting” or “weird” stuff as they put it. For example, as shown in the article, one female informant detailed how she learned to perform a successful hand job from porn. As for the element of contingency, a heterosexual male was surprised that he actually finds it arousing to see depictions of women who swallow their partners’ sperm although he is repulsed “by his own cum” in general. As Tiidenberg and Paasonen (2019, 391) assert, negative affective intensities, ranging from guilt to disgust, can indeed intensify and amplify sexual desire and arousal as they add an extra layer of transgression to the encounters at hand. Article 1 reaffirms these findings.

Last but certainly not least, the article proposes considering porn spectatorship as a finite province of meaning or put differently, other realities that are apart from the everyday life world. This also echoes with Paasonen’s reminder on Johan Huizinga’s notion of magic circle as underlined in the second chapter. Magic circle serves to explain play’s apartness from the reality of the everyday life, which also resonates with online porn’s specific modalities, affordances, and dynamics. Therefore, the article also highlights the importance of understanding the communication between performer and spectator within the separate reality of online porn (and in some cases, for other sexual media or platforms that give space for toy/porn-play).

4.2 How do individuals navigate the tension between the norm and pleasure, and through which assemblages is this tension being formed?

Article 3 and SQ 3 zoom into the tension between norm and pleasure. As explained in Chapter 2 and at the end of Article 1, there are connections present between different realities and the everyday life world, and they require further analysis because they play an important part in regard to the ways through which individuals navigate that tension. Though, as detailed earlier, when I started to think how to analyse this navigation, I changed my mind and decided to work with a more modern and subtle projector, in this case, which was ANT.

To illustrate the uses of porn and the tensions that spectators have to navigate, I approached the interview data in linked with ANT. This necessitated rather an unconfined rapprochement with the interview data without “an overall scheme and no stable grid” as Mol (2010, 257) defines it. The goal was to enrich the repertoire, rather than a complete purification (Mol 2010, 257), thus I considered the relevancy of every possible actor and the network they are being enabled by, for the research, no matter how pointless and trivial they might seem. This consideration led to the detection of various interesting mediators, such as traditional Turkish household carpets, low-quality webcams, ergonomics of different electronical appliances and many more.

Then, when looking at the censorship mechanisms of the Turkish government, the article found that the efficacy and impact of these mechanisms heavily depend on various actors and their assemblages. Assemblages are understood as different human and nonhuman entities’ associations and acknowledging their presence and the ways through which they come into being (therefore assembled) is crucial to understanding the censorship mechanisms’ proper functioning. For example, in most cases, it is quite easy to bypass censorship mechanisms, yet informants can be restrained from it through the fear of viruses, slow Internet connections (and in relation to this, lack of good free VPN services), and so on. Unwilling to go through such hassles all the time, people sometimes just prefer not to look for porn or any other sexual content that is blocked and instead rely on other self-resources like imagination, already downloaded videos, and so on. Through the utterances of frustration, excitement, and remembrance, individuals not only explain how they navigate themselves within the tension between norm and pleasure but also elucidate how these assemblages are being formed.

However, the assemblages scrutinized in this article do not automatically result in materialization of norms. Meanwhile, they can also unsettle and dismantle norms. Similarly, certain configurations such as live sex cam websites can mitigate the risks of work-related gendered violence as shown in the article through the example of one informant, who fancies the ways in which her foreign friend makes substantial financial gains online as a webcam model. This results not only in being able to imagine the possibility of working in such a job in violence-free ways but also leads to disassociation of gender norms that associate female sex work with degradation. Of course, not all the norms in work here are Islam and/or other sorts of conservative culture related. As the article digs into the frustrations, the presence of negative affective registers like anxiety and self-humility becomes apparent within the encounters with porn and other sexual material. Super-fit bodies, long penises, exaggerated performances (mostly through the actors using performance-enhancing drugs and hence, there are more assemblages to explore) can create discomfort as well as reinforcing certain aesthetic bodily norms.

