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**From Mystical to Morbid Love: the  
Emergence of Sexual Science and Gender  
Ideology in the Late Ottoman Empire and  
Early Turkish Republic**

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the construction of Ottoman/Turkish sexual scientific knowledge and gender norms in the early twentieth century. It traces the shifting definitions of love and explores how its mystical meaning was displaced to allow for the production of a new body of statements that would constitute the modern discourse of sexuality and gendered identity. By focusing on cross-cultural entanglements between European and Ottoman-Islamic traditions, it shows how the established ideas about love, mysticism, and morality were amalgamated with the imported sexological apparatus not in a totalizing but, instead, in an eclectic and relatively unsystematic fashion. It draws on evidence from the works produced by the founders of neurology and psychiatry in Turkey, namely Mazhar Osman, Nazım Şakir, and Fahrettin Kerim, as well as other texts on love and sexual pathology. It concludes that in these works love retains its ontological foundation as a unifying and harmonizing source, but within a changing social and cultural context that promulgates a strict gender division and heteronormative behavior. As such, love represents an impossible ideal degenerated into lower passions, perverse desires, and hence morbidity. Ultimately, love finds for itself a place as a sacred bond between husband and wife within the nationalist narrative, cementing the notion that it is only possible within the boundaries of companionate marriage.

## **Keywords**

morbid love, sexuality, psychiatry, Ottoman Empire, Turkey

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## Introduction

In a recent article “*L’Amour morbide*: How a Transient Mental Illness Became Defunct,” Alison Moore describes *l’amour morbide* (morbid love) as “a transient mental illness” that emerged in late nineteenth-century French medical literature, reaching a crest of popularity among respectable psychiatrists and physicians before it disappeared from circulation during the opening decade of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> As a term evoking sexual aberration, it was often used contemporaneously with more scientific-sounding terms such as “perversion [*la perversion*],” “sexual pathology [*la pathologie sexuelle*],” and “fetishism [*le fétichisme*],” but with a humane spin: “The world of morbid love was one in which sexual follies were part of the stuff of life, the drama of being human – and even part of the struggle of sensitive souls in an alienating world.”<sup>2</sup> While medical doctors favored technical vocabulary such as sexual pathology and perversion to endow their ideas with scientific rigor, they at the same time deployed the more evocative term morbid love, which “overlapped with, and remained sympathetic to, the unique context of late nineteenth-century decadent culture,” and thus provided them with a platform to engage with the sexuality–degeneration debates.<sup>3</sup>

According to Moore, morbid love was “so utterly peculiar to the *fin-de-siècle* worldview,” especially in terms of its ambivalence about degeneration, that it fell into complete oblivion as the period drew to a close and ambivalence became more suspect in the eyes of medical experts after the First World War.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps that is why—because it was a distinctively French invention that had a short lifespan—there has been no sustained research in sexuality studies apart from Moore’s admirable article, and certainly no study that explores its transnational reach. In fact, Moore herself stated in a Q&A, when asked to comment on the global response to morbid love, that “It probably was quite a weirdly French thing and that possibly when English speakers came across it even in that time, it wouldn’t make a lot of sense to them, given that it was used alongside the other terms.”<sup>5</sup> Contrary to Moore’s assumption that morbid love was widely ignored outside of France, the term was popularized by early neuropsychiatrists at the Ottoman Empire in the beginning of the twentieth century in tandem with the notions of sexual pathology and sexual normality. As it fell out of use in psychiatry and adjacent fields in 1910 in France, the concept started to appear in medical works published in the wake of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution in the Ottoman Empire. *L’amour morbide* was initially translated as *aşk-ı marazî* or *marazî aşk* but was also called by a number of other names such as *gayr-ı tabîî aşk* or just *aşk* in prominent early sexology texts published between 1910 and 1928. It remains a challenge to find out to what extent these texts appealed to and catered for the common people, yet they still reveal important insights into the emergence of sexual science and gender ideology in the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic.

Research on sexuality in the Ottoman Muslim and the broader Islamicate world is still a work in progress with much room for improvement. Existing contributions have so far examined issues of sexuality through the teleological postulation of an epochal rupture between premodern and modern notions of love, beauty, and desire. Premodernity has characteristically been defined in terms of male homoeroticism, gender ambiguity, and fluid

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1 Alison M. Moore, “*L’Amour morbide*: How a Transient Mental Illness Became Defunct,” *Intellectual History Review* 29, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 291–312.

2 *Ibid.*, 293.

3 *Ibid.*, 291–2.

4 *Ibid.*, 293.

5 As Moore reveals in the Q&A section of her November 6, 2017 public talk at Birkbeck, University of London entitled “Morbid Love: Between Decadence and Degeneration,” <https://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2017/11/alison-moore-morbid-love-in-late-nineteenth-century-france-between-decadence-and-degeneration/>

and multiple sexual categories.<sup>6</sup> Modernity, on the other hand, is marked off as a time of European intervention and imposition of dimorphic gender norms and heteronormative behavior.<sup>7</sup> Dror Ze'evi, one of the most important scholars in this field, asserts that while local sexual discourses in the premodern Ottoman world were rich and varied, “they all either disappeared in the late nineteenth century or were transformed into almost sterile genres in which sex and sexuality are seldom discussed, and even then always obliquely.”<sup>8</sup> This argument, although not without its merits, is also problematic because it positions the so-called Ottoman Middle East as an uncritical implementer of European values and norms that spell the eradication of local practices. A similar oversight usually appears in the studies of the history of medicine in the late Ottoman Empire, which embrace the presumed subjugation of traditional medicine by Western science.<sup>9</sup> In short, whether from progress to decline, or from darkness to light, there is a dominant historicist discourse that adheres to a linear narrative of history and pays little attention to the contradictions, ambiguities, and loopholes inherent in any discussion of sex and sexuality outside the European orbit.<sup>10</sup> It treats the apparent inconsistencies as invalidating arguments, not as natural companions of transculturation as a process that accentuates cultural differences. In other words, it ignores the murky intermediary realm in which the transition from one epistemological framework to another—from Ottoman/Islamic to the Western—does not occur without a dialectical back and forth between the two intellectual traditions.

This article seeks to remedy this lapse by exploring this intermediary realm in the construction of early twentieth-century Ottoman/Turkish sexual scientific knowledge. By focusing on cross-cultural entanglements and transfers, it seeks to show how the established ideas about love, desire, morality, and community were amalgamated with the imported medicinal concepts of the West not in a totalizing but, instead, in an eclectic and relatively unsystematic fashion. Thus, it recognizes the agency of the Ottoman doctors in their selective translational, transnational, and transtemporal appropriations of Western scientific paradigms, and suggests, in a similar vein as does Ryan M. Jones when he states with respect to Mexican sexology, that “there was no clear break where traditional views on sexuality, as mediated through practices of religion, confession, and bodily expression were placed with a purely

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<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Irvin Cemil Schick, “Representation of Gender and Sexuality in Ottoman and Turkish Erotic Literature,” *The Turkish Studies Association Journal* 28, no. 1/2 (2004): 81–103. Selim S. Kuru, “Sex in the Text: Deli Birader’s *Dâfi’ü l-Gumûm ve Râfi’ü l-Humûm* and the Ottoman Literary Canon,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 10, no. 2 (2007): 157–74. Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*, 165.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Yücel Yanıkdağ writes, “Ottoman-Turkish neuro-psychiatrists almost fully accepted the medical or pseudo-medical theories current among European scientists” (Yücel Yanıkdağ, *Healing the Nation: Prisoners of War, Medicine and Nationalism in Turkey 1914-1939* [Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2013]: 212).

<sup>10</sup> Even within the European orbit, the history of love and sexuality is full of contradictions, but it is often narrated around the dichotomy of repression and liberation, with a tautological insistence on progress or moving forward, from a repressed Christian conservative past towards sexual revolution. In the accounts of Islamic sexuality, the opposite direction is followed, as if there was a golden time of sexual liberation before European colonialism, which is identified with sexual backwardness. But in both cases, there is a linear progressive discourse contributing to a teleological understanding of history marked by shifts and breaks. In this sense, what stands out from a majority of the studies is Mehmet Kalpaklı and Walter Andrews’s book *The Age of Beloveds*, where they look at sexuality not through the binary lens but seek to construct it through cultural interactions and exchanges in the sixteenth century Ottoman and European worlds. This article is inspired by and seeks to extend their approach to the early twentieth century discussions of sexuality. (Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2005]).



clinical *scientia sexualis*.”<sup>11</sup> Eventually, instead of treating love as a universal human disposition and sexuality as a natural biological endowment, this article considers the historically contingent nature of their conflation in the late Ottoman and early Turkish Republican psychiatric discourse. It traces the shifting definitions of love and examines how its mystical and cosmological meaning was displaced to allow for the production of a new body of statements that would constitute the modern scientific discourse of sexuality and gendered identity. By doing so, it aims to contribute to the intellectual debate in global sexology studies, which rejects the standard models of “westernization” and “modernization” in favor of a reciprocal understanding of cultural exchange marked by “less of a one-way journey than of the ‘multi-directionality of intellectual exchange,’” emphasizing intermingling, multidisciplinary, and hybridization.<sup>12</sup>

To this end, this article sets out to explore how the French medical concept of *l’amour morbide* was reformulated by Ottoman and Turkish psychiatrists through a confluence of divergent meanings associated with love—biological-materialist, Darwinian, and Christian conceptions on the one hand and Islamic mystical, metaphysical, and humoral connotations which had been attached to it for hundreds of years on the other—to create a distinctively indigenous product: a term that denotes sexual reproduction and its perversions but is also evocative of mystical attraction, the ideal of moderation, and homoerotic desire. It is my contention that this process of re-elaborating the concept of love in the early decades of the twentieth century also contributed to the production of knowledge about the subject, where gender and sexuality became the primary mode of self-expression.<sup>13</sup> In arguing my case, I will draw on evidence from the works produced by the founders of the disciplines of neurology and psychiatry in Turkey, namely Mazhar Osman, Nazım Şakir, and Fahrettin Kerim, as well as other texts on love and sexual pathology.<sup>14</sup> I will offer an analysis of the philosophical,

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<sup>11</sup> Ryan M. Jones, “Mexican Sexology and Male Homosexuality: Genealogies and Global Contexts, 1860-1957,” in *A Global History of Sexual Science, 1880-1960*, ed. Veronika Fuechtner, Douglas E. Haynes, and Ryan M. Jones (California: University of California Press, 2018), 232–57, 235.

