

Humour and Homosociality in *Bin Bir Buse* (1923-24)

Understanding the role
of homosocial ridicule
in marginalising women
and non-hegemonic masculinities

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Bin Bir Buse: En Şen En Şuh Hikayeler (1923-24) was an erotic magazine published weekly in the early years of the newly founded Turkish Republic.¹ Sold for 5 *kuruş*, the magazine had a massive readership among both women and men, shaping the public discourses around sexuality in the country (Schick 2011, 212).² The magazine's popularity and its depiction of free sexual relations between men and women signified a radical break from the previous erotic literature of the Ottoman Empire. Humour was a dominant element in *Bin Bir Buse*, conveyed through satire, hyperbole, and cartoons. This essay explores the homosocial functions of humour in *Bin Bir Buse*, namely laughing at women and non-hegemonic masculinities together.

Although published anonymously, researchers (Schick 2005, 17; Türe 2015, 135) agree that most of the stories were written by Mehmed Rauf, who had been prosecuted for his famous erotic novel *Bir Zambağın Hikayesi* (The Story of a Lily) a decade prior (Schick 2005, 17; Türe 2015, 135). *Bin Bir Buse* told stories of Istanbul's elite class, depicting their modernising sexual relationships. Though the magazine

has been referred to as “erotica” in the literature (Schick 2011), *Bin Bir Buse* should not be viewed as flat or uniquely erotic. Humorous style often appeared along with the more obvious, the erotic. In fact, of the 65 stories published in the sixteen issues of the magazine, over 50 of them contained humour, satire, hyperbole, or irony. Humour was also conveyed through the cartoons and visuals in the magazine. Despite the increase of literature on *Bin Bir Buse*, the humorous style of the magazine has not received much attention. While Türe’s research (2013, 177) acknowledges the prominence of humour in *Bin Bir Buse*, it provides an incomplete and inaccurate understanding of its function, presenting it as a way for the author to mock the modern woman or male-female relationships (ibid., 136). I argue that this analysis overlooks the multi-layered male homosocial function of humour in *Bin Bir Buse*. Homosociality refers to the social relations between persons of the same sex (Flood 2008, 340) and, in this case, male-male social bonds. In attempts to address this gap in the literature, I provide an understanding of the homosocial functions of humour in *Bin Bir Buse* through a thematic analysis of the complete sixteen issues of the magazine.

Bin Bir Buse told stories of cheating, virginity, sexual dissatisfaction, male sexual health, female sexuality, and pleasure. In most of the stories, the author addressed the readers as if he was talking to his male friends.³ This is a technique commonly referred to as authorial intrusion, which is a literary device that allows the author to interrupt the narrative (Baldick 2008) and break the fourth wall, an imaginary barrier between the fictional world and audience in the non-fictional world. I suggest that authorial intrusion allows the author to create a sense of intimacy between the readers and themselves. In *Bin Bir Buse* this sense of intimacy was one that excluded women and formed a homosocial relationship between the author and the reader – signifying a sort of “boys club.” I identified two functions of homosociality in *Bin Bir Buse*. First, it allowed men to bond over heterosexual desire, while marginalising and laughing at women. Second, it functioned to encourage men to laugh together at other

men and non-hegemonic masculinities.⁴ Even though the magazine was likely consumed by both men and women, the intended reader was the male audience. For example, in the story *Ahretliĝe Mücazat* (Punishing the Orphan), the author writes, “The hodja got rid of the cane, approached the girl, and did what any of you would do if you were in his place.”⁵ Here, “you” clearly refers to the heterosexual male reader.

Male homosocial bonds were strengthened with the use of humour. Humour in these relationships, or homosocial ridicule, often consolidates privilege by taking forms of misogyny or homophobia (Flood 2008, 340). R.W. Connell (2000) and Michael Kimmel (1994) argue that homosocial norms are closely associated with heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinities, and the subordination of women. In homosocial relationships, humour can be a powerful tool for asserting or claiming superiority over underprivileged groups (Hickey Moody and Laurie 2017, 217; Bird 1996, 121). I believe that the prominence of homosocial ridicule in *Bin Bir Buse* supports these findings.

