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'How am I supposed to enjoy that?' Assemblages of porn spectatorship

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the affective dynamics of porn spectatorship and assemblage formation connected to it through the experiences of the 18 study participants. By bringing conceptualizations of the 'social' and non-human agency from actor–network theory to porn studies, the article conceptualizes what porn consumption assembles and how certain sexual norms are materialized by being (affectively) experienced and lived, a process which eventually involves spectators' different fantasies, interests, and preferences. The article asks what different entities, be they non-human or human, may 'authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid' in their material-semiotic heterogeneity and multiplicity within porn spectatorship.

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Introduction: steely quality of social norms and assemblages

This article investigates the affective dynamics of porn spectatorship and assemblage formation connected to it through the experiences of the 18 study participants. The notion of assemblage is here understood as the different human and non-human entities' associations, and the article argues that to understand and explain how social norms manifest in experiences of pornography, one has to first investigate these associations. This investigation is mainly driven by the question of how sociotechnical affordances impact intimate experiences and how certain sexual norms materialize within them.

Arguably, Turkey is a convenient context to get caught in academic inertia overall,¹ as there may be a temptation to frame analyses of Turkish sexual cultures through fixed concepts such as Islamism, Kemalism, secularism, Islamic oppression, and many others, and such research can have a somniferous impact (Ünsaldı 2019, 23). Beyond Turkey, readily accepted and vaguely defined concepts seem to yield mysterious power so that they can be used to explain specific social phenomena (Latour 2005, 3). This article adopts an actor–network theory (ANT) informed approach and methodology in order to find an alternative framework for thinking about affective dimensions of porn spectatorship and the ways in which sexual norms are lived with.

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Bruno Latour (2005, 64–67) argues that conventional sociology, ‘the sociology of the social’, perceives the social as material similar to wood, steel, or straw without explaining where its very qualities come from. In his view, social is not a domain of reality ‘but rather is the name of a movement, a displacement, a transformation, a translation, an enrollment’ (2005, 64–65). He also argues for including non-human organisms and/or objects in the analysis of social to better understand and depict how norms become materialized through the associations between different (human and non-human) entities. Latour places all of these approaches under the umbrella of ANT.

As the social does not exist prior to assemblages, researchers setting out to investigate and/or discover the extent of social power must first look at what has been assembled and ask how. That is, one should not confuse ‘explanans’ with the ‘explanandum’: ‘Society is the consequence of associations and not their cause’ (Latour 2005, 238). Entities such as organisms, objects, and related associations are the means through which (social) power ‘lasts longer and expands further’ (2005, 70). In other words, there are no self-evident social forces or a society that stands behind the actors, and which, like a transcendent puppeteer, controls individuals. To picture the extent of social power without assuming self-evidence, the article illustrates how individuals are affected and moved within the associations.

My particular case is also one where technological actors such as wireless networks, smartphones, bits, and bytes vividly operate and associate with one another. It is even easier to physically track the connections of entities now when science and technology have developed further (Latour 2005, 180–181), such as in the case of porn consumption. Similarly, Susanna Paasonen (2015, 703) argues that networks, devices, and applications alter and eventually modify both our everyday routines and embodied potentialities for action. Moreover, the material assemblages of devices, videos, and domestic spaces also meet the assemblages of fantasies, preferences, experiences, interests, and norms. I argue that exploring such assemblages in the context of porn consumption, a phenomenon that largely involves non-humans and technological transformations, through the framework of ANT offers avenues for nuanced analysis. Rather than building on generalizing notions of the Turkish context, ANT makes it possible to tie supposedly unimportant and/or unrelated material assemblages to non-material assemblages such as preferences, interests, and experiences within porn spectatorship. Likewise, such an approach facilitates the study of the social emerging from such accumulative alignment.

By bringing conceptualizations of the ‘social’ and non-human agency from ANT to porn studies, I conceptualize what porn consumption assembles (Latour 2005; Mol 2010; also Paasonen 2015) and how certain sexual norms are materialized by being (affectively) experienced and lived, a process which eventually involves spectators’ different fantasies, interests, and preferences. I ask what different entities, be they non-human or human, may ‘authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid’ (Latour 2005, 72) in their material-semiotic heterogeneity and multiplicity within porn spectatorship.

This article builds on the self-sexual narratives of 18 Turkish porn users, for the purpose of tracing what is assembled around the porn. The analysis section consists of two different instantiations, ‘frustrations’, and ‘excitements and remembrance’ related to sexual and bodily norms, aesthetic values, and related pleasures in the Turkish context. Before moving into the analysis, I start with a section on ANT/methodology.