<sup>12</sup> Veronika Fuechtner, Douglas E. Haynes, and Ryan M. Jones, “Introduction: Towards a Global History of Sexual Science: Movements, Networks, Deployments,” in *A Global History of Sexual Science*, 11. Scholars that contribute to this new trend in global sexuality studies include Heike Bauer who argues for a reconceptualization of sexology through the lens of translation “understood as a mode of modification” refashioning, reformulating, and recreating. For Bauer, the conventional treatment of sexual theories approaches them from a purely scientific perspective. “This model of sexual theorization challenges the view that sexological discourses are merely descriptive and prescriptive scientific formulae. It suggests that sexual theory and sexual identity formation are part of an interactive process where intertwined scientific and literary discourses simultaneously produce and reproduce ideas about sexuality, influencing contemporary sexual politics which then in turn influence new sexual discourses” (Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009]: 17). Kirsten Leng and Kattie Sutton highlight new directions in the history and historiography of sexology and approach sexual science as a “porous field” that encompasses law, social science, anthropology, and literature among others. It lies at the intersections between different fields rather than as a distinct, clearly demarcated discipline. It is also transnational, as most of the main players of sexology read each other’s work, they also read outside of the field, articulated non-sexological views of sex from other fields, such as history, literature, law and anthropology. Translation is a key issue, both the translation of texts between languages and cultures, but particularly the translation of concepts and evidence between fields. (Kirsten Leng and Katie Sutton, “Histories of Sexology Today: Reimagining the Boundaries of *Scientia Sexualis*,” *History of the Human Sciences* 34, no. 1 [2021]: 3–9). Moreover, Alison Moore’s argument resonates with the others in the field as instead of a clear rupture she foregrounds entanglements, complexity, and multidisciplinary. She shows how the urge to historicize sexuality lies in the origins of the field: “In fact, it seems that historical understanding of the sexual past was part of a complex web of ideas that gave rise to sexual science in the first instance” (Alison M. Moore, “The Historicity of Sexuality: Knowledge of the Past in the Emergence of Modern Sexual Science,” *Modern Intellectual History* 18, no. 2 [June 2021]: 420).

<sup>13</sup> As Michel Foucault shows, sexuality is not an action, but a state of being. It is intimately connected to the questions of the self. That is why a history of sexuality is always a history of the self. See Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Primary texts include: Fahrettin Kerim [Gökay], *Yorgun Sinirler ve Marazi Aşklar Üzerinde Ruhi Tetkikler* (İstanbul: Kader Matbaası, 1928); Fahrettin Kerim [Gökay], *Gayr-ı Tabii Aşklar* (İstanbul: Suhulet Matbaası, 1925); Nazım Şakir [Şakır], *Aşk-ı Marazî*, (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Hayriye ve Şürekası, 1910); Mazhar Osman [Uzman], *Tababet-i Ruhiye*, I. C., (İstanbul:

ethical, and societal concerns that underlie these texts by placing them in dialogue with each other as well as the wider social context. I believe that in these works love retains its ontological foundation as a unifying and harmonizing source, but within a changing social context that promulgates a strict gender division and heteronormative behavior. As such, love represents an impossible ideal degenerated into lower passions, perverse desires, and hence morbidity. It is only within the nationalist narrative that love finds for itself a place as a sacred bond between husband and wife cementing the notion of a companionate understanding of marriage.

### From the Erotics of Male-to-Male Bonding to the Vagaries of Male-Female Relationships

What explains the attraction of the concept of *l'amour morbide* to the Ottoman and Turkish neuropsychiatrists? To answer this question, we should first switch our attention from medicine to literature since, just like its precedent in France, *marazi aşk* in Turkey also had a close affinity with the literary culture of the time. According to Selçuk Çıkla, the trope of love and/as sickness was often found in the fictional narratives of the nineteenth century, which described love (*aşk*) and transcendence (*aşkınlık*) in sickly terms: exuberance (*taşkınlık*) embodied in passionate desires and fleshly lusts, which were often directed toward women.<sup>15</sup> These narratives would feature common plot structures revolving around a young man who develops an erotic obsession with a woman, who is generally of questionable moral character, and as a result suffers from lovesickness. It was within this context that *l'amour morbide* was taken up by the neuropsychiatrists, not because of the evocations of the adjective *morbide* but the noun *l'amour*: love was already inscribed in competing narratives of what constitutes proper sexual conduct, the right way to think about sex, and even what it means to be male and female. Therefore, *marazi aşk* in psychiatric texts was at once a continuation of this literary trend and an attempt to offer a new scientific perspective on the so-called lovesickness by linking it to the brain's anatomy. However, I maintain that the biological explanation was only a pretext to posit a noble societal ideal embodied in love's potential for greater union and harmony while at the same time preventing its realization. In what follows, I will provide a short overview of the concept of love in the Ottoman literary tradition, followed by its disintegration and reformulation in the nineteenth century.

In classical Ottoman literature, love did not mean romantic attraction between persons of the opposite sex, but it meant an intense, unsettling yearning for God.<sup>16</sup> This type of ideal love commonly had homoerotic overtones, whose intellectual roots lie in an elite discourse of poetic composition (*ghazal*) celebrating the pleasures of beautiful boys, wine, and music.<sup>17</sup> One of the defining features of this amorous verse was ambivalence: "Love in the *ghazal* is at once carnal love, as well as chaste Platonic love, and love for/of the Divine; the beloved is at once the tantalizing fleshly object of physical desire, as well a beautiful youth who manifests and thus bears witness (*sāhid*) by virtue of his/her chaste beauty to the Beauty of the Divine, or is simply God Himself."<sup>18</sup> In the Ottoman Sufi context, this merging of the celestial and the earthly was often expressed through the thirteenth-century Andalusian-born mystic Ibn al-

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Matbaa-i Hayriye ve Şürekası, 1909). There are also other texts, that talk about issues related to love, sexuality, perversion such as the first Turkish journal of Neurology and Psychiatry *Şişli Müessesesi'nde Emraz-ı Akliye ve Asabiye Müsâmereleri* (1916-1918, 11 vols.); Selami Münir, *Gayri Tabii Aşklar*. Istanbul: Bozkurt Basımevi, 1937. And various short essays written by the above-mentioned authors.

<sup>15</sup> Selçuk Çıkla, *Edebiyat ve Hastalık* (İstanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2016), 181-183.

<sup>16</sup> Taner Timur, *Osmanlı-Türk Romanında Tarih, Toplum ve Kimlik* (Ankara: İmge Kitapevi, 2019), 24.

<sup>17</sup> Everett K. Rowson, "Homoerotic Liasons among the Mamluk Elite in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria," in *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, ed. Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 215.

<sup>18</sup> Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 36.

'Arabi's philosophy of "the unity of being" (*wahdat al-wujud*).<sup>19</sup> The most fundamental tenet of this philosophy was to view God in threefold form as the first love, first lover, and first beloved, which the mystic experienced through a transference of love from the human to the divine to realize the secret of triune unification.<sup>20</sup> Such spiritual love, however, was customarily a prerogative of the male sex. "It was only in a [male] same-gender relationship that one could find a partner who was similarly educated, and thus, potentially an intellectual equal ... This kind of relationship would not necessarily be dominated by sexual intercourse and the reproductive subtext. It could be primarily spiritual and intellectual."<sup>21</sup> Male love implied a more intellectual, refined, and superior love since such qualities were thought to be more prevalent in men than women. Women were typically viewed as more active and passionate in sexual matters, represented in many narratives dealing with female sexuality as voracious and barely controllable.<sup>22</sup> As a result, love became a prominent feature of male-to-male bonding while its earthly manifestations, lust, carnality, and sexual desire, were relegated to the female body. In his analysis of a sixteenth-century Ottoman erotic text by Deli Birader, Selim Kuru affirms that "Love is defined separately from sexual passion," and discussed in the section on boys – and not on women.<sup>23</sup> Operating on an unconscious level, this choice reveals a certain fear underlying the text: while boys' passive role presents no real challenge to male potency, women's active sexual appetite exudes a threat of emasculation.<sup>24</sup>

As Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı also demonstrate in their book *The Age of Beloveds*, the tradition of homoerotic love, which might seem progressive by today's standard because of its recognition of sex-role ambivalence, was inextricably linked to the gender hierarchy through the eroticization of dominance and submission. They contend that there was "a direct link between entertainment – the party (tavern, coffeehouse), intoxication, sexual excitement – and the maintenance of power."<sup>25</sup> They further suggest that "power relations of all kinds, from the most personal (adult-child, husband-wife, lover-beloved) to the most public

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<sup>19</sup> Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*, 82.