The first function of homosocial ridicule in *Bin Bir Buse*, as discussed previously, is to allow men to bond over heterosexual desire while marginalising women. The cartoon from *Bin Bir Buse* in Figure 1 depicts a woman in a jupon and garter with one of her breasts out. The caption suggests that she is thinking, “I wonder if I would get cold if I went outside like this.” The image portrays a sexually desirable yet foolish woman. The answer is obvious to the reader, and this has a humorous dimension. I suggest that this allows the reader to feel superior in intelligence to the woman asking this question. The author and the intended male reader share this joke, laughing together at her. She becomes the subject matter of the joke and a site for homosocial bonding.⁶

Laughing at the humiliation of gullible women is a recurring theme for homosocial ridicule in *Bin Bir Buse*. Most of the stories or cartoons in *Bin Bir Buse* position the female character as the butt-of-the-joke,

provoking laughter at her vulnerability, humiliation, and gullibility. The cartoon in Figure 2, showing a woman who has fallen on the sidewalk with her underwear revealed, follows a similar line of humour. The caption is a word play of the homonymous word *kaymak*, which can mean slipping *or* cream. Through this double entendre, her fall is both laughed at and sexualised. A common signifier of gullibility and innocence in *Bin Bir Buse* was not having engaged in sexual activity. In several stories, such as *Müjganın Kedisi* (Müjgan's Cat) and *Ferhunde'nin Dudakları* (Ferhunde's Lips), young women who have never engaged in sexual activity are made the subject of the jokes. Considering the theoretical discussion on homosociality, I argue that these jokes in *Bin Bir Buse*, in which women's (sexual) vulnerability, humiliation, or gullibility are at the centre, helped maintain male superiority within society and the concomitant problematic association of women with lower intelligence. Although written a century ago, it is interesting that the homosocial ridicule

Figure 1



Figure 2



in *Bin Bir Buse* is similar to the obscene and misogynistic laughter shared between men in locker rooms or bars today (see Flood 2008; Kehily and Nayak 1997; Nursanti 2022).

Heterosexual men prioritise homosociality over their relationships with women (Flood 2008, 344). The cartoon from *Bin Bir Buse* in Figure 3 exemplifies this. The cartoon depicts four men spending time together at a setting that resembles a coffeehouse. The caption reads, “(Reading the letter) My dear, I will now end this letter. You are the only one who knows the secrets of my heart...” He disrespects her wish for confidentiality, sharing her letter with his mates. This shows that the homosocial bonding takes primacy for him. Furthermore, I suggest that reading this letter helps him boast about his sexual achievements and compete with other men, which is a way for men to seek the approval of their peers in homosocial settings and improve their position in masculine social hierarchies (Flood 2008, 341).

Figure 3



Homosocial bonding does not always require the expression of heterosexual desire. In some instances, the joke is heterosexual desire itself – of course, still to the detriment of women. Examples of how homosociality between men is facilitated through mocking heterosexual desire can also be found in *Bin Bir Buse*. In *Bir Kadının İki Tesiri* (One Woman, Two Effects), a man visits a psychiatric hospital and upon seeing a man, he asks the doctor what has happened to him. The doctor replies, “He liked a young woman, but her parents did not approve of their marriage, so he lost his mind from the pain and the grief.” The visitor sees another man, and again asks the doctor why he was admitted to the hospital. The doctor says, “This is the husband of that young woman the other guy could not marry!” This joke allows married heterosexual men to bond over the hatred for their wives. A similar line of joke can be found in the story *Cennete Kabul* (Getting into Heaven), where a man who has been married is declared worthy of getting into heaven by the gatekeeper, implying that he has suffered enough on earth. Later in the story, a man who has been married three times is declared crazy by the gatekeeper. These stories show that the homosocial bonding that subordinates women does not always do so through the sexualisation or objectification of women, but sometimes through their vilification. While obscene humour targeted at the female body is a more predictable way to reaffirm heterosexual masculinity and to bond with other men, mocking heterosexual relationships with women presents an ironic and unexpected base for heterosexual men to maintain social relations with each other. Men who are married are often mocked for being “under the thumb” of their wives (Flood 2008, 344), which is closely linked to the second function of homosociality in *Bin Bir Buse*: laughing at non-hegemonic masculinities.