ANT is like a kaleidoscope: on behalf of the methodology

By comparing ANT to a kaleidoscope, an optical instrument with multiple reflections made by two or more reflecting surfaces that offers colourful – and arguably beautiful – ever-changing patterns, Annemarie Mol highlights that there is no conventional methodology and/or casual explanations when one ‘links up with ANT’ (2010, 261). Likewise, Law and Singleton state that ANT can be understood as a toolkit for ‘thinking about and charting the heterogeneous practices of association that make up the social’ (2014, 380). Although these scholars highlight the rather experimental features of an ANT-inspired methodology, compared with the other theorizations of assemblages, such as those by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, it can be thought of as ‘the empirical-sister-in-arms’ of more philosophical inquiry (Müller 2015, 30). Nevertheless, their parallels are noteworthy: as Müller affirms, these two conceptualizations of assemblage both consider the centrality and productivity of relations between human/non-human entities. Agreeing with Müller’s emphasis on empiricism, I however follow ANT as a method.

The colourful patterns made in heterogeneous practices of associations (Law and Singleton 2014, 381) cannot be formed or seen without considering the presence and impact of non-human actors. In this vein, Latour underlines that it would be a mistake to ‘limit in advance and in the actor’s stead the range of entities that may populate the social world’ so as to ignore ‘the constant work they do’ and ‘to restrict their repertoires and to keep controversies far from the scope of the analysis’ (2005, 227). However, not every entity is involved in such constant work: a researcher needs to identify mediators so as to better depict that which has been assembled. Mediators can be understood as entities whose course of action has the capacity to make someone, or something, do something: in other words, they are not mere transporters (2005, 79). Innovations, such as the technologies that have enabled contemporary porn consumption, are an advantageous site for detecting such mediators (2005, 81).

Law and Singleton (2014) exemplified the use of this toolkit through the 2001 foot and mouth epidemic in the UK. As the epidemic escalated, ontological multiplicity – that is, the different but coexisting realities – and material heterogeneity were laid bare. For them, a researcher aiming to understand the realities of the epidemic also needs to think about its all-possible material forms, and the ways in which they all got cut in (2014, 382–383). Researchers would need to go to the farms where the animals were held in quarantine or slaughtered as a precautionary measure; explore the laboratories where the disease was detected and the bureaucratic paperwork that was needed to deal with the outbreak; and also examine the government’s political performativity.

Gathering data through interviews is one pillar of ANT-inspired methodology. The other is to identify the mediators. For me, this has meant going back to my old field notes so as to identify and frame mediators involved in porn consumption. This process, which is detailed in the following, also reveals the convolution of the presented techno-material assemblages.

Old field notes, visits to sex shops and interviews

When I first started studying porn use in Turkey in 2015 for my sociology master’s dissertation, my (then) advisor suggested that I visit local sex shops (called ‘erotik shop’ in

Turkish, even though it is not Turkish at all) in case something interesting would occur in terms of overlaps between the porn spectatorship and sex shop customers at the initial steps of my ethnographic study. The research question was simple: how do people's experiences of porn spectatorship effect their perceptions of broader sexual norms in Turkey? However, it was not that simple to determine the adequate study sample for answering this question. Upon my advisor's counsel, I tried to verify whether there was any significant correlation between watching porn and specific socio-economical traits, gender, or sexual orientation through a multiple-choice survey with more than 400 participants. As it soon became obvious that almost everybody was watching porn, however, I adopted a different strategy. I followed the other way around. First, I specified the most important criterion: being open about one's porn consumption and willing to talk about it. Second, I used a snowball method to reach other study participants. Through these participants, I have been able to redefine my sample (university students/graduates between 20 and 30 years old, who live in Turkish metropolises) as they possess similar socio-economical traits. My initial field notes, which also cover visits to sex shops, are not only reminiscent of a desperate – but fun – experimentation with the study sample. They are also helpful in identifying potential mediators.

During one of these visits, a vendor gave me a very detailed account of his cliental profile:² his younger clients mainly shopped online, rather than coming to the shop in person. The clients who came there personally, according to him, were mostly people over 45 years of age, and their product choices were somewhat limited. These older clients ranged from older heterosexual men, in his terms 'broken-down impotent old-timers who were looking for vibrators for their wives' and/or erectile dysfunction drugs, to 'mature' straight, bi, and homosexual women who were confident about buying vibrators. Finally, there was a small number of gay men, and some tourists who, interestingly, had a wide range of shopping habits compared to the locals. When one looks at online customer statistics, however, this picture dramatically changes. Products such as sex dolls, portable vaginas (probably for straight men), and different types of dildos and vibrators were sold along with many other items. In addition, the customers' gender profile was much more even: 60% male and 40% female (no further categories were used). Although I understood that my advisor's insight was wrong – there were similarities but no overlaps whatsoever – I found this information surprising.