<sup>20</sup> Nusret Çam, *Aşk Dini* (İstanbul: Ötügen Neşriyat, 2011), 161. As Çam explains, among the mystics those who talk about love the most are those who believe in the philosophy of the unity of being, such as Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, Ahmed Yesevi, and Yunus Emre (175). They believe in the unity of being and/in love. If the origin of everything is one, then love must be an indivisible whole, like the body, that is, existence. It is wrong to distinguish between creator-created, divine love and human love. The philosophy of the unity of the being means briefly: Allah, whose essence is hidden, manifests Himself in humans and other existing things by means of His attributes (or names). That is to say, both the lover and the beloved are Allah Himself at every level. For example, if someone makes a jug out of frozen water, that is, ice, and fills it with water, there is no doubt that this jug looks like a separate substance from water. However, when the sun's heat hits the ice jug, both the jug and the water in it become the same (300).

<sup>21</sup> Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds*, 20. "Moreover, for a male to love a male affirm self-love (it is, in this sense, masturbatory); it also affirms the value of masculinity and supports a patriarchal culture, insofar as the possibility of a boy dominating a manmade vulnerable by love does not threaten patriarchal structures to the same extent that a woman dominating a man might" (179).

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Nafzawi, *The Perfumed Garden of Sensual Delight* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Ibn Hazm, *The Ring of the Dove: A Treatise on the Art and Practice of Arab Love* (London: Luzac & Company, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Kuru, "Sex in the Text," 163.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 165. Having said this, Kuru also makes it clear that the world of literature where boys were taken as the only object worthy of spiritual love was different than the real world in which men had female lovers and wives. Andrews and Kalpaklı also highlight this: "even though Ottoman Turkish poems are overwhelmingly homoerotic, most men in the Ottoman Empire commonly and naturally had female beloveds" (*The Age of Beloveds*, 147). It was as if in the public realm, the fear of emasculation prevented men from openly praising women beloveds because there was an established belief that too much focus on women, on loving, pleasing and praising them, will make a man effeminate" (133). So here we see the continuance of the Neoplatonic division "this world—evil/that world—good" applied to gender relations: this world characterized by woman and the other (spiritual/higher world) characterized by men. Thus, when a poet falls for a woman, "he becomes a mere man and less 'manly,' a mere lover, more worldly and less 'spiritual.' She gains the upper hand; he is powerless" (135). Therefore, in this Neoplatonic imagination of love lies an issue of power.

<sup>25</sup> Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds*, 312.

(courtier-monarch, patron-client, even empire-empire), were eroticized on a consistent pattern. That is, they were imagined in the forms, the language, and the metaphors of love.<sup>26</sup> The discursive interplay of power and eroticism was an important feature of “the masculinization of the erotic” through the naturalization of a gender hierarchy between masculine and effeminate men in early modern Ottoman society—and the same was true for medieval Europeans, who thought of politics in equally erotic terms.<sup>27</sup> Because of this deeply ingrained dynamic, the authors argue that during the Orientalist heyday “it was easy for the West to eroticize its relations with the Ottoman East because the East had already eroticized its own social and political relations.”<sup>28</sup> What the authors recognize as common to both cultures is a homoerotic subtext that centers on the maintenance of an all-male (which can also be called self-loving, narcissistic, or masturbatory) fraternity, which feels threatened by and therefore eliminates the possibility of women dominating men in any area. This explains why shifting political, social, and economic relations among men and between men and women over the centuries in the Ottoman Empire—as in other militarized imperial regimes—invariably prompted a reformulation in the understandings of love, desire, and eroticism. The leitmotif of homoerotic love, too, was unable to resist the changing structure of relations, and thus gradually dissolved as the late sixteenth century saw the waning of the Age of Beloveds and the rise of puritanical movements.<sup>29</sup> In time, the metaphor of wine, amorous intoxication, and passionate admiration of beauty in boys lost its currency and came under attack for being this-worldly, impure, and morally inferior.

Most scholarship in Middle East sexuality studies cites colonial encounters with Europe as a turning point in the stigmatization and ultimately the banishment of homoerotic love. Dror Ze’evi maintains that a variety of Ottoman-era sexual discourses—legal discussions, medical treatises, shadow theater plays, dream interpretation manuals—fell into an “embarrassed silence” over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> He proposes the advent of the printing press and circulation of travelogues published by European agents such as missionaries, traders, and travelers among the Ottoman literate classes as an important factor in the condemnation of same-sex practices as shameful through the promotion of “bourgeois monogamous heteronormality.”<sup>31</sup> Likewise, Khaled El-Rouayheb claims that the concept of homosexuality did not exist in the Arab-Islamic world before the nineteenth century when “the modern, nebulous notion of ‘sexuality’” as a European Victorian invention was introduced, cementing “the emerging view that all forms of passionate attraction to boys were equally signs of ‘sickness’ and ‘depravity’.”<sup>32</sup> Joseph Massad emphasizes the Western civilizational discourse, which fuses together debates over modernity and civilization with debates over sex and sexual practices, as the underlying impetus behind the repudiation of the love of boys in Arabic poetry.<sup>33</sup> Afsaneh Najmabadi constructs a similar argument with respect to the Persian world by stressing the connection between the European condemnation of male same-sex

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 312. They further argue that the same power dynamic was apparent in (Southern) Europe. “The model of dominance and submission governing relations at court is that of an all-male society—a homoerotic society—in which the hierarchy of domination does not admit of a woman dominating a man at any point.” Andrews and Kalpaklı, considering the kind of society and culture that produced such poetry and situating it in a broader and cultural context (love poetry and the “cultural scripts” that governed it), instead argue that the poems register eroticized but actual political interactions among men, and as such question the particularity of the Ottomans (their otherness compared to Europe).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>30</sup> Ze’evi, *Producing Desire*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> Dror Ze’evi, “Hiding Sexuality: The Disappearance of Sexual Discourse in the Late Ottoman Middle East,” *Social Analysis* 49, no. 2 (January 1, 2005): 34–53, 49.

<sup>32</sup> El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 159.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Andoni Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

relations and the heteronormalization of love “as a condition of ‘achieving modernity’” in Iran.<sup>34</sup> In the end, various scholars seem to converge on the view, summarized by Leslie Peirce, that “the impact of the West on nineteenth-century Middle Eastern society [including love and sexual relations] is undeniable.”<sup>35</sup> However, it is my belief that we still need further understanding of this impact in more nuanced, complex ways, which take into account local variations and complexities as well as internal contradictions and contestations, and go beyond the grand narrative of modernity—as a narrative of radical rupture between traditional and modern societies.<sup>36</sup> In this respect, instead of viewing the disappearance of the male beloved as a break or departure from the past, we can think of it as a pattern of continuity in transformation that is nothing other than the condition *sine qua non* of women’s debut in narratives of heterosexual romance, marriage, and family life, which was as empowering as it was constraining. In other words, since the world of the male beloved demanded an all-male fraternity, its erosion can be read as evidence of a softening of patriarchy, which brought women new freedoms as well as new limitations.<sup>37</sup>

According to Kuru, the ideological stakes of women’s increased visibility were perhaps the most discernable in the changes taking place in literary culture in the tumultuous second half of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>38</sup> There was a generic shift from verse to prose (such as the novel and the short story) as the dominant form of expression, and accompanying this shift was a narrative reorientation from the erotics of male-male desire towards the vagaries of male-female relationships. As he explains, “As a matter of fact, almost none of the early Turkish novels written after the second half of the nineteenth century dwell on the passionate relations between men. In these novels, most of the young and good-looking male protagonists fall for women with a hopeless and desperate love. The focus on boy beloveds and wine taverns in classical Ottoman poetry shifts towards female lovers, the danger women can cause to men, or the nationalist ideals they symbolize.”<sup>39</sup> In a similar vein, Taner Timur claims that the change in gender relations in the wake of the Crimean War (1853-1856) led to a new understanding of love, raising the status of the representation of women from courtesans and slaves to more active roles in sexual selection.<sup>40</sup> This transformation was given momentum by the growing number of translations of Western (primarily French) literary works into Ottoman. According to Timur, the fact that early translations gave priority to the

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<sup>34</sup> Najmabad, *Women with Mustaches*, 3

<sup>35</sup> Leslie Peirce, “Writing Histories of Sexuality in the Middle East,” *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (December 2009): 1325–39, 1336.

<sup>36</sup> Recent work by Ezgi Sarıtaş and Şeyma Afacan goes in this direction. They both claim that there is a need for a different historiography, the former with respect to sexuality and the latter science and medicine. Ezgi Sarıtaş, *Cinsel Normallüğün Kuruluşu: Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Heteronormatiflik ve İstikrarsızlıkları* (İstanbul: Metis, 2020). Şeyma Afacan, “Idle Souls, Regulated Emotions of a Mind Industry: A New Look at Ottoman Materialism,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 32, no. 3 (August 27, 2021): 317–53.

<sup>37</sup> Irvin Cemil Schick writes that the creation of private publishing houses catering to a female audience worked towards a more equal understanding of love on the lines of “symmetry, sharing, mutuality” (Irvin Cemil Schick, “Print Capitalism and Women’s Sexual Agency in the Late Ottoman Empire,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 [May 1, 2011]: 216). While this was happening, as Tuba Demirci and Selçuk Akşin Somel write, this new visibility put more emphasis on women’s bodies through a new discourse of progeny and reproduction. (Tuba Demirci and Selçuk Akşin Somel, “Women’s Bodies, Demography, and Public Health: Abortion Policy and Perspectives in the Ottoman Empire of the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17, no. 3 (2008): 377–420). Gülhan Balsoy extends this view in her book by showing how the government’s anxiety over a perceived decline of the Muslim population instigated the adoption of pronatalist policies “predominantly formulated through women’s sexuality and the female body” (*The Politics of Reproduction in Ottoman Society, 1838-1900* [New York: Routledge, 2013]: 1).

<sup>38</sup> Selim Kuru, “Yaşanan, Söylenen ve Yazılan: Erkekler Arasında Tutkusal İlişkiler,” *Cogito* 65-66 (2011): 263-277.