Another remarkable notion that emerges in the article is the technology-mediated nostalgia. Way less regulated obscenity on 1990s Turkish television and the sex influx of the 1970s were remembered with feelings of longing by some informants, as their content is challenging JDP's particular narrative of Islamic decency. In that regard, the article also offers to define this sort of nostalgia as an assemblage itself, as it comes to being through different sociotechnical affordances and the negative affective registers that are associated with JDP's policies, which promote their own version of Islam. Echoing what has been discussed in the previous subsection, i.e., the findings that state the intensification and amplification of desires due to negative affective registers and the attraction of transgression, there are many instances where pleasures amplify due to authenticity, familiarity, and proximity, not only to certain individuals, but also to social norms (see also Taylor 2022). As one informant states very clearly, steering for a specific taboo, for instance, active participation of some Turkish sexually active woman in live-sex performances on Periscope is exciting for him, not only because of the sexual performance onscreen but also for the fact that they are not hiding their faces and are Turkish, which is proven via their Turkish-speaking during the intercourse.

The findings of this article echo and reaffirm the results and claims of past scholarship, for instance, in regard to the overwhelming copresence and alignment of different actants, from humans to nonhumans, in developing visceral affects in networked settings (Martins 2019) or in the sense of potentialities that devices and applications, thus any sorts of nonhuman object, could carry for modifying users' capacities to act, be it to increase, sustain or diminish (Paasonen 2015). In the article, there are material assemblages of VPNs, modems, ergonomics of certain devices, Internet infrastructure (i.e., everything that is part of that infrastructure like TCP ports that are blocked and/or bits of data they carry – or cannot carry – to and from IP addresses) and so on. Yet there are also other assemblages such as fantasies, experiences, interests, longevities, nostalgia and of course, norms. Their complex alignment makes things possible, actors to act, networks that are functioning due to them, without a priori pointing in specific directions (e.g., towards dismantlement or reinforcement of norms). Similarly, such findings put the centrality of human agency in question and verify related argumentations from ANT scholars. Thus, within their quest of navigation between norm and pleasure, porn spectators act in different ways; their actions are enabled by the networks they dwell in, in spite of the existence of JDP's censorship mechanisms. In turn, they also make the networks they dwell in function. Their presence and participation in acting make these networked settings possible. This article's SQ contributes to the main RQ by illustrating the assemblages through which pleasure and normativity pertain to porn and other sexual media in Turkey.

4.3 How has porn been historically regulated and consumed in Turkey? What are the prevalent discourses concerning sexuality and porn?

Article 2 sets out to explore the historicity of porn consumption and regulation in Turkey (and also partially in the Ottoman Empire) as its SQ manifests. While it is an exploration, it also critically engages with certain academic traditions, which often rely on unproductive and misleading umbrella terms that generalize and flatten the local specificities of different Muslim-majority countries. This critical engagement is made through two major arguments: first, during the transition period that led to the ultimate foundation of heteronormativity, older sexual scripts that were inclusive of homosexuality disappeared, but certain new ones emerged and reinforced the foundations of heteronormativity, even though they did not manage to completely eradicate its instabilities. Second, I argue against defining Islamic coercion against sexualities, or conservative Islamic perceptions of sexuality in general, as hegemonic and established. Instead, I offer to put them in the nexus of resistance, because I claim their stance is formed via the will of “to be conducted differently,” to quote Foucault (2007).

The article appeals to Ezgi Saritaş’s (2020) subtle exploration of different periods within the transition to heteronormativity in the late 19th century, highlighting specific periods, such as the increased popularity of erotic novellas during the second constitutional era and the sex influx of the 1970s to reveal how heteronormativity was founded gradually during the 19th century and also to demonstrate newer sexual scripts that are disseminated by different sources/cultural scenarios (Simon and Gagnon 1984). Hence, through this historical investigation, the article uncloaks the coexistence of different and contradicting sexual discourses, some of which were also endorsed by some of these specific cultural scenarios formed by the erotic novellas/sex influx films. For instance, as Yaren argues, the sex influx has managed to create its own vernacular discourse that feeds upon both the social and class fault lines of 1970s Turkey and sex-positive female sexuality. Different articulations of female sexuality in such sources also pave the way for a more popularized participation of a female audience. Both Toprak (2015) and Yaren (2018) point out that female audiences were interested in such sexual material. At the same time, though, certain sex influx material also created its own sexist revenge discourse that plays upon the bourgeoisie urbanite versus the traditional rural underclass (Yaren 2018, 8).