There is much to speculate here, yet I think it would be a mistake to draw early assumptions about young customers' reluctance to shop in person by, for instance, associating such reluctance with shame. Even if shame may play a role, online shopping is often easier considering the spatiotemporal qualities of Turkish metropolises, such as long working hours or traffic jams. To a certain extent, such temporal reluctance is also manifest in my interview data:

My biggest problem is to create free time. This is really one of the most important reasons why I watch porn. You have to search for a partner, then comes your personal care etc. Instead of all these, I just watch porn, it's really easier. (Serdar, homosexual cisgender man, age 30 years)

As noted in an *Independent Turkish* article on December 20, 2020, the demand for sex shop products boomed in Turkey in 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following are some subsets of associations exposing a myriad of mediators for the case of

experiences of sex toys: the COVID-19 virus emergence and stay-at-home campaigns, the Turkish lira plunging in value, high inflation, and taxation – yet at the same time, a relatively unflinching online banking system, the carry-over of in-person shops to the online environment, and profit margins that rose 50–100% per product. Although these mediators are not directly related to porn consumption, the thought processes involved here were helpful to determine the mediators in the experiences of porn. To sum, even re-reading my old field notes was eye-opening in terms of identifying mediators of porn consumption in Turkey.

In order to understand the reality of porn consumption within the Turkish context, I have traced associations that were initially raised in the interviews. I have tried to enrich the repertoire, rather than purifying it (Mol 2010, 257). By following Mol (2010) and other ANT scholars, I re-approached my interview data without ‘an overall scheme, no stable grid’ and with the will ‘to move, to generate, to transform and to translate’ (2010, 257). In the end, I was able to identify a number of mediators: the censorship mechanisms of an Islamist government, pornographic video streaming sites, paid and unpaid VPN technologies, high-speed modems and older ones, computer viruses, ergonomics of headphone technologies that provide privacy, webcam livestreams, and even household objects such as carpets. The potential list could go on, but these mediators are the ones that matter for my analysis.

I conducted the interviews between 2015 and 2019 with 18 study participants from Turkey who did not constitute a homogeneous group: they included eight cisgender women, nine cisgender men and one genderfluid³ individual with different sexual orientations. They were socio-economically privileged, that is upper-middle-class individuals with higher education, located in Turkish metropolises (Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir) and some relocated abroad after the first interviews. They were between 20 and 30 years of age at the time of the interviews.

The participants were initially selected due to their openness about porn consumption. I then pursued the features that they had led me to – apps, games, and websites I had never heard of before, new VPN brands, interesting rituals involving live streaming, and many more – and considered which ones could be treated as mediators. As with the case of sex shops, I looked at what early assumptions might result in confusing the explanans with the explanandum. I used both offline and online environments for the interviews, ranging from online apps such as Skype and WhatsApp to university canteens and cafes. Online environments were much more useful in the sense of tracing connections as informants could easily give me necessary links and other leads, even during the interviews. Combining the flexibility and connectivity provided by online environments with semi-structured interviews, I have been able to check out these leads and then pose further questions. Finally, apart from being semi-structured, the interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and pseudonymized. All of the interviews were held in Turkish, and all translations are mine.⁴

In the analysis section, I will be reflecting on the practices of various entities, be they material or semiotic.

Frustrations

Looking back at the interview data, it was intriguing to see how many frustrations the study participants articulated and, more importantly, how many of these were related

to non-human interventions. Ruptures in network connectivity related to both masturbatory and non-masturbatory⁵ porn consumption. Interruptions took myriad forms and sometimes went beyond hardware malfunction: simultaneous practices of VPN usage⁶ due to the censorship mechanism of the Turkish government, slow connectivity, lack of quality in available free porn content, and even sometimes real-time presence of partners, flatmates, or family members. A dialogue with one of the informants is illustrative:

Sometimes, I rely on my imagination rather than searching porn, as it might become very tiring. There are lots of junk stuff that pop up, so there is always the risk of losing my excitement, let alone becoming even hornier. In such cases, I usually give up and start building things up myself.

Speaking of giving up, do you find it difficult to navigate yourself with VPNs and all that stuff?