<sup>39</sup> Kuru, “Yaşanan, Söylenen,” 276; my translation. Kuru is making it known that this change or transformation happened in the realm of literature while in real life, the practice of male same-sex desire and sexual activity continued well into the Republican period.

<sup>40</sup> Timur, *Osmanlı-Türk Romanında*, 23.

most popular examples of romance fiction is an index of the Ottoman imaginative evolution: “These works demonstrate what Ottomans were looking for in love both in their own lands and in Europe which they now followed with great interest.” Even though, as Timur makes clear, the romantic ideal did not quite fit with the reality of Ottoman society, it was still favored by a majority of authors because “romantic love was, to a certain extent, a secularized form of the mystical love that they had left behind.”<sup>41</sup> From this, we can infer that the Ottoman elites unconsciously transferred their perception of love as intense longing for divine unity onto the possibility of companionate marriage as a new marital ideal. Therefore, homoerotic love found expression through a legitimate heteronormative trope; it remained pure and perfect, but its object shifted from the young boy to the adult woman, who now evoked, just like the boy did in the past, the vision of a greater unity. The eroto-politics of desire changed, but the underlying search for unity, and hence for the divine, continued.

Love stories in early Ottoman novels prove this argument in their conferral of an inviolable status on love, depicting it as an eternal and everlasting source that uplifts man to a higher level of humanity.<sup>42</sup> This depiction embodied an ideal worldview, which sought to transcend the polarities and conceptual divisions of the day and was treated as a goal, an ethical endeavor, towards which society and the individual should strive. Consequently, as Jale Parla argues, any deviation from the “true and original form of love”—that is, its physicalization in the body—was regarded as a disease that caused sickness.<sup>43</sup> Sickness was believed to be more than merely an ailment: it was considered to be a specifically social and moral problem. Sick people were weak-minded and weak-willed, which made them susceptible to succumb to their baser sexual instincts and revert to their animal nature. They thus posed a dire threat to the integrity of the entire community by departing from the ideal of love—the ideal of harmony in the social and moral order. Since there was already a long-established tradition of associating women with carnal lust, the source of this sickness was often located in women’s sexual excess and potential for deviance. Such mythic projections of gendered fantasies ultimately led to a contradictory discourse in the representation of female characters in early Ottoman novels which oscillated between the archetype of a dangerous femme fatale and that of an innocent victim.<sup>44</sup> Depending on whether their love for their male partner was spiritual or sensual, these heroines were either exalted as angels or reviled as devils. Hence, heterosexual definitions of love were caught between the dichotomous pairings of soul and body, good and evil, union and separation, and as such were naturally counterproductive to the ingrained notion of love as perfect harmony. In other words, the regulation of sexual desire in both men and women was the focus of the effort to create a harmonious society through the restoration of natural love, but the same effort was simultaneously nullified by the duality of sex as the basis for gender difference. Because of this incongruity, love was in a sense condemned to be unnatural and thus morbid.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 25-6.

<sup>42</sup> Jale Parla, *Babalar ve Oğullar: Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1990): 88. Parla draws attention to the fact that love in the Tanzimat novels does not have the same individualizing function as it has in the Western romantic novel (168). It is almost equal to divine law. There is a sacredness attached to it. Parla once again emphasizes the view that the body has no place in love while examining the Shakespeare translations. As Nükhet Sirman writes, it is this quality of love that is later displaced onto the nation so that “the nation is imbued with the same sacredness attached to ... love that serves as a way of approaching God” (Nükhet Sirman, “Gender Construction and Nationalist Discourse: Dethroning the Father in the Early Turkish Novel,” in *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*, ed. Feride Acar and Ayşe Güneş-Ayata [Leiden: Brill, 2000]: 172).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>44</sup> Nükhet Sirman, “Writing the Usual Love Story: The Fashioning of Conjugal and National Subjects in Turkey” in *Gender, Agency, Change: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Victoria Ana Goddard (New York: Routledge, 2000), 202-220, 205. Also see Şerif Mardin, “Superwesternization in Urban Life in the Ottoman Empire in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century,” in *Turkey: Geographical and Social Perspectives*, ed. P. Benedict and E. Turnertekin (Leiden: Brill, 1974) and Deniz Kandiyoti “Slave Girls, Tempresses, and Comrades: Images of Women in the Turkish Novel,” *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 1 (1988): 35–50.

It is my contention that this dilemma was the hinge on which the early sexological discourse on morbid love, sexual deviancy, and gender norms took shape. It reflected a larger struggle between competing visions, ideologies, and epistemologies informing the late Ottoman period.<sup>45</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that there are confused and contradictory statements in the works produced by the founders of neurology and psychiatry in Turkey. At medical school, they were raised in the tradition of Western science, trained to view life as a biological process, which made them ardent supporters of biological psychiatry.<sup>46</sup> However, when their texts are closely analyzed, it becomes apparent that their reliance on a reproductive framework in the explanation of sexuality and sexual pathology is contested by love's Islamic cosmogonic function as a unifying, integrating, and harmonizing force (what we call mystical love). In what follows, I explore how, in the works of early neuropsychiatrists, the talk of love and morbidity becomes a focal point for the struggle to regain the lost balance—of the humors, the body, the spirit, the community—which almost always carries implications for the wider social and political order. I conclude that the search for ideal love—and its fall back into a morbid form when not realized—becomes an expression of the desire for unity and harmony at a time of deep crisis in social and political reality, which ultimately finds its fulfillment in the imagining of the nation on a reproductive register which is based on companionate marriage and the nuclear household.

### What is Love? A Unifying Force or an Individual Instinct?

The formal recognition of psychiatry as a medical specialty took place at a comparatively later date in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>47</sup> Even though trainees were sent to Europe for an education in psychiatry, starting from 1893,<sup>48</sup> the field generally remained marginal in an environment of political repression under the regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II.<sup>49</sup> It was only after the adoption of a Second Constitution following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 that the sciences of psychiatry and neurology flourished side by side with the first Turkish publications devoted to the promotion of mental health and treatment of nervous diseases.<sup>50</sup> Among them, a range of disorders including criminality, alcoholism, sexual pathology, hysteria, and homosexuality was

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<sup>45</sup> For a study of this period, see Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000); M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Fatih Artvinli, Ş. Erkoç, F. Kardeş'in "Two Branches of the Same Tree: A Brief History of Turkish Neuropsychiatric Society (1914-2016)," *Nöro Psikiyatri Arşivi* 54, no. 4 (2017).

<sup>47</sup> The enactment of the Regulation of Mental Asylums in 1876 is often considered to be an event that marked the beginning of mental medicine in the Ottoman Empire by preparing the necessary legal ground for it to be recognized as a specialized field (Türk Tuna Gözütok, *Psikiyatrinin Türkiye'ye Girişi: Mecnûndan Akıl Hastasına* [Istanbul: Nobel Bilimsel Eserler, 2020]: 85-6). However, it was also the year Abdülhamid II took to the throne after his brother Murad V was officially diagnosed as untreatably insane. That is when he started to meddle with mental specialists by applying censorship. This period between 1876 to 1909, Abdülhamid's rule, is often narrated as a "dark time" for psychiatry in narratives penned by the founders of the field, written most likely with a partial view of the past. See, for instance, Avni Mahmud, *Muhtasar Emrâz-ı Akliyye* (İstanbul: Ahmed İhsan ve Şürekâsı Matbaacılık Osmanlı Şirketi, 1910) and Mazhar Osman [Uzman], "Timarhaneden Emrâz-ı Akliyye ve Asabiyye Hastanesine Doğru," in *Sıhhat Almanakı* (İstanbul: Kader Matbaası, 1933): 119.

<sup>48</sup> Gözütok, *Psikiyatrinin Türkiye'ye Girişi*, 99.

<sup>49</sup> Şahap Erkoç explains that during the reign of Abdülhamid II, it was forbidden to use the words "crazy," "mad," or "madhouse." Even in *Lügat-ı Tıp* (Dictionary of Medicine) the Turkish equivalent of the word crazy could not be mentioned at all. Besides, it was forbidden to publish works related to psychiatry. The field only started after the Second Constitutional Monarchy. (Şahap Nurettin Erkoç, *Türkiye Psikiyatri Tarihi*, YouTube, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFLxVc9c7jw>).

<sup>50</sup> Among the first publications are: *Muhtasar Emrâz-ı Akliyye*, one of the first Turkish psychiatry books written by Avni Mahmud. Even though it was published only in 1910, it was written earlier; The first edition of Mazhar Osman's *Tababet-i Ruhîye* was published in 1909 and the second in 1910. Raşid Tahsin's *Seririyat-ı Akliyye Lectures* were published only in 1920. However, most of these lessons date to an earlier time.

discussed, often under the heading of *marazî aşk*, in works such as Nazım Şakir's *Aşk-ı Marazî* (1910), Mazhar Osman's *Tabâbet-i Ruhiye* (1910), Fahrettin Kerim's *Gayr-ı Tabîî Aşklar* (1925) and *Yorgun Sınırlar ve Marazi Aşklar Üzerinde Ruhi Tetkikler* (1928).<sup>51</sup> In these works, morbid love functioned—like its equivalent in French—as an ambivalent category to group not only sexual but also a wide array of social anomalies under one head. It was not just used as a pseudo-scientific term to describe and classify “unnatural” sexual practices, but in most cases its meaning remained conveniently broad and vague so as to embrace a multiplicity of subjects that bore no intrinsic connection. As such, it provided early neuropsychiatrists with enough flexibility to deploy an eclectic array of competing discourses to make sense of the changing definitions of love, gender, morality, and community in a period of transition between imperial and national rule. As Alper Yalçınkaya shows, science within the Ottoman context was almost always articulated in moral terms: “[T]alking about science was always about what ‘our values’ were or, even more fundamentally, who ‘we’ were.”<sup>52</sup> The science of sex, too, was subordinated to moral concerns, used by the first neuropsychiatrists as a tool for value judgement, rather than merely a descriptive formula, to ponder the questions about human nature, personal identity, and social coherence. Juggling with conflicting definitions of love, which commonly alternated between union and individuality, was an important part of this process, and exposed their confusion over the distinction between individual and group interests.