I assert that these arguments, which ignore the emergence of new sexual scripts in the late Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey, originate from Turkey’s deliberate and direct placement in the Muslim/East/Middle East, which a priori eliminates/flattens all possible differences and local specificities between these distinct Muslim-majority contexts. For example, historian Dror Ze’evi’s

understanding of post-Ottoman Turkey as a bleak world that is void of any new sexual scripts suffers from the same flattener approach. However, overemphasizing the societal outcomes of JDP's reign and suggesting that its reign happened because of an increased Islamization of the country in the first place is equally misleading. Of course, as I have argued in the theoretical background chapter, there are many efforts on JDP's behalf "to make Turkey connected with its authentic Islamic roots," because for them, a remarkable proportion of the Turkish nation is just root rot in its current state, something that the article's title heralds in advance. What I am arguing against is that JDP's long electoral success is itself often seen as a manifestation of a more Islamic Turkey, which for me, is not the case. Here, it is critically important to acknowledge that Erdoğan and JDP, even after two decades in power, do not see Turkey as Islamic as they would like it to be. Erdoğan's obsession with establishing an intellectual power manifests this inadequacy. That is why I wanted to study and highlight this inadequacy by citing Foucault's conceptualizations of power.

In the remaining part of this subsection, I would like to elaborate more on Islamic counter-conduct and its attempts to modify the existing Western conduct through different means, insofar as this strictly relates to the article's findings. The most substantial part of this counter-conduct is the Muslim nation project (Morgül 2022). As explained in the theoretical chapter, this project consists of three main pillars : 1- the placement of Sunni Muslim identity at the core of Turkishness, or better, replacing it with Turkishness through Sunni Islam's supranational connotations; 2- establishing close ties with former Ottoman-ruled regions (especially if they have a Sunni Muslim heritage) to "make Turkey great again"; and 3- situating the Ottoman legacy as the ontological basis for contemporary Turkey. Earlier, I claimed that Erdoğan's endorsement of non-Turkish Muslim migration to Turkey constituted an important part of this project; however, JDP's biopolitics expand on multiple societal layers, like the increased presence of tariqas in public space as well as their infiltration to various bureaucratic settings, national education becoming more religion-based/influenced (along with the inflation of Quran courses), and strictly controlled Internet (although it is not hard to bypass the censorship, but it is annoying), and many more. This seemingly almost boundless extent of JDP biopolitics, in the sense of their sheer enthusiasm to permeate all the domains of the life of Turkey's local populations, I believe, strengthen my argument of Islamic counter-conduct because there are many things to modify and be corrected in Erdoğan's and JDP's opinion. This, as noted, corresponds to the plea to be conducted differently, in my opinion, and necessitates situating Islamists of Turkey to a more resistant point.

To give more examples, Erdoğan never uses the word "Atatürk," the surname of the founder of the modern republic, and this is supposedly a historical rhetorical