Of course! I mean you can always reach porn somehow, but it is always demanding and can make you give up easily. In some cases, with VPNs, you open a site and wait for the content to load. But if you don't use a VPN then you have a very limited choice of content. You know there are these shitty Turkish sites with the title of 'sikiş'⁷ and these are the ones usually not blocked. Even if you can at last reach the page in which the clip will play, then the speed is miserable. I've already seen some pop-ups from my free VPN that encourage me to get a paid version, something along the lines: 'if you want more speed, upgrade to the paid-version' blah blah. To be honest, I'm also not eager to pay for that. Anyway, I don't always have the same amount of energy to deal with this stuff for an hour, so I just imagine some stuff and masturbate. (Gülbin, bisexual cisgender woman, age 27 years)

Here, conservative Turkish censorship mechanisms are indeed effective, but their efficacy builds upon many factors beyond their reach and/or control, such as limited and unsatisfying free porn content, deficient VPN services for free-roaming customers, Turkish internet infrastructure extending beyond the rule of the Justice and Development Party (JDP),⁸ or slow and unreliable modems. The JDP's policies do, of course, have consequences – for example, the devaluation of Turkish lira⁹ – that make it harder to afford paying for VPNs and/or porn which demand foreign currency for their monthly/yearly subscription.

A similar account comes from another informant, and his narrative adds new layers to the previously expressed frustrations:

To be honest, I don't know shit about technology. I don't get how to change DNSs or proxy settings. When I was in Turkey,¹⁰ I wasn't very good at those things, and I had many moments of frustration. You know there is this saying, 'I had this one raki delight, and they even fucked that up', this is exactly that! It's a small and short pleasure, just for 5–10 minutes (max. 30) and they're fucking it up. I just want to watch little bit of gay porn for fuck's sake! To deal with that shit, I tried to download stuff from torrent, and I got a virus. Then you deal with that, as you have nothing to do else! [...] Even now, I pay for anti-virus programs. I never paid for porn, but I pay for this, it's interesting in a sense ... (Metin, homosexual cisgender man, age 30 years)

At one point in the interview as he was complaining about pop-up adverts, I asked Metin whether he was using advert-blocking apps or not, and he told me that he does not know anything about such software. Being able to navigate restricted networks requires basic knowledge and not every informant possessed this skill. To recap, the JDP's censorship mechanism is not functional on its own: although it is not impossible to bypass, it can become irritating very easily as an unnecessary amount of effort is

needed in order to obtain a ‘five-minute pleasure’. Downloading torrents is no easier than adjusting settings such as DNSs or proxies, yet every informant had their own perception of the hardship involved, ranging from computer viruses to sluggish porn streaming.

More basic hardware-related frustrations, combined with living with a family or someone else, were also present. Jülide’s (heterosexual cisgender woman 24) testimony evokes the ergonomics of headphones:

I live with my family, so I always watch porn without any sound.

Why don’t you use headphones?

Nah, I often can’t be bothered to connect them to my PC. Though, I’m pretty sure that I’d enjoy more if I weren’t that lazy for it.

While living with a family is indeed an obstacle to privacy that can make porn watching less pleasurable, headphone design and difficulties in connecting it to one’s PC also played a part. As Vörös (2015, 296) highlights, porn consumption and the feelings of shame associated with it necessitate a space of sexual autonomy in which masturbatory practices can develop and endure. Headphones and similar technologies are important components of this space. As seen in Jülide’s example, the lack of comfort can easily reduce the pleasure taken, if not completely deteriorate one’s sense of sexual autonomy.

Frustrations came in many forms. They did not always stem from the informants’ socio-material conditions but were also related to porn production. Some interviewees expressed anxiety and self-humility towards porn performers’ ‘over-humanly’ bodies and/or performances. These pornographic portrayals and performances also rely on biological entities such as genes as in the case of hypospadias (Brennan 2019), or non-human entities such as performance-enhancing drugs or surgical tools used to perform labiaplasty (Jones and Nurka 2015) or breast augmentation. These entities, via computer or mobile phone screens, and through the technologies of the data transmission, convey visual aesthetics/bionic performances. Together with the affective response they create among spectators, they may also shape normative values (see Ramsay 2017; Brennan 2018; also Preciado 2013). One informant, for instance, expressed anxiety vis-à-vis the muscular bodies and long penises on screen (Turgut, homosexual cisgender man, age 29 years). Also, as mentioned, exaggerated performances could also cause distress. One of the informants (Dilruba, bisexual cisgender woman, age 27 years) describes how troublesome she finds being affected by such perceptions:

We all learned how to have sex from porn, to be honest. And I sometimes see the traces of it in my (male) partners. I never talk about these thing with them directly, but you know, in porn, a woman is often seen as an entity that supposed to give pleasure to men: she constantly screams, like she can’t have orgasms without screaming, or performances that last for an hour, performers are like really athletic etc. My partners try to be like those porn stars, they seem to be feeling like ‘I can make my woman happy only if I’m able to have sex like that’ etc. Sometimes, I also ape them, I also have a similar feeling: ‘If it’s pleasurable, then I have to scream’. I think this feeling directly comes from porn, where else would I get that idea? [...] It’s not like they are forcing me do so, it’s more like I do it if I want to make them happy. But in any case, it is troublesome.