In *Bin Bir Buse*, men are often mocked for being emasculated by their girlfriends, wives, or their sexual performance – or lack thereof. *Namuskaranane Hıyanet* (Honourable Betrayal) tells the story of Receb Efendi, whose neighbours make fun of him for being powerless against his wife who cheated on him numerous times. Similarly,

in *Büyülü Haplar* (Magic Pills), Cemil is ridiculed for being an emasculated man, and “a slave” for his wife. As for the latter, there are four stories that mock men for the length of their genitalia, while nine stories have jokes targeted at male sexual health problems, such as premature ejaculation, or inadequate sexual performance. The stories that centre around male sexual performance often point to the woman as the cause of the problem. For example, in *Her Nev’i Tamirat* (All Sorts of Repair), Nezihe’s controlling behaviour is revealed to be the reason behind her husband’s lack of sexual performance. In the stories where the subject of the joke is non-hegemonic masculinities, the presence of the author is not as obvious as the stories where the jokes are targeted at women. I argue that this was the author’s attempt to deliver the joke through the female character. For example, in *Temaşa-yı Hüsn* (Watching the Beauty), Hüseyin Hasib and his genitalia are the subjects of the joke. It is not the author who delivers the punchline, but Semra Dilber, saying “How short, how short, I was not picturing it like this, my poor friend. ... My child, why would you bother me for something so small!” This way, the author is able to shift the blame on the “malicious” woman.

Inquiring into a largely neglected aspect of *Bin Bir Buse*, its humour, I provided insight into the homosocial humour fostered by the relationship between the male author and the male reader. Extremely popular and hyper-publicised, it is indubitable that *Bin Bir Buse* diffused a sense of humour, maintained existing gender roles, and invoked laughter amongst its mostly male target readership. Of course, this essay only scratches the surface of the nexus of humour, eroticism, and homosocial bonding. Further analysis is needed to broaden our understanding of this phenomenon in erotic imagination, by extending it to other erotic magazines of the period or its manifestations in modern-day pornography. Can homosocial bonding be observed in other erotic magazines in the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkey? If so, is humour at the centre? Do current expressions of eroticism still maintain hegemonic masculinities? Who is ridiculed in modern-day pornography?

Notes

- ¹ Thousand and One Kisses: The Most Joyful and Lively Stories. Translation is my own; the magazine has been transliterated from Ottoman script by Türkoğlu (2005) and published as a book. A copy of this transliteration has been provided to me by Irvin Cemil Schick, whose valuable insights are presented in the foreword of the book. I have used this transliteration for my research.
- ² For reference, 1 US Dollar bought 1 *lira* 66 *kuruş* in Turkey in 1923.
- ³ In the foreword of *Bin Bir Buse: 1923-1924 İstanbulu'ndan Erotik Bir Dergi*, the transliteration of the complete sixteen issues into modern Turkish, Irvin Cemil Schick reports that the author has described his goal as awakening “excitement” in the reader and leaving them “trembling and convulsing.” According to Schick, this established an intimate setting. In my research, I build on this line of argument.
- ⁴ In this essay, I am drawing from Raewyn Connell's conceptualisation of hegemonie masculinities, which can be broadly summarised as the way in which society is organised to justify male subordination of women and feminine identities. For a more in-depth definition, see: Raewyn Connell, 2000, *The Men and the Boys*.
- ⁵ All translations of titles and quotes from *Bin Bir Buse* to English are my own.
- ⁶ For a more in-depth feminist analysis of contemporary misogynist humour, see Bergmann (1986), “How Many Feminists Does It Take to Make a Joke? Sexist Humor and What’s Wrong with It.” *Hypatia* 1 (1): 63–82.

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