In an essay “İnsan Hayatında Cinsî Kudretin Rolü,” Fahrettin Kerim starts out: “Every creature that opens its eyes to the world struggles with two needs: one is the preservation of the self, the other of the species.”<sup>53</sup> This Darwinian-fueled statement postdates, and closely paraphrases, the opening line of Nazım Şakir's *Aşk-ı Marazî*: “All living beings, from the least significant to the most significant, are under the influence of two essential imperatives: the instinct of hunger for survival and the desire to reproduce for the continuation of the species.”<sup>54</sup> As Atila Doğan shows, the theory of evolution was a popular talking-point among the Ottoman intellectuals, who understood it as a natural law based on a battle of life motivated, above all, by the instincts of hunger (preservation of the self) and love (preservation of the species).<sup>55</sup> This understanding, which was also assumed by both Kerim and Şakir, implied a bastardized conception of the evolutionary discourse, whose origin can be traced to the “religionization” or “fetishization of science” in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup> The most salient feature of this trend of what Şükrü Haniöğlu calls “vulgar materialism” was that it popularized a combination of scientism, materialism and social Darwinism in an attempt to transform

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<sup>51</sup> Most of these publications, which often appeared as original works, cited, sometimes extensively and often without proper reference, important European, particularly French and German, psychiatric texts. For example, *Aşk-ı Marazî* is a liberal translation of Emile Laurent's book *L'amore morbide* (1891), following the same structure of the original work, except for three chapters: sadist, masochist, and uranist love, which seems to mimic the same argument as that of Mazhar Osman's *Tabâbet-i Ruhiye*, which takes most of its material (case studies, examples etc.) from Richard von Krafft-Ebing's work. Fahrettin Kerim's books also freely paraphrase both works. Consequently, we can argue that these doctors read and reproduced each other's work, which points to the existence of a more or less unified sexual discourse, albeit mostly translated.

<sup>52</sup> Alper M. Yalçınkaya, *Learned Patriots: Debating Science, State, and Society in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015): 6.

<sup>53</sup> Fahrettin Kerim, “İnsan Hayatında Cinsî Kudretin Rolü,” *Tıp Dünyası*, no. 4 (1941): 3.

<sup>54</sup> Şakir, *Aşk-ı Marazî*, 3. For the influence of Darwinian ideas on the Military School students, see Alper Yalçınkaya, *Learned Patriots*, 180 and Atila Doğan, *Osmanlı Aydınları ve Sosyal Darwinizm* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2006): 168.

<sup>55</sup> Doğan, *Osmanlı Aydınları*, 189.

<sup>56</sup> M. Şükrü Haniöğlu, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Zihniyet, Siyaset ve Tarih* (İstanbul: Bağlam, 2006): 15-16.



society along the principles of scientific investigation.<sup>57</sup> Under its charm, a group of Ottoman intellectuals were apt to misconstrue the brain as the organ par excellence of the mind (as well as the emotions), and to dismiss the heart, soul, and poetry as unworthy of serious consideration. For example, as a radical materialist, Beşir Fuad criticized poets for attaching metaphysical functions to the human heart, redefining it as merely a muscle that pumps blood. In his debate with Namık Kemal, the well-known poet of the time, he vigorously defended the primacy of the brain in intellectual and emotional function and insisted that love “must be considered an illness, as discussed by Letourneau and other physiological psychology experts.”<sup>58</sup> Şerafeddin Mağmumi, an avid supporter of Beşir Fuad’s ideas, also described love as a chemical and physiological condition: “In my opinion, love is semi-madness. It is the emergence of a thin liquid layer and its coverage of the brain, the center of wisdom and intelligence, because of constant contemplation.”<sup>59</sup> Over the course of the last decade of the nineteenth century, the debate of brain versus heart (or science versus poetry) became more intense, with more scientists and intellectuals joining in.<sup>60</sup> As a result, with the anti-poetry front gaining an advantage, love gradually became divorced from its poetic-theological foundation, and came to be perceived as a biological function arising from “this hormonal, physical thing, this mating urge.”<sup>61</sup>

Such debates also influenced the intellectual climate among medical students, including the leading psychiatrists and physicians of mental health who graduated from the Military School of Medicine.<sup>62</sup> Normal and natural love was identified with reproduction, which had as for its object the ensuring of future generations through procreation.<sup>63</sup> Yet, in a way that undercuts this derivative definition of love as reproduction, one might observe that there was another, more primordial, meaning attached to love. This primordial meaning was essentially related to the neo-Platonic/Sufi ideas about love as a unifying and perfecting force. For example, in *Aşk-ı Marazî*, Şakir writes: “In fact, everyone, even the most invisible living things, is subject to a natural law that can be called the ‘attraction of love [as reproduction]’”<sup>64</sup> In Émile Laurent’s original text, *L’Amour morbide* (1891), the same sentence reads: “Everything in fact yields to the need to love physiologically.”<sup>65</sup> Here Şakir speaks of love, like Laurent, as a physiological need, even as physical law, but his use of the word “attraction”

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<sup>57</sup> Şükrü Hanioglu, “Blueprints for a Future Society: Late Ottoman Materialists on Science, Religion, and Art,” in *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga (London: Routledge, 2005), 27–116, 27–29; Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008): 138–141.

<sup>58</sup> Hanioglu, “Blueprints,” 36. Beşir Fu’ad’s ideas were in line with the rise of eugenic fiction in Europe, which “would collapse this division between love (as poetry) and marriage (as sexual reproduction), urging that love was to be no more, and no less, than the rational reproduction of the species.” (Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth-Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 92.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 42–47.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Johnson, *Love, Heterosexuality and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2007). 26. Of course within the Ottoman-Islamic tradition, there was already an established branch of medicine that treated lovesickness as a concrete, physiological ailment. But this understanding co-existed with several other viewpoints. Although it is hard to talk about a dominating ideology, what the anti-poetry critics held onto was a simplistic account of the past, as they saw all classical Ottoman poetry mistaking what was truly the work of the brain with an esoteric function of the heart. This view, which simplified the past, also gave the late Ottoman intellectuals an illusory superiority over their ancestors. They believed that they were the ones who could correct the mistakes of the past, by adopting a truly and absolutely scientific look. It served their interests to dismiss the whole past as trivial poetry, as unscientific endeavor, and celebrate the new present.

<sup>62</sup> Yalçınkaya, *Learned Patriots*, 180. Not only that, but also the political movement, of the Young Turks.

<sup>63</sup> This becomes obvious in the texts that use the word “tenasül” (reproduction) almost synonymously with love. Therefore, “tenasül” in time comes to replace and subsume the word love, though, not without contradictions.

<sup>64</sup> Şakir, *Aşk-ı Marazî*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Émile Laurent, *L’Amour morbide: Étude de Psychologie Pathologique* (Paris: Société D’éditions Scientifiques, 1891): v. (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k76844p.texteImage>)

(*cazibe*) slips an involuntary ambiguity into the first meaning. Since love is not a material force (it does not operate on matter in the way that gravity does, for example), the meaning of attraction can only be metaphorical, that is to say, a force that is not visible to the eyes but to the heart. Therefore, it can only be understood in a spiritual sense, as a transcendental magnetic energy that gives mobility, fertility, and life to all creatures.<sup>66</sup> The language used in the subsequent sentences affirms this view:

The 'pollens' that form the stamens of flowers fertilize all female flowers near and far thanks to the blowing wind; an earth beetle swoons with a maggot; another meets its bird lover; likewise a fish in the breast of the waters searches for a fresh fish in order to soothe the joys of its love. This desire for fertilization is an eternal and infinite feeling, an absolute need, for all cells of living, movable limbs that we see and do not see.<sup>67</sup>

Şakir suddenly switches to a symbolic style, which transposes the earlier mechanical definition of love as a physiological need into an emotional euphoria of the perfect union in nature, concluding that this *attraction* between all living beings, this elevating force of love, is “an eternal and infinite feeling, an absolute need,”—a statement not present in the original text. Here Şakir is clearly not just talking about love as reproduction or fertilization, but about love as a primordial, cosmic power that drives the visible world of matter.

Nearly thirty years later, we find the same line of argument in Kerim's essay “İnsan Hayatında Cinsî Kudretin Rolü,” where sexual energy is described as an “eternal force”: “This energy is found hidden in every cell. It dominates all existence, from the most primitive creature to humankind, endowed with powers such as contemplation and thought.”<sup>68</sup> Even though Kerim assures us that “Love is a sexual drive. It is a physiological need,” he, at the same time, conjures up a mythological time when “Love was a general and universal law,” growing out of “the insemination of the earth by the heavenly dew,”—an unacknowledged quote from Şakir's *Aşk-ı Marazî*.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, while love is treated as a mere animal instinct, there is also a contrary view that harkens back to a nostalgic past when love was noble, exalted, and pure. This explains the abundant use of references to mythology, philosophy, and poetry (juxtaposed with science and medicine) since they remain the only record of this distant past as enduring witnesses to love's permanence and glory. According to Parla, this was a common view of love during the Tanzimat period, extending into the later nineteenth century. In almost all novels of the period, love was described as a “truly uplifting feeling” that elevated man to a higher level of humanity;—when materialized in the body, it became equally decadent and wretched. This immutable kernel of love was imbibed in a romanticized view of the world embodied by the father/monarch as the ideal lover.<sup>70</sup> It is possible to see the same glorified conception of love in other prescriptive treatises on love published around the same time. For example, in *Love* (1913), Selanikli Abdi Tevfik objects to the view that love is merely a base passion, and instead proposes to view it as a transcendental ideal in opposition to nature; while nature is subject to mortality and death, as a ruthless place where one destroys

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<sup>66</sup> Actually this spiritual understanding of love as a magnet that draws everything to itself and the physical understanding of gravity were not that distinctly separated from each other as spiritual and scientific views of physics. There was not much difference between defining love in a scientific way as an attraction and the religious view. Even when Newton found the force of gravity, he was after a law of love, as he was of the opinion that the celestial beings were attracted to each other just like living beings. The same view was shared by Rumi who thought that atoms were pulled to each other by a force of love. See N. Hanif, *Biographical Encyclopaedia of Sufis: Central Asia & Middle East* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2002): 382-402.