Different sexual and/or body norms do not appear spontaneously: they are lived with and they materialize in uneven and contingent ways and with the aid of entities such as

VPNs, modems, or underwater internet cables that make the internet function, along with entities facilitating the flow of money (payment infrastructures, credit card companies, and cards). They can pose constraints to the lived experiences of porn spectatorship, as well as making them constraint free. It is possible to also see the impact of pharmaceutical and other medicinal technologies at work in sustaining/altering how individuals perceive these norms.

Such assemblages do not always result in frustrations: they can also create moments of happiness, admiration, appreciation, and even increased self-esteem. These are also sexually exciting moments with their own thrills.

Excitements and remembrance

Assemblages can also unsettle, dismantle, and disassociate norms (Law and Singleton 2014, 383). The intervention of non-human mediators can enable things that would otherwise be impossible. Some objects perceived as insignificant can afford pleasurable stimulus in a masturbatory context. These moments are wide-ranging, plentiful, and multifarious. Zehra (bisexual genderfluid, age 28 years), for example, articulates her admiration for certain 'heroic women':

Porn made me understand the limits of female bodies. Thanks to some heroic women, I can also force my limits. [...] Porn can be empowering for a woman too. There was this one woman from Canada with whom I was chatting, we have same area of interests etc. She was saying 'I want to buy a new car this year' and she was making money with live webcam shows. It sounds really great to get undressed in front of a camera, to lick some mayonnaise from the tits and make that amount of money while being 100% safe. I really like to watch her; she's the one who sets the rules.

Here, a subset of technologies not only makes this monetary exchange possible but also conveys the very idea of such a trade. It mitigates the risks concerning gender-based inequality (including violence) in the workplace and challenges widespread gender roles. Furthermore, forcing one's body limits also involves different material practices.¹¹ It can be concluded that the scenery brought by new technologies hosts contrasting gender norms.

Technology-mediated nostalgia can lead to different – but still similar to a certain extent – affects. It can convey a distant past when different sexual and body norms were prevalent. It was intriguing to see my interviewees – mostly the straight men among them – remember Turkish 'sex influx' films of the 1970s or the relatively less restricted 'obscenity' of Turkish television in late 1990s as 'progressive', especially in comparison with Islamic narratives currently introduced by JDP governments, even as all of them spoke of the censorship's ineffectiveness and 'cosmetic quality'. Here, it is imperative to state that many 1970s sex influx movies can be found on popular pornographic video streaming sites like Pornhub or xHamster under the category of retro, vintage, and/or Turkish. Likewise, numerous Turkish television shows¹² of the pre-JDP period are available on YouTube and other streaming media sites like Dailymotion. Nostalgia can here be thought as an assemblage, underlaid by different sociotechnical affordances and feeding upon the negative affective registers associated with JDP's Islamic policies.

When asked about his thoughts on the sex influx of the 1970s, Murat detailed his view as follows:

It's indeed interesting. I watched several of them. You know, there is this old porn star Zerrin Egili. Look man, back then we even had porn stars! I think at that time, we were in the same league with USA or something. Even some stars were starting their careers in the porn industry and then they were straightly jumping to the Green Pine¹³ (Yeşilçam). It's really good! It's also interesting, I mean it was the 70s after all. I really wish that it was still existing today, three in one films¹⁴ etc. [...] I really think that we started in a somewhat legendary way, but at some point, we took the wrong turn and then tumbled down the cliff. What can I say ... ? It seems beautiful, I only wish that it was still present today. [...] I mean, these performers were treated as proper cinema actresses. They didn't treat you like you are 'just that person' who produce sexual content back then. For instance, a porn performer won't be allowed to play in a TV series in Kanal D¹⁵ today. Or in a Turkish movie for that matter ...