strategy of Turkish Islamism.³⁸ Similarly, Necmettin Erbakan, the famous Islamist politician and mentor of Erdoğan,³⁹ and his supporters protested and declined to chant the national anthem of Turkey in the “Jerusalem rally” back on 6 September 1980. Likewise, Islamists’ *tariqas* have been underground for decades trying to provide clandestine (religious) education as an alternative to the official curriculum and even promoting certain “Islamic” modes of life. Such rejections of the supposedly common and essential national values are remarkable and reminiscent of how Foucault imagines the instantiations of counter-conduct. Here I find it imperative to repeat how Foucault writes about the counter-conduct: “to be led differently, by other men, and *towards other objectives than those proposed by the apparent and visible official governmentality of society* (emphasis is mine).” JDP and all prior Islamic movements, be they in the form of a political party or as NGOs or anything in between, opposed to objectives of the secular Turkish state (also to the Westernization and modernization objectives of the Ottoman state) and the examples above reflect only a tiny fragment of their opposition. To make my claim stronger, I also offer to read all this information through the distinction between Turkey and other Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, made by Margot Badran (2009): In many Muslim-majority countries, education, and law with the exception of family law, was taken from the religious authorities and tried to be given to the secular state. Still, for Badran, such efforts have failed and resulted in an incomplete separation of spheres. But Turkey appeared as an exception due to the successful reforms and its long-lasting secular tradition. Therefore, in such a context, Islamism’s coercive stances should not be seen as hegemonic or as the conduct; on the contrary, they should be defined either as counter-hegemonic or counter-conduct. Otherwise, as has been done by some scholars, findings of certain scholarship can lead to defining recent Islamic sexual decency, and sexual norms that it posits, wrongheadedly as hegemonic.⁴⁰

Of course, situating Islamic discourses in Turkey to the nexus of resistance might meet with substantial backlash, and I am pretty aware that these arguments extend beyond the scope of this dissertation. Still, from a Foucauldian lens, it is important

³⁸ According to columnist Tayfun Atay, this is because Atatürk took this surname once he established laicism and abolished the Islamic caliphate, which was a heritage of the Ottoman Empire; see in Turkish: Tayfun Atay, “Erdoğan Neden ‘Atatürk’ Demekten Kaçınıyor?,” *Cumhuriyet*, November 10, 2015, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/412005/Erdogan_neden_Ataturk_demekten_kaciniyor_.html.

³⁹ Erdoğan started his political career in Erbakan’s party.

⁴⁰ For an example of such scholarship, see Veronika Tzankova, “Watching Porn in Turkey: Women, Sex, and Paradigm Shifts,” *Porn Studies* 2, no. 2–3 (July 3, 2015): 208–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2015.1061745..>

to distinguish the conduct and the counter-conduct, because it reveals too much about the ongoing debates on sexualities and coexistence of contradicting and unstable sexual discourses. Hence, this article and its SQ not only contribute to the main RQ through the historization and contextualization of the research problem but also propose to detect the essential social coordinates of Islamist movements in Turkey (with JDP being its terminal form) within the power relations.

4.4 Why was the sex flux of the 70s in Turkey important, how did it end, and in what ways, did it reflect the continuum of gender inequality in Turkey?

The fourth article and its SQ focus on the sex flux of the 1970s and first lay bare how the sex influx was a part of certain international trends at the time, a period which is often called “the golden era of porn” within the histories of porn. For instance, in both Italy and Turkey, the prevalence of sexploitation/softcore sex films was eased, if not catalysed, by certain developments like the introduction of television and the consequent decline of film theatre audiences. Likewise, in the UK, along with the introduction of television, economic instability coupled with massive inflation, caused by the oil crisis, resulted in the adoption of similar strategies by British film producers (Yaren 2017, 1362).

Other international affinities the sex influx possessed can be seen when one looks at its content more closely. Softcore movies that were spliced with hardcore material, dominantly from imported hardcore material from abroad, reflect some similar strategies adopted by other film producers in different parts of the globe. The necessity of avoiding censorship and/or working around some legal obstacles, in general, resulted in various original solutions like *şanzıman*, which literally meant gearbox in English and referred essentially to the practice of reel swapping in case of a police raid. The *şanzıman* was the “Turkish” strategy, but Italian film producers were also commonly using hardcore inserts when exporting sex films to neighbouring France (as they could not sell the same content within Italy (see Maina and Zecca 2022, 127). Although it is hard to define them as a part of the golden era⁴¹ and they reflect more recent trends in general, Malayalam softcore sex films and Bangladeshi celluloid porn had also included comparable techniques and strategies

⁴¹ What constitutes the golden era might be vague, temporally, and geographically, but in general, it is used as a term to point out the 35-mm film production and cinema distribution era in connection to the developments within the 1970s regarding production, consumption, regulation, and public visibility. See Susanna Paasonen and Laura Saarenmaa, “Golden Era, Revisited,” *Porn Studies* 10, no. 4 (October 2, 2023): 336–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2023.2265128>.