<sup>67</sup> Şakir, *Aşk-ı Marazî*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Kerim, “İnsan Hayatında Cinsî,” 3.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Parla, *Babalar ve Oğullar*, 88, especially the chapter on “Oğullar ve Süfli Lezzetler”.

another to preserve himself, love stretches to eternity and infinity.<sup>71</sup> Consequently, even though there was a tendency to reduce love to brutishness in the late-nineteenth century, we can see that love still maintained, albeit often indirectly, something of its established usage as a supra-representational power above (but also within) the material realm. The invocation of scientific and materialist theories could hardly mask its origin as an impersonal force (*mana*), which comes before and is the source of matter (*madde*), subtly undermining the popular materialist conception that “What is eternal and infinite are the laws of matter and force.”<sup>72</sup>

Of course, one did not have to be a Sufi in order to subscribe to such a cosmic view of love. As Andrews explains, “Not every Ottoman subject was a Sufi but the general conditions that made it possible for emotions to have meaning for Ottomans were shaped, predominantly at a subconscious level, by mystical notions.”<sup>73</sup> These mystical notions, which eminently tended toward union and harmony, created an “Ottoman *emotional ecology*” of love characterized by an overarching interdependence that remained essential to a broad range of relations.<sup>74</sup> In other words, love gave communicable form to the fundamental truth of the unity of all within, or beneath, the apparent separateness of the ordinary world. According to Andrews, this paradox was captured in an emotional vocabulary that operated on an axis between union and separation:

At the pole of union is gathered vocabulary associated with pleasure or contentment: emotional vocabulary such as fulfillment, hope, joy, merriment, smiling, amazement, madness, laughter, spaciousness, intoxication, togetherness and pleasure-associated images such as day, sunshine, light dawn, the water of life, Paradise, That World, spring flowers, warmth, rebirth, rain, summer, flowing water and the gathering of friends. At the pole of separation the vocabulary is that of pain: emotional vocabulary such as yearning, despair, grief, helplessness, weeping, sadness, madness, abandonment, sacrifice, hopelessness, betrayal, loneliness, alienation and images such as night, darkness, fire, smoke, burning, clouds, rain (of tears), thirst, starvation, death, Hell, disaster, this world, autumn, winter, snow and ice.<sup>75</sup>

This rich language was the foundation of classical Ottoman *divan* poetry, “generated out of the polarity of functions symbolized by the signs *hecr* (“exile, separation, alienation”) and *visal* (“arrival at, union, conjunction”).”<sup>76</sup> However, the same signs were at work not only in poetry, but they also provided metaphors that became an integral part of the common culture in Turkey. As a recent study shows, Turkish conceptions of love continue to be unconsciously shaped, in a semantic level, by the same mystical conceptual schema.<sup>77</sup>

It was no different for the neuropsychiatrists at the turn of the century, who operated within the same mental ecology of Ottoman emotions in their articulation of the paradox of love. However, when inserted into a “scientific” discourse with little tolerance for ambiguity, this paradox inevitably turned into a full-blown aporia: Is love a harmonizing force that can unite individuals, communities, and society at large, or is it a survival instinct, a struggle for life, that can explain the primary motives behind pathological behavior? Without the religious component, it was utterly confusing to determine whether love was benevolent or cruel –

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<sup>71</sup> Selanikli Abdi Tevfik, *Aşk*, (İstanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2015).

<sup>72</sup> Doğan, *Osmanlı Aydınları*, 213.

<sup>73</sup> Walter Andrews, “Ottoman Love: Preface to a Theory of Emotional Ecology,” in *A History of Emotions, 1200-1800*, ed. Jonas Liliequist (London: Routledge, 2016): 21–48, 28.

<sup>74</sup> Andrews, “Ottoman Love,” 21.

<sup>75</sup> Andrews, “Ottoman Love,” 27.

<sup>76</sup> Walter G. Andrews, “Singing the Alienated ‘I’: Guattari, Deleuze and Lyrical Decodings of the Subject in Ottoman Divan Poetry,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 6, no. 2 (1993): 191–219, 203

<sup>77</sup> Yeşim Aksan and Dilek Kantar, “No Wellness Feels Better than This Sickness: Love Metaphors from a Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *Metaphor and Symbol* 23, no. 4 (October 21, 2008): 262–91.

whether it was a moral ideal that needs to be pursued, or a modern reality that needs to be embraced, that every man is for himself alone. Cevdet Nasuhi, Mazhar Osman's psychiatric assistant, furnishes the earliest evidence of this confusion in an article on crimes of love published in the first Turkish journal of neurology and psychiatry.<sup>78</sup> He mentions two instincts: attraction (*tecazüb*) and repugnance (*tenafür*), the former referring to conduct that benefits the community, the latter to conduct that causes harm to the community. He situates love as something intermediate between these two directions, writing "Despite their apparent contradictions, affection and enmity set off from the same starting point."<sup>79</sup> However, what he understands from love – this starting point – remains restricted to egoism (*hodperestî*). In other words, he wrongly ascribes its source to egoism, or an inherited concern for self-preservation. Therefore, it remains unclear how love as self-interest can exist in harmony with the interest of society. In many ways, Nasuhi's contradictory account epitomizes the intellectual dilemma that troubled most of the early supporters of the evolutionary theory.<sup>80</sup> After reducing love to self-righteous morality, which was used to explain maladaptive behavior such as murder and robbery, it was almost impossible to imagine a society based upon justice, harmony, and peace.<sup>81</sup>

To be sure, what was at stake was how to accommodate the new ideal of individuality, which eroded the old ideal of love, in the establishment of a new communal moral order. Now it was time to consider the new subject, his desires, passions, and emotions, and determine how to both promote and regulate them for civilizational advancement. Consequently, the talk of love, in the disguise of a scientific investigation, provided the early mind specialists with a linguistic space to consider the questions "who are we?" and "what is our relationship to each other?" which, as we will see, also implied the relationship one has to one's own sexual activity.

### **What is Marazî Aşk? A Disease of Immoderation or Violation of Gender Norms?**

Foucault's genealogical critique compels us to recognize that the modern subject is thoroughly "a historical and cultural reality," and so is his sexuality.<sup>82</sup> It suggests that the Christian practice of confession played a pivotal role in the coupling of subjectivity and sexuality: the obligation to voice the truth of the soul—and its innermost desires, passions, and secrets—produced a certain truth of the subject constructed around his sexuality.<sup>83</sup> This truth was not restricted to the sexual act, either in deed or thought, but involved "the problem of the relationship of oneself to oneself."<sup>84</sup> Foucault illustrates this with a reading of the Augustinian interpretation of the Garden of Eden, arguing that the rebellious penis that refuses to bend (the source of shame to both Adam and Eve) is an embodiment of the rebellion of "a part, an internal component, of the will" against the subject himself, which calls for a "permanent hermeneutics of oneself,"—that is to say, a constant process of "scrutinizing ourselves as libidinal beings."<sup>85</sup> This historical construct—this Christian subject—was a thoroughly alien concept to the

<sup>78</sup> Cevdet Nasuhi, "Sevgili Katilleri ve Aşk ile Cinayetin Münasebetleri" *Şişli Müessesesinde Emraz-ı Akliye ve Asabiye Müsamerelei* 4 (1917): 9-18.

<sup>79</sup> Nasuhi, 18.

<sup>80</sup> Doğan, *Osmanlı Aydınları*, 257.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>82</sup> Michel Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude," in *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985): 365–72, 366.

<sup>83</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.

<sup>84</sup> Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude," 371.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

Ottomans.<sup>86</sup> Islamicate tradition ascribed libidinal urges not to an inner truth qua an immaterial soul distinct from the body, “but to one that springs from the body’s elemental composition (fire, air, water, and earth) and reflect its humoral balance.”<sup>87</sup> Therefore, sex was not a necessary evil, or an unruly desire that must be contained. Rather, it was linked with the body’s humoral constitution. “Thus, the body, by virtue of its composing substances rather than any divinely appointed soul, would have a strong or weak sexual urge, a feminine or masculine, active or passive, penetrating or penetrated type of sexuality.”<sup>88</sup> This vision of sex and the body was fully compatible with the pervasive religious worldview that emphasized harmony and balance in all things.<sup>89</sup> As Ze’evi elaborates, “The message driven home was not one of sin or shame, nor was it an attempt to instill a new puritan sexuality. It was a call for moderation and continence.”<sup>90</sup>