Another informant also had similar appreciation even though she had never seen sex influx movies herself:

Well as sex can be something considered repressed in our culture, I can say that, surely, it must have been an interesting trend. Technically at least, it sounds cool, in the sense of normalizing sex, but I don't feel like people get on with it, even today. (Jale, straight cisgender woman, age 24 years)

Such technologically mediated remembrance, which incarnates itself within the ghost of the sex influx, is indeed powerful affect-wise. Even for individuals like Jale who had never seen the movies, it can create affective responses like appreciation, admiration, or, as in Murat's case, yearning and longing. Meanwhile, such affectivity cannot be explained only through the presence of Turkish language and/or ethnically Turkish actors/actresses.¹⁶ As Murat's comment illustrates, there is a holistic acclamation of whole Green Pine, as a film industry, where softcore porn performers 'were treated as proper cinema actresses'. If, following Özgür Yaren (2017, 1361), one considers sex influx as Turkish cinema's survival strategy, a whole new array of mediators will emerge, such as television and colour film technologies, Central Bank of Turkey's reserves of gold and foreign currency – which ran out and eventually led to an economic crisis – or contraband trade (smuggling of raw films). For Yaren, sex influx is hard to consider separate from the crisis dynamics of the 1970s, without 'a decade of perpetual crisis with ten successive weak governments, bookended by military coups' (2017, 1357).

At the same time, such past reminiscences quickly shifted to contemporary amateur porn featuring Turkish-speaking people. In some cases, its excitement faded away for reasons such as the low quality of the amateur porn clips and/or class differences. For instance, Alev's (straight cisgender woman, age 27 years) comment was remarkable:

Well, don't get me wrong but I never see people like you and me in those clips. I mean, let me put it straight, I mostly see poor people's houses, definitely in the décor and general house setting, but it might also be the hygiene of the people. It's not like I see poor people inferior to us, it's more like being able to define someone as poor in a movie setting for example. These are the stereotypes we have in our minds, it's more like that.

Murat, who praised the 1970s influx, was critical of the low quality and 'behaviour' of performers in currently available content while yearning for better, professional, and high-quality Turkish porn where people speak Turkish loud and clear enough:

The Turkish porn sector is shit, almost dead. I can understand Turkey's backwardness even in this business. I can't be sure about what are we worst at, except regarding porn. We could be the worst nation in the whole planet. That would be awesome to watch some high-quality content, featuring people who speak your own language, like really professionally. Though, even if some people dare to do such thing today, they will shoot them to death. And no one wants to be that 'first', no one wants to get killed. As I say, in general, I can understand one country's level of development just from the easiness to conduct this type of business.

Why do you think the available clips are shitty?

Well, first of all those camera angles! Imagine the shitty, fuzzy quality Skype gives you when your connection weakens, multiply that by ten! How am I supposed to enjoy that? Then they're always super short. Camera is already placed super far from the bed, and they just show you some thirty seconds, that's all. Or there is minimal talking or no talking at all. There are like small, intermittent moans. She moans like a 'kezbán'.¹⁷ If you are into making porn, why do you moan like kezbán, for fuck's sake? It seems very conflicting to me.

Interestingly, for some informants, the admiration for the 'sexual' openness of the 1970s disappears when class lines are introduced in contemporary material labelled as 'Turkish porn'. However, the low quality of available Turkish porn (or again, of porn that features Turkish-speaking people) and/or some of the 'authentic' objects (which could be also labelled poor people's objects) present in it are not dissatisfactory to everyone. For instance, Alper (homosexual cisgender man, age 30 years) gives a very detailed account of how these factors make him horny:

Of course, I like it to be in Turkish. It gives me a sensation that is closer to real sex.

Because they speak in Turkish?

I mean there is that, but also the setting, it gives me a certain feeling: I mean I'm sure that it's a household in Turkey, even the carpet on the floor gives you that hint. It's also a bit comparable to the feeling when I watch someone whom I met from an app through webcam. I also prefer amateur porn in general, but when it's in Turkish, it's even more authentic.

Are they good in quality?

Of course not, but even that gives me some sort of authenticity. It's like watching them through a hidden cam. Though it would be better to watch something in good quality, that's for sure.

Webcams have always been related to realness. As Hernández (2019) shows, since their early popularization in the late 1990s, webcam conventions have built upon perceptions of realness. However, in Alper's case, the webcam's poor quality becomes the source of authenticity in itself. A poor-quality webcam, which can become imaginable as a hidden cam, invokes some kind of proximity and familiarity, reminding him of his matches from online dating apps, with whom he talks through a webcam, just before meeting with them. It is nevertheless not only the webcam that invokes familiarity: the agency of objects such as carpets is also central here.

