

An Analysis of Erinc Seymen's "A Portrait of a Pasha" and His Other Anti- Militarist Artworks

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Abstract

First artwork to be analyzed is called Portrait of A Pasha by Erinc Seymen consisting of 1000 bullet holes on a wood panel. Pasha stands for famous Turkish drag singer Zeki Müren. The artwork mainly symbolizes Zeki Müren's contrasting potential of glorification or extermination due to his queer identity in male and heterosexual dominated Turkish society. Body of the drag singer Zeki Müren "disapproved, attacked, in danger of destruction" is controlled with sexual violence by being "penetrated" with bulletp. Homophobic intervention from verbal to action by the society increases the fragility of queer identity. Within this context, embarking from Seymen's "Portrait of a Pasha", the connection between militarism, male dominated fascist image and homosexuality can be questioned. Secondly, Erinc Seymen's other anti- militarist artworks will be analyzed. It will be stated that object of desire in the totalitarian regime is under the cover of heroism, masculinity, machines and being suppressed.

Keywords: masculinity, queer identity, drag singer, militarism,

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Figure 1: Portrait of a Pasha/ Erinç Seymen, 2009 1000 bulletholes on wood panel. 220 x 170 cm (Gallery Rampa İstanbul)



First and the main artwork to be analysed is Erinç Seymen's artwork called "Portrait of A Pasha" (2009) consisting of 1000 bullet holes on a wood panel. Erinç Seymen's artwork's starting point was a urban legend about 1980 Turkish military coup general Kenan Evren's encounter with famous Turkish drag singer Zeki Müren. During this encounter, Kenan Evren asks Zeki Müren why Turkish public calls him "Pasha" and he humorously replies: "They can't call you and your brothers in arms "queer" so called me "Pasha"! (Çakırlar, 2013) Instead of this urban legend, the real story goes like this: during Zeki Müren's concert in Bodrum Castle (1984) after the applause continued for a long time, a fan among the audience shouts out " You are the best! Our Pasha"! And the singer replies: " Don't mention it! It's our Lord first, than you all. There is nothing more important than you, my people." According to singer's friend, journalist Nalan Seçkin (1998), at this moment in history, the singer stood up against the political pressure along his public. "She adds: " I don't know how they managed to do so but the Turkish State Television broadcasting this concert alive censored this conversation at once!" About calling Müren Pasha, Cüneyt Cakırlar (2013) points out " We can see this as a way to cover up his homosexual nature, to normalize him by praising him with a military tittle due to his professional success and virtue. Seymen uses this portrait to revive the double faceness of Turkish Republic's nation- building project, revealing the hetenormative discourse and the socio- political relation between the state and the queer citizen by constructing this relation through the nation's most popular queer figure. Zeki Müren has a contrasting potential of glorification or extermination due to his queer identity in male and heterosexual dominated Turkish society.

His position where in between the ideal citizenship and his queerness finds an expression in the portrait of the singer drawn and shaped by the bulletp. In a militarist or militarism friendly Turkish society, where did Müren's identity stand for? Within this context, embarking from Seymen's "Portrait of a Pasha", the connection between militarism, male dominated fascist image and homosexuality can be questioned. International emergence of the Queer image made an impact in an illustrated magazine called "Tom of Finland" during 1960'p. The real name of the illustrator was Toukou. He was born in 1920 in Finland. His name means May in Finnish. He was grown up among men who had a tough life working in the woods and fieldp. The illustrator became famous after sending masculine male body drawings to Physique Pictorial. He died in 1991. Illustrator Toukou was known for his realistic drawing series of masculine police, soldier, truck driver, cowboy and motorcycle rider with leather jacketp. These drawings, exaggerated illustrations of muscled male bodies recall the perfectly aesthetic Greek sculptures but these bodies are turned into kitsch objects of desire. The homoeroticism of muscled men in uniforms holding other overly muscular naked male bodies (Şekil 5.1.1.2) overlap with Zeki Müren's image served by the media while he was held in arms of a handsome muscular man showing off his body. Şekil 5.1.1.3) According to Irigaray " Women socially perceived in a low status is solidified with its inaccessibility to masculine representation systemp. Feminine is identified by masculine or "for masculine" (as cited in O'Rourke & Giffney, 2009) While masculine being physically strong and dominant, it emphasizes it's so called superiority. An exaggerated and flamboyant masculine imagery is served to the homosexual viewer in Tom of Finland pictorial magazine. This visuality corresponds to John Berger (1972)'s definition of male gaze. "Men watch women. Women watch themselves being looked at." Within this context, in a contradictory way, it can be claimed that exaggerated male visuality of homoerotic images is a feminine visuality.

Eroticism and glorification of the male body as in Tom of Finland, actually occurs in spaces where men are alone together under heterosexual, masculine and macho guise as soldiers, police and truck driverp. These places as stated in the "Body1 History" are monasteries, prisons and among seamen and pirates during 17th century. Practices of homosexuality within these spaces were seen contrary to nature; human flesh who couldn't stand being without a woman was to blame. The connection between homosexuality, fascism and modernism has been questioned by