We find the same call for moderation and continence in the early twentieth-century psychiatric accounts of sexuality in Turkey. Harmony (*ahenk*), balance (*muvazene*), moderation (*itidal*), and prudence (*ihitiyat*) make up some of the most frequently used words in the discussions on love, temperament, sex, and marriage. This might explain the appeal of translating Emile Laurent’s book *L’amour morbide* into Ottoman Turkish because Laurent uses morbid love not in the sense of “a sexual aberration,” but in the sense of “the exaggeration, the hypertropia of a natural sentiment or even passion.”<sup>91</sup> He believes that “modern civilisation had corrupted the natural urge for harmonious love, creating perversion, obsession, and masculine failure.”<sup>92</sup> Thus, he views morbid love not as an individual disorder, but as a social degeneration, its most common symptom being “hyper-excitability.”<sup>93</sup> As a result, the adjective *morbide* comes to represent a disruption (through contemporary civilization) in the natural and harmonious order of things. It is exactly this meaning that was evoked in the descriptions of *marazî aşk* and sexual pathology by Ottoman-Turkish neuropsychiatrists. Nazım Şakir pictures love as a delicate balance between two scales, physical and sentimental, which should be in perfect equilibrium if sickness is to be avoided; otherwise, *marazî aşk* is sure to follow.<sup>94</sup> In a similar vein, Fahrettin Kerim compares degenerate patients to “a broken clock deprived of balance and harmony constantly swinging backwards and forwards.”<sup>95</sup> Conveniently, he describes a variety of disorders under the heading of *marazî aşk*, such as hysteria, dementia, and homosexuality, as extremism and condemns those who suffer from them for being overly excited and emotional. Mazhar Osman, too, shares a similar understanding of love in a popular quote still circulated widely across the Internet: “A moderate amount of love is natural, less is insensitiveness and spiritual castration, and more is morbidity and insanity.”<sup>96</sup> The early sexological discourse of the normal (*tabîî*) and the pathological

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<sup>86</sup> Zeynep Sayın writes: “A perfect and Islamic understanding of metaphor would contradict a self-concept that reveals itself through its volatility: One should not be able to say ‘I’ in its real sense.” Therefore, it would be hard to talk about the existence of an individualized sense of self in the Islamic tradition. The focus on union and interdependence prevented the development of such a separate, autonomous idea of a subject, which in many ways remained blasphemous.” (Zeynep Sayın, “Batı’da ve Doğu’da Bedenin Temsilinde Haysiyet ve Zillet-II. İslami Beden Temsili: İffet ve Zillet,” *Defter*, no. 40 (Summer 2000): 195–235, 204.

<sup>87</sup> Ze’evi, *Producing Desire*, 22.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. Also see Ahmed Ragab, “One, Two, or Many Sexes: Sex Differentiation in Medieval Islamicate Medical Thought,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 3 (September 2015): 428–54.

<sup>89</sup> Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 18.

<sup>90</sup> Ze’evi, *Producing Desire*, 35.

<sup>91</sup> Moore, “*L’Amour morbide*,” 296.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Şakir, *Aşk-ı Marazî*, 13.

<sup>95</sup> Kerim, *Yorgun Sinirliler*, 5.

<sup>96</sup> “Aşkın Tanımı Nedir?,” *Soran Web*, May 14, 2018, <https://soranweb.gen.tr/askin-tanimi-nedir/>.

(*gayr-ı tabii*) sexuality, as we will see, was constructed on the same humoral language of moderation and excess. What was thought to be the cause of pathology was lack of balance, and what was sought after was its restoration.

However, there was an irreconcilable conflict between the sought-after balance, which sustained an unconscious economy of desire for the lost unity, and the reality of its decrepitude. Insisting on moderation and continence seemed like a futile endeavor in a world gone mad – literally, because the number of people committed to mental hospitals rose each year. This tension is subtly revealed in the founding works of neuropsychiatry. For example, Cevdet Nasuhi classifies personality into three broad groups: 1) fair-tempered, moderate 2) quick-tempered, mania 3) slow-tempered, melancholia. He identifies the moderate as the only group “who lives completely naturally,” yet he comes to accept that such people make up only a small minority in today’s society as most tend to move in the direction of either of the two extremes.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Nazım Şakir holds that *marazî aşk* is not an exception in a world of perfect harmony, but seems to be the rule.<sup>98</sup> Mazhar Osman complements with an alarming note: “Unfortunately more people are drifting into degeneration with each passing day.”<sup>99</sup> As they promoted psychiatry as a legitimate medical science for treating mental illness, the founders of the field had to confront the fact that their profession was the very sign that the scale of society was off balance.<sup>100</sup> This is why they often lapsed into the discourse of degeneration, to explain and ultimately intervene in a wide range of human behaviors that they labeled abnormal, including alcoholism, prostitution, crime, sexual pathology, and neurosis. Yücel Yanıkdağ notes that ideas about degeneracy in the late Ottoman context were fueled by social anxieties about race, nation, gender, and sexuality, brought about by the fear of imperial decline.<sup>101</sup> Çiğdem Oğuz adds that these anxieties corresponded with a popular discourse of moral crisis, which, when coupled with social Darwinism and eugenics, paved the way for a new understanding of morality.<sup>102</sup> Although degeneration was weighted with strong social/moral overtones, it also made health and disease a matter of personal responsibility rather than larger structural factors. As Harry Oosterhuis writes, “Degeneration was largely understood as a failure of the will to command the senses; increasingly, modern man appeared less governed by moral laws and had become more and more a slave of his physical desires.”<sup>103</sup> What loomed in the background was something related to the very core of being a sexual subject: the inability to master the rebellious penis was recast in the inability to master the rebellious will and its vicious desires.

In *Yorgun Sinirler ve Marazî Aşkılar*, Kerim often associates immoderation with a weak will. In his definition of hysteria, he emphasizes: “First of all, let us note that hysterical characters have weakness of will.”<sup>104</sup> Because of this, they are prone to “excessive reactions.” For example, they cry too much, burst into laughter at inappropriate times, or gets into a flap in the face of a small accident.<sup>105</sup> This is a new reading of the will, which significantly departs

<sup>97</sup> Nasuhi, “Sevgili Katilleri,” 15.

<sup>98</sup> Şakir, *Aşk-ı Marazî*, 5-6.

<sup>99</sup> Mazhar Osman Uzman, *Tababeti Ruhiye*, 3rd ed. (İstanbul: Kader Basımevi, 1941): 226.

<sup>100</sup> The root of this conflict was also present in European accounts: the relationship between madness and civilization was established in this way. Civilization was thought to be inhabited by people with bigger brains and this was used to explain the growing number of mad people in Europe.

<sup>101</sup> Yanıkdağ, *Healing the Nation: Prisoners of War, Medicine and Nationalism in Turkey 1914-1939* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2013).

<sup>102</sup> Çiğdem Oğuz, *Moral Crisis in the Ottoman Empire: Society, Politics, and Gender during WWII* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021): 16.

<sup>103</sup> Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Kraftt-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 54.

<sup>104</sup> Kerim, *Yorgun Sinirliler*, 23.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

from its earlier association with enthusiasm, perseverance, and determination,<sup>106</sup> and has for its aim the control of emotions by means of repression. It reveals how love is subsumed under sexuality and sexuality is individualized as a function of the subject in early sexological discourse in Turkey. In most accounts, love is described as an involuntary impulse, something akin to an unruly passion, restless desire, or ceaseless appetite, which needs to be kept in check. This has implications for the creation of a new sovereign subject—a subject who is now liberated from paternal-communal authority but must bear the burden of self-restraint.<sup>107</sup> It is possible to argue that this is how *marazî aşk* differs from traditional accounts of lovesickness in medieval Ottoman medicine, where it was believed to be “a major component of the illness ... to be the frustration of the lover’s sexual desire.” For this reason, for example, one of the healing methods Ibn Sīnā prescribed for lovesickness, besides medicine, was the use of “old women and effeminate men to divert the lover’s attention to someone else.” He also condoned the use of slave girls to satisfy unfulfilled sexual needs. In the same way, Ibn al-Jazzar emphasized “the need for coitus as a natural way of removing bodily superfluities.”<sup>108</sup> In modern accounts of lovesickness, there is no room to entertain such fantasies. An overflow of sexual energy should always be moderated through a careful repression of not only its quantity but also its direction. Like a broken compass, it should point in only one direction: to the qibla of the woman. Thus, the humoral language of immoderation and excess acquired a new association within the Ottoman-Turkish sexological discourse with (the lack of) repression. It was on this ground that the ideal of romantic love and companionate marriage was established, and the conjugal couple became central to the notion of legitimate sexual expression.<sup>109</sup>

As the nuclear family became the site of moderation, stability, and normalcy, where balance may once again be restored, women’s role within the family expanded, too, as companionate wives and nurturing mothers. Traditionally, Ottoman medicine promoted the ancient “imperfect-man” model, which regarded woman as a less-developed version of man, albeit occupying the same position within a sexual continuum.<sup>110</sup> In the nineteenth century, a new biological model was gradually adopted in medical discussions of syphilis, public hygiene, and sterility, which saw male and female bodies as two distinct entities with different functions in reproduction.<sup>111</sup> As a result, “women received unprecedented attention as the bearers of the future of the Ottoman population,” which resulted in the state granting them legal agency.<sup>112</sup> As Seçil Yılmaz adds, while woman’s body was exalted because of its reproductive skills, men’s bodies were seen as potential “vectors of syphilis who challenged public health and order.”<sup>113</sup> Therefore, there were pronatalist, biological discourses that challenged the old paradigms based on male superiority and female inferiority, demanding a kind of equality between the sexes, which is how discourses on love and sexuality proliferated in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Marriage was seen as the essential building block that constituted the nation. This is how the early neuropsychiatrists appropriated the eugenic

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<sup>106</sup> Mustafa Çağrırcı and Hayati Hökekleli, “İrade,” in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 22 (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2000): 380-384.

<sup>107</sup> Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1995): 55.

<sup>108</sup> Dols, *Majnūn*, 90.

<sup>109</sup> Sarıtaş, *Cinsel Normalliğin Kuruluşu*, 67.

<sup>110</sup> Ze’evi, *Producing Desire*, 39.