(Mini 2019, 58; Hoek 2020, 99-100). Beyond these “technical solutions” like inserts, the contextualization of obscenity could help elude censorship. Comparable to the decamerotic subgenre of the Italian erotic cinema, which emerged as a venture to bypass censorship by relating obscenity with artistry (Maina and Zecca 2020), the sex influx films’ obscenity could have been ignored if they were “socially” accepted (Yaren 2018, 10-11)⁴². Similar but also distinct in their local specificities, all these international trends evidence the importance of vernacular mediations of porn that fall outside of the North American context. The Turkish sex influx, on the other hand, has managed to create its own vernacular discourse by articulating sex-positive femininity and also by feeding upon the fault lines of class in the national context (Yaren 2018).

Another substantial trait of the sex influx, including its aftermath, is the way it reflects the continuum of gender inequality as well as political pragmatism when it comes to the governance of sexualities. As discussed in the article, a new Netflix series by comedian and standup artist Cem Yılmaz, *The Life and Films of Erşan Kunteri* (Erşan Kunteri 2022), sparked certain debates about the era, as it features a fictive ex-sex influx director’s post-sex influx career choices and the new films, he is interested in producing and directing. The most common criticism against Yılmaz’s series was its neglect of the fate of female performers. As explained in more detail in the article, those performers not only witnessed their careers collapsing before their eyes, but some, like Feri Cansel, also became victims of femicide. It is important to note that during female performers’ suffering, their male counterparts continued to live their lives and pursue their careers without any problems. Thus, the indifference and neglect of Erşan Kunteri towards female performers’ agonies, almost forty-five years after the peak years of the sex influx, becomes another example of the continuum of gendered approaches towards women who make financial gains out of sexually explicit content.

In this regard, the article also scrutinizes the similarities – and also differences – between the societal perceptions of sex influx performers and current OnlyFans content producers. As noted, there have been many female OnlyFans producers in

⁴² On the other hand, in the Italian case, there is an emphasis on the “noble literary tradition” (Maina and Zecca 2020: 104). In contrast, in the Turkish case, socially acceptable content does not guarantee bypassing censorship. As can be seen in Yaren’s (2018, 10-11) example, which I quoted in Article 2, Susuz Yaz (Dry Summer) was not banned because of its obscenity, but because it depicts an elder brother marrying his sister-in-law while his younger brother is in jail. Another substantial difference content-wise is that Italian filmmakers were exploiting the tension around gender dynamics and new modes of female sexuality, whereas Turkish filmmakers, as mentioned many times, were using the class conflict present in 1970s Turkey as a core narrative element. However, in both contexts, a sex-positive female sexuality emerged as a result.

Turkey, some of whom were celebrities (like models and/or social media influencers), who have been making substantial financial gains while openly advertising their accounts and without facing similar agonies and/or life-threatening instances, except occasional online slut shaming and some legal harassment. The government's legal intervention was the case for Merve Taşkın, who in the end, was cleared of all the charges against her. In the article, I evaluated that this could be seen partially as a result of changing perceptions around female sexuality and "making money" out of sexual content production. However, a little while after this article was published, OnlyFans was blocked in Turkey. Although I still argue in favor of changing perceptions, random but deliberate political intervention and particular means for policing female sexualities by the rightist government in Turkey, again reflect another instantiation of the continuum of gender inequality, because such legal accusations rarely target men. The article nevertheless argues, like Yaren (2017; 2018), that the sex influx's articulations of a sex-positive femininity onscreen had important consequences, especially today, in terms of appreciation of this past influx's boldness, compared to contemporary conservative approaches against sexualities. Even though there is a continuity of gender inequality, especially considering the fate of the female performers offscreen, recent appropriations of female performers' legacy, at least in certain social cohorts, are worth noting.⁴³ I assert that this stance cannot be thought of outside of Turkey's political transformation and new power configurations. As Mutluer (2018) argues, the plea for sexual freedoms is understood as a signifier of being secular and progressive in Turkey's current neoliberal context. Considering the discrepancies between (Islamic) decency, which is an important part of "domestic and national"⁴⁴ discourses of JDP, and this nostalgic sex-positive femininity, these signifiers are highlighted even more.