Cenk (straight cisgender man, age 27 years) contemplates the thrills of transgressing norms and the proximity and authenticity of the acts depicted (also see Hofer 2016), yet he is not critical about the available Turkish content:

You know on Periscope, Turkish women or couples often broadcast themselves while having sex. Meanwhile they speak Turkish. I like them because in these broadcasts, that amateur vibe which I've been telling you is more present than usual. You know, it's not like paid-work, so maybe this is the real reason of its appeal. At the same time, we're steering for another taboo, specific to Turkey: Horny, sexually-active women, women who seek sex, these concepts are taboo here. And they use this taboo in their videos in different ways. There was this video which incredibly turned me on: a Turkish couple is having sex while a woman shouts at the man 'you see, it has become 1000, now 2000 people watch us, faster faster'. Later the man asks if she'd like to give him a blowjob, but she says, 'forget it! that would make my face seen, just fuck me'. When I tell you like this, it didn't sound very sexy I know [he laughs] but it's their [women] carelessness and comfort within this repressive system which make this whole thing sexy. Of course, there're also some couples who don't hide their faces. Then, it's even better because a bigger taboo gets broken if the faces are seen.

The excitements of Turkish porn can then abate or become accelerated due to the fault lines of class, religion, race, and social background, but they do exist among the informants' ways of thinking. There are constant variations, contrasts, and shifts. The admiration for one epoch can be obscured by the fault lines of class in the next generation by the same individual. An object like a carpet acting as a 'mood killer' can function as a stimulant in another. Despite the discontent, informants like Murat yearn for a Turkish-speaking porn market and/or more quality content. In some other cases, people are satisfied with the existing scenery while mentioning that they would appreciate better videos as well.

In summary, the excitements detailed in this section are shaped by many entities: webcams, portable cams, authentic objects such as carpets and 'Turkish-looking' furniture, cell-phone cams that record low-quality videos, the technologies that convey reminders of the sex influx into contemporary Turkish society, and even medicinal procedures that the porn stars undergo. The commingling of local and global¹⁸ is also remarkable as lingual associations can very easily shift to class affiliations and 'more global' lifestyles. Sexual norms, body norms, and aesthetic values, as well as the frustrations and/or excitements they create, are sustained as well as disassociated by these assemblages.

Conclusion

This article has deployed ANT for understanding the affective dynamics and assemblage formation in porn consumption. The article has explored how different and sometimes contrasting perceptions of sexual and bodily norms are formed and how norms themselves become materialized and lived through the personal accounts of my study informants.

I have argued that if one tries to purify the research setting by prioritizing and even isolating human actors, the outcomes can become misleading, or simply wrong. Objects and animals – that is, all forms of non-humans – can impact how the social norms are lived with. It is unproductive, to say the least, to remove them from the picture. As Martins (2019, 9) argues through his analysis of Chaturbate, there is no reason to consider humanity as the sole source of agency and to avoid the intricate network of relationships made by different bodies in every different flowering event.

A similar point can be made about confusing the explanans with the explanandum. Eagerly arguing for the explanatory capacity of pre-existing and *sui generis* social forces, instead of explaining how they come about (be these Islamic or ones with any

other adjective), can produce academic inertia and lead to misleading outcomes. This article contributes to understanding the complexities involved in how assemblages resolve, adjust, weaken, shift, unsettle, or strengthen individuals' perceptions of different norms without attributing unexplainable, and thus mysterious, powers to select social forces. My findings show that assemblages within and around contemporary online porn can ease or constrain normative features, or do both simultaneously. The perception and acceptance of sexual norms can be weakened and entrenched separately or concomitantly in an open-ended process.

The ANT approach adopted here does not tend to explain heteronormativity and/or cisgender norms (or the religious norms that these may tap into) through notions such as social structure, society, or power so as to 'jump straight ahead to connect vast arrays of life and history, mobilize gigantic forces, detect dramatic patterns emerging out of complex interactions or to reveal behind the scenes some dark powers pulling the strings' (Latour 2005, 22). Instead, it is used as a guide to expand the number of possible social aggregates, to increase the number of mediators that make actors do things, to include non-human objects and entities not readily defined as human in order to comprehend how non-social things, through their associations, help social norms to come about: to be lived, negotiated, and resisted. As shown in the article, new media technologies can help to dismantle sexual norms promoted by the current Islamic government by bringing back sceneries from the old Turkey.¹⁹

Alternatively, a non-human object, something as trivial as a carpet of traditional design, can enhance pleasure by tying the authentic and the familiar together with sexual excitement, or by carrying the thrills of breaking heteronormativity in a supposedly 'conservative' cultural setting. As a final point, just as Paasonen (2015) argues, this article describes techno-material assemblages and human–non-human relationship involving affective dynamics. The ways in which social norms, the perception of which can be sustained or weakened by assemblages, are affectively experienced by individuals as frustrations, yearnings, excitements, and disappointments.