<sup>111</sup> How this model was created especially with respect to debates on reproduction and pronatalism, see Gülhan Balsoy, *The Politics of Reproduction in the Ottoman Empire, 1838-1900* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013) and Seçil Yılmaz, “Threats to Public Order and Health: Mobile Men as Syphilis Vectors in Late Ottoman Medical Discourse and Practice,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 13, no. 2 (July 2017): 222–43.

<sup>112</sup> Balsoy, *The Politics of Reproduction*, 120-1.

<sup>113</sup> Yılmaz, “Threats to Public Order,” 224.

discourse to intervene in the further degeneration of the diseased national body. “For these doctors, marriage was not something that could be left to emotions; nor could it be left to unfounded assumptions and folk traditions. It was much too important for the nation’s survival and, as such, it constituted a state matter.”<sup>114</sup> As Mazhar Osman writes, “Marriage is not a gratification of an individual need, it is a matter of race and state.”<sup>115</sup> As Fahrettin Kerim approves, producing “healthy and numerous children is an important national duty.”<sup>116</sup> As such, channeling sexual desire into marital love became the basis for racial regeneration and national survival. This is how love’s mystical function was recast in a national narrative as a lofty emotion in service of a greater purpose. Love was first devalued as a sexual impulse, as an individual need, to be later extolled as a national ideal.

Major types of sexual perversions, namely fetishism, sadism, masochism, and uranism, are all interpreted within this framework of newly instituted marriage and gender relations. For example, fetishism is construed as loving a woman’s belongings (such as her dress, handkerchief, shoes etc.) or a part of her body (such as her hands, hair, voice etc.).<sup>117</sup> What is condemned as perversion is the inability (of the male lover) to love a woman as a whole rather than partially or incompletely. In a similar manner, sadism is linked with male aggression, specifically the disproportionate use of force against women, which is often read as brutal and atavistic (and not civilized) behavior: “Sadistic love is the growth of a natural feeling. Some lovers want to dominate all the feelings and actions of the women they like. If this ability to bully a loved one is used for good, it will remain at the level of bullying. Without his brain, a man would want to follow a woman and possess her with a fierce feeling like an animal.”<sup>118</sup> Mazhar Osman writes that the lowest level of sadism is moderate beating, and the highest level is murder, and condemns both of them: “The one who beats a woman in his imagination and the one who kills a woman in reality are both [equally] ignoble.”<sup>119</sup> Masochism is portrayed as the opposite of sadism, consisting of “being subject to all the orders and wishes of a woman and being the target of insult in her hands.”<sup>120</sup> For this reason, Gökay collectively characterizes men who like being passive (which also implies being in a penetrated position), “those just enjoy intercourse with men” because “they do not like women” as masochists.<sup>121</sup> This attitude continues in the description of uranism (homosexuality), which is regarded as a perversion caused by an inability to love women. Fahrettin Kerim writes: “What I have mentioned so far [pederasty] is a result of the rather permissive nature of [past] social life and especially the inability to approach women,” and goes on to portray *mahbubperestlik* (homosexuality) as a condition in which “the patient cannot enjoy women and instead dreams of being with someone of his own kind.”<sup>122</sup> İzettin Şadan, Turkey’s first psychoanalyst, also defines the homosexual as “any man who cannot think of a woman as an object of pleasure.”<sup>123</sup> Consequently, the discourse of sexual perversions had very little to do with the sexual act; rather, it provided an avenue to reimagine gender relations in the creation of the discourse of normality which became more and more synonymous with heterosexual coupling.

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<sup>114</sup> Yanıkdağ, *Healing the Nation*, 228.

<sup>115</sup> Mazhar Osman Uzman, “Öjenik,” in *CHP Konferanslar Serisi*, vol.2 (Ankara: Recep Ulusoglu Basımevi, 1939): 7.

<sup>116</sup> Yanıkdağ, *Healing the Nation*, 233.

<sup>117</sup> Osman, *Tababet-i Ruhîye*, 252; Şakir, *Aşk-ı Marazî*, 135; Gökay, *Yorgun Sinirliler*, 67.

<sup>118</sup> Şakir, *Aşk-ı Marazî*, 166. I suspect that this quote reflects Şakir’s own point of view.

<sup>119</sup> Osman, *Tababet-i Ruhîye*, 256.

<sup>120</sup> Şakir, *Aşk-ı Marazî*, 146.

<sup>121</sup> Gökay, *Yorgun Sinirliler*, 50.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>123</sup> Gözde Kılıç, “Turkey’s Pioneering Psychoanalyst: İzettin Şadan’s Disquisition on (Homosexual) Love as Sickness,” *On\_Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture*, no. 9 (September 2020), <http://geb.uni-giessen.de/geb/volltexte/2020/15441/>.



This continued to have resonance in later years, as we witness in a popular sexology book on morbid love and sexual pathology called *Gayr-ı Tabii Aşkılar* (1937). Morbid love is used as an umbrella term to designate people who do not marry, start a family, and thus reach “full and true love”.<sup>124</sup> In this way, morbidity take on a moral meaning and is always connected to marriage and the family hearth for redemption. True love, on the other hand, which is described as pure, sublime, and divine, transforms into the bond between husband and wife as a necessary component of conjugal life.

Consequently, in early psychiatric works on morbid love and sexual pathology, it is possible to witness a shift towards a negative ontology, defined by “defenses, censorships, denials” which Foucault groups under the category of the repressive hypothesis.<sup>125</sup> For him, it is this very negativity that makes it possible to produce the regime of *scientia sexualis*. *The language of truth spoken by this regime is “motivated simultaneously by an emancipatory and a normative ethic—the free and healthy expression of our (hetero)sexual ‘nature’.*”<sup>126</sup> Sexology treats sexuality as an individual psychological problem, making it an aspect of personality, self-concept, even state of being. Therefore, it relates the individual as a unique, embodied being with a right to self-expression. However, this understanding also consolidates the bourgeois nuclear family as a regime of sexuality, hence lie the constraints of normativity. Within the Ottoman/Turkish context, too, the early sexological discourse helped consolidate a new masculine and feminine identity, in which “extreme” behaviors were toned down to what was thought to be moderate/normal behaviors. Descriptions of sexual perversions acted almost like imperatives urging men not to be too dominating or too weak towards the opposite sex; not to act like a woman or an animal; not to masturbate or indulge in homosexual practices. They also reinforced, albeit in a less pronounced way, the construction of women as housewives, mothers, and child-rearers. However, these now-traditional roles assigned to both men and women worked to primarily contribute to a nationalist cause by controlling sexuality outside of reproductive, heterosexual marriage. Therefore, the idea of a (sexual) subject almost melted into the national body. As Fahrettin Kerim puts it, “The individual is the state’s most profitable capital ... but he cannot be left alone ... his freedom is limited by the interests of the general public and society.”<sup>127</sup> The ideal of union and harmony was once again anchored on the prosperity of the community and the future, which was enshrined in the happy couple at home. This was how the tension and contradictions of the first decades of the twentieth century, against the backdrop of a decaying empire, found resolution in the new ideal of conjugal love.

## Conclusion

In her article, Moore seeks to addresses the question of “what epistemological work morbid love was doing in the elaboration of French medical ideas about sexual perversion.”<sup>128</sup> She shows that it mainly worked to create a discourse to group sexual anomalies with mental illness in a way that did not clearly define the boundaries between the normal and the perverse, medical and fictional, or sensibility and cold scientific rigor. In this article, I grapple with a similar question: what was the appeal of *l’amour morbide* and why did it muster interest among the Ottoman/Turkish neuropsychiatrists? What epistemological work did it do as a medical concept? At what cost? I found that it provided the early mind specialists with a linguistic space to group disparate subjects under one category, including criminality, alcoholism, sexual pathology, hysteria, homosexuality, and even rebellious students and

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<sup>124</sup> Münir, *Gayri Tabii Aşkılar*. 23.

<sup>125</sup> Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007): 12.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>127</sup> Fahrettin Kerim, “Eugenique Meselesi ve Irk Sağlamlığı,” 4-6.

<sup>128</sup> Moore, “*L’amour morbide*,” 292.

grumpy wives. As such, it vested them with scientific authority to comment on social ills, lay claim to treat people with these diseases, and even contribute to the state efforts to regulate populations through reproductive ways. This is how the scientific discourse on sexuality was produced in translation. Better knowledge of human sexuality was seen as a matter of individual and collective interest; failure of this knowledge was thought to lead to a sickly and degenerate population.

But this discourse was not without its contradictions. Even though love was reduced to a survival instinct and an individual attribute like sexuality, there was also a primordial mystical meaning attached to love, its evocation from the past, as a unifying and perfecting force, or call for balance and harmony, that continued to exert its subtle influence. This immutable kernel of love has always been related to the male/father beloved and has been associated with an understanding of love that is not dominated by sexual intercourse and the reproductive subtext. The contradiction rose when this sacred understanding of love had to be displaced onto women, who have, as a rule, been associated with the lowly aspect of love: its carnalized form as passion, lust, and sexual desire. So the question was: how can love as a divine attribute be fulfilled in romantic love between man and woman? This led to the redefinition of love, in a way that kept its immutable kernel, but found expression through a channeling to companionate marriage. This contradiction was the hinge on which the early discourse of sexual science and gender ideology took shape. It reflected the loss of an ideal world, of harmony and balance, yet it was constituted as a way to regain it. In other words, the regulation of sexual desire in both men and women was the focus of the effort to create a harmonious society through the restoration of natural love, but the same effort was simultaneously nullified by the duality of sex as the basis for gender difference. *This process of redefinition questioned men's central place in patriarchy, therefore brought more freedom to women, but this freedom remained restricted to family and its extension as nation. In this way, Turkish sexual science functioned as both an essential tool for modernizing Turkey, and a vector for earlier cultural knowledge to persist and to be redirected to the nation, patriotic love, and family.*