Historically, there has been a pragmatic approach to the governance of sexualities within the periods when different right-wing governments were ruling the country. For example, erotic novellas that were escaping censorship, especially compared to more political texts, novels, and so on, in the second constitutional era (Toprak 2015) have been followed by the sex influx films that were also avoiding censorship from time to time, due to the threat felt by socially critical films and even

⁴³ Still, these appropriations should be approached with caution because they originate from a highly polarized political context. As Larsson warns, bygone porn is ridden with heterosexist tropes (which might feed into anti-porn discourses) and these types of appropriations could remain indifferent to these sexist tropes.

⁴⁴ Erdoğan uses these adjectives to define his and his party's stance and policies. This narrative also frames the opposition parties and any other parties/institutions that oppose Erdoğan's policies, with their roots somewhere else, or root rot, as the second article's title suggests.

avant-garde films, depending on the political context in the 1970s (Yaren 2018, 21). However, I claim this pragmatism has reached its limits today, as JDP's ascension to power, thus the dissemination of its own sexual discourses and particular ways of governing/policing the sexualities, has made sexualities and certain sexual identities even more politicized, as just mentioned above. Hence, it can be said that different from previous governments, JDP frames sexualities with a more political cast, thus its policies result in more backlash. Yet, even JDP, notably in its early reign, has used and even promoted certain sexual freedoms to achieve its political goals.⁴⁵ To me, the fact that even JDP can resort to discourses on sexual freedom again crystalize the particular conduct/counter-conduct configurations that are discussed throughout this dissertation.

The final crucial finding to discuss is the revival of sex influx movies on porn aggregator sites, which highlights certain difficulties in porn research. Different scholars emphasize different downsides of the lack of archives: For example, while Linda Williams (2014, 29) sees it as a major obstacle to the development of porn studies as a proper discipline, others, like Larsson (2022), in the same vein, point out the existent milieus that could be considered an archive, even if not a proper one, and contemplate strategies that can be pursued to build proper archives for future research. Meanwhile, in the current state where we do not have any proper archives, porn aggregation platforms appear as a transitional solution, or at best, as in Gehl's (2009) definition of YouTube, they constitute "archives without a curator." In a similar vein, the fourth article enjoyed the content that was available due to the sex influx's vivid afterlife on these platforms. If this was not the case, I would not been able to discuss the outcomes, findings of the extant research on the era, and so on.

The lack of a proper archive leads to further problems. In the case of the sex influx, information about the casting practices was often anecdotal, and questions about the hiring processes of body doubles as well as stand-ins remained unanswered, all of which obstructed further exploration of such practices. At the moment, different platforms encompass "vintage" and/or "retro" (mostly softcore)

⁴⁵ For instance, in a Q&A with students, prior to his election victory back in 2002, Erdoğan promised to provide constitutional protection and legal recognition for homosexual individuals (the question was asked as such, no other sexual minority was mentioned either in the question or in the answer). It can be watched here in Turkish: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WyhizrExiaA>. Or on a late date such as 2015, before the elections of that year on 7 July, JDP distributed election flyers that stated, "Turkey has become a country where Pride marches can be held peacefully, even in Ramadan!" The flyer also shows this as proof that "nobody's way of life was threatened by JDP or by the increased visibility of conservative people." See "AKP, Lgbti'lerden Oy Almak İçin Bakın Ne Dağıtmış!," Cumhuriyet, June 17, 2016, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/akp-lgbtilerden-oy-almak-icin-bakin-ne-dagitmis-552899>