This article can be seen as an invitation to consider porn consumption in relation to the techno-material assemblages that underpin it. Exploring these assemblages opens up new theoretical and methodological directions. Hopefully, this article will encourage porn scholarship to enrich its research settings so as to reveal uncharted territories.

Notes

1. Porn Studies in/about Turkey is scarce, but Tzankova (2015) exemplifies this type of analysis. Likewise, much other scholarly work within Gender/Woman Studies shares this tendency that Ünsaldı underlines.
2. I would like to emphasize that these descriptions of clients, and who use what in the following paragraph, are explicitly the vendor's views.
3. During the interview, the same person has also been self-identifying as a woman.
4. The participants in the research have given explicit informed consent and have had the right to withdraw from the research if so desired; the material is fully anonymized so that no research register has been established.
5. Most of the time, non-masturbatory practices meant preparations for masturbation.
6. It is also noteworthy to remind that most of my informants were restraining from using paid VPNs at the time of interviewing.

7. This particular word can be translated to English as ‘fucking’. The informant told me that she tries to avoid the content with such titles, as they sound offensive to her. She also stated that she is very interested with the category of feminist porn, although she was complaining about the limited free content.
8. The internet has been available to the public since 12 April 1993 in Turkey (see Middle East Technical University’s Information Technology Department archive: <http://www.internetarsivi.metu.edu.tr/tarihce.php>). According to Speedtest.net data, the average fixed broadcast internet speed in Turkey is in 103rd place out of 181 countries as of 2021. Yet considering the JDP’s 20-year rule within the last 28 years of the internet in Turkey, the lion’s share has gone to the JDP in this matter. Mobile connections are slightly better: The country holds 55th place out of 140 countries (see <https://www.speedtest.net/global-index>).
9. Although the Turkish lira has crashed to a historic low at the time of writing this article (December 2021), it is not a recent trend. Devaluation as a trend was present while I was conducting some of these interviews.
10. This informant is currently located abroad.
11. Recently, porn star Adriana Chechik detailed her injuries and her recovering strategies after shootings in a podcast (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JdVA83TVVM>). Again, these injuries and strategies to ease them involve medicinal procedures and so on. Of course, this perception of heroic women could also be considered reminiscent of Paul Preciado’s (2013) formulation of pharmacopornographic gender, which cannot be reduced either to a performance or an ideology/metaphor. For him, the certainty of one’s gender comes from a ‘somato-political biofiction’ which itself is an aggregation, an assemblage of body technologies and pharmacologic and audiovisual techniques which function, in his words, ‘like protheses of subjectification’ (Preciado 2013, 117).
12. A very prominent example is an episode from Cem Özer’s *Laf Lafı Açıyor*, a popular late-night talk show back in early 90s, in which, poet Nara Benek had revealed her breasts. See: https://youtu.be/IW_-mBQxH3k?t=1138
13. Metonym in the Turkish film industry. It comes from Green Pine Street in Beyoğlu, Istanbul where most of the film studios were located at that time.
14. This is a reference to the famous ‘three in one movies’. The name comes from the fact that one could pay one ticket price to watch three different porn films in a row.
15. A mainstream Turkish television channel.
16. This is a historical shift from the late Ottoman and early Republican eras, as ethnically non-Turkish, and non-Muslim female actresses were portraying ‘flirtatious’ and sexually active women back then (Özgüç 1988, 14).
17. *Kezban* is a Turkish name of Persian origin, which was more popular in older generations but not much today. In the Turkish memescape, it is used as a belittlement to women who supposedly want to be seen as modern/western but whose attitude and behaviours are, again supposedly, not modern. In this context, it is used to belittle female performers and to produce shame: she is modern enough to make amateur porn, but not modern enough to do dirty talking. See the discussion on Quora: <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-meaning-of-the-Turkish-word-kezban-in-English>.
18. It is also necessary to highlight that, from an ANT perspective, there is no such thing as global, in the sense of a larger and wider place in which the micro (local) is embedded or vice versa. In Latour’s words, ‘no place can be said to be bigger than any other place, but some can be said to benefit from far safer connections with many more places than others’ (2005, 176).
19. The distinction between new and old Turkey has been made into the mainstream mainly by Erdoğan’s speeches. However, it is also affectively used by its opponents as a way to trigger a (secular) nostalgia.

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