pornographic material, but in almost every case, these platforms are far from constituting a proper archive; rather, they are often built upon the capitalization/monetization of audiences' "nostalgia" (Larsson 2022, 32). Still, on one hand, examples like *privateclassics.com* in the Swedish case provide source material for scholars, even if they are not fully convenient for conducting research. As Larsson warns, relying solely on certain websites, in her case *Private Classics*, would lead to a wrongful conception of porn history (Larsson 2022, 35). On the other hand, the particular case/context of the sex influx proves that even improper semi-archives like *Private Classics* could be more valuable than one might think, especially considering recent de-platforming of sex (Tiidenberg and van der Nagel 2020) or basically, the obstacles to such efforts for creating archives that are endorsed by conservative governments/communities/NGOs and so on worldwide.

This final article and its SQ contribute to the RQ by zooming into arguably one of the most "notorious" eras within the modern Turkish cinema, and thus, by further historicization and contextualization of normativity and pleasure pertaining to sexual media in Turkey.

5 Conclusions

This dissertation has aimed to study and understand the ways through which the uses of porn and other sexual media connect to normativity and pleasure in Turkey. To this end, I have examined eighteen informants' narratives on their uses of porn and other sexual media. Their responses revealed that the uses of porn and other sexual media harbour exciting experiments and contingencies, whose variations range from experimental applications of hand job techniques learned from porn to the thrilling realization of a gay man that images of vulva could become appealing to him. Furthermore, these comments disclose pleasure; the discomfort of normativities can be sensed simultaneously, and pleasures often get intensified when doubled with negative affective registers such as guilt, disgust and many more. Based on these findings, and by following Paasonen (2018) and Sicart (2014), I offered framing online porn as a toy, and its uses as play.

Thus, this work has shown that while pleasure and normativity often pertain to the uses of porn in various ways, their pertaining is often experienced through their copresence, though this does not mean that they are not held in tension. To uncloak this tension, I studied the networks and the actants enabled by these networks, as it has become apparent through the assemblages as explained earlier. Through the inclusion of nonhumans in the research design as suggested by ANT, I was able to take a more subtle snapshot of how different actants are assembled via the networks that enable them. This, in turn, helped me to crystalize how the materialization of norms takes place, or on the contrary, how they are dismantled due to the copresence of various networks and the very ways in which power is dispelled. In other words, instead of just stating a self-explanatory, substance-like definition of Islam or other conservative cultures' traits, I laid bare how they come along in the first place. From here, I argued that one good way to not lean on substance like notions, but to explain how they come into being, is to be linked up with ANT. As exposed, on the one hand JDP's censorship mechanisms and some of its other punitive instruments are relying on assemblages of different entities that entail a great material-semiotic heterogeneity. On the other hand, similar assemblages also provide porn viewers with the means to oppose, negotiate or resist these mechanisms and instruments that function in a top-down fashion. Hence, I claim for ANT's merits in porn studies

because its suggested research design appurtenances can illustrate how normalization, the materialization of certain norms, takes place.

Furthermore, to provide a historical look and therefore, reinforce my claims, I investigated different historical vignettes, tried to make sense of trends of regulation and local histories of porn, and ultimately evidenced the contradictory and instability-ridden coexistence of sexual discourses that are part of mutually exclusive semantic worlds. Also, it is exhibited that distinct forms of remembrance of certain periods, like the sex influx, can challenge contemporary impositions of certain types of sexualities and the prevalence of sexual decency discourses. To give a more nuanced picture of how different sexualities are understood, negotiated, and lived, I offered to position the governance strategies of JDP and other Islamist movements' stance as a counter-conduct. However, what do all these mean for current and future research? Into what directions could one move from here?

I should first highlight that the issues tackled in this dissertation are part of ongoing transformations. Accordingly, beyond my dataset's inability to represent the whole of Turkish society, the dissertation also zooms into a fixed point in time. In that regard, first, it should be again acknowledged that the responses of the informants who participated in this research reflect the experiences of particular individuals at a particular point in time, which happened to be the 2010s in Turkey. Moreover, there is a strong trend of emigration outside the country. As I mentioned a couple of times throughout the dissertation, most of these people are trying to emigrate to Western countries in the context of massive sociopolitical and demographic transformation, which also includes large waves of non-Turkish immigration to Turkey, fuelled by the Muslim nation project of JDP.

Second, how these individuals navigate the tension between normativity and pleasure depends on the networks analysed, which of course, refer to certain assemblages and only to a specific temporality, i.e., how they initially come along and make norms either dismantle or work. If one remembers Couldry's (2008) account of the shortcomings of ANT in dealing with the long-lasting effects and consequences of networks it set out to explore, future effects and long-term consequences of these assemblages are beyond the reach of this research. Likewise, new assemblages, potential networks via which they come along, their potential affordances, and finally, the outcomes they might produce, are well beyond the reach as well.⁴⁶

Another related and important issue to point out is framing porn as a toy and uses of porn as a play, and their analysis as such also depends on current platforms' (like Aylo or OnlyFans) affordances and how these affordances are negotiated between

⁴⁶ As Couldry ("Actor") claims, ANT is not so useful for the long-term study of (media) networks.

users and platforms (van Dijck 2013, 160). As van Dijck contends, these negotiations can even lead to the redefinition of norms and values. These examples can be pulled out from the short history of social media; we have witnessed lots of clashes and compromises in the past decade, which range from users' protests against a change of UIs (user interfaces) or ToSs (terms of service) to more grave examples, such as the demise of Tumblr. Or users may just get bored with certain platforms and seek new ways of engagement (van Dijck 2013, 160). For example, when I first started this research, there was no TikTok, OnlyFans, or Instagram did not have a Snapchat-like story function. Or at some point in my research, VR porn has also become more of a topic, as VR itself has come into sight more aggressively due to Meta's (formerly Facebook) large number of investments in VR technology, but its slip-out was arguably faster. Hence in the current ecosystem of the Internet, any technology or platform can rise or fall, suddenly. In that regard, porn's current toyish elements and aesthetics can decline in the future, or on the contrary, start to contain more of these elements/aesthetics that would bring new forms and unpredictable ways of toy play. These different possibilities indeed herald a great potential for future research.

In terms of other potentially interesting research directions, the voice of porn performers from Turkey (or somehow connected with Turkey through diasporic channels) remains relevant. As argued earlier, although it might be difficult to reach and convince the sex influx performers to give interviews, contemporary OnlyFans producers (or other sexual content producers on other platforms) can provide researchers with a great amount of information. Such information would not only help understand the vernacular dimensions of sexual content production, which is hard to perceive due to the lack of archives and coercion toward performers but also contribute to porn studies in general.

Finally, I sincerely hope that this research will be considered a convenient example when it comes to unpacking substance-like notions, or crudely translated concepts, without really considering the local specificities they are being translated to. This unpacking should also extend to the import of certain sexual identity categories to certain places, especially if they originated elsewhere. Here I am not referring to the non-use of certain categories, as emphasized by the verb "unpack." I literally point out an engagement, engagement with the categories in hand and positioning of these categories and/or concepts in local coordinates, or in other words, making them work in particular semantic worlds. I believe this is particularly important for the Turkish context. Once this arguably sloppy research is avoided, I think the research outcomes will contribute to many important discussions, or better, create new productive discussions. As far as porn audiences are concerned, I advocate for the enlargement of audience studies, especially beyond the North American context. It is thrilling to see much such work nowadays, and hopefully, my dissertation will be a valuable addition to the extant research.

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ISBN 978-951-29-9931-6 (PRINT)
ISBN 978-951-29-9932-3 (PDF)
ISSN 0082-6987 (Print)
ISSN 2343-3191 (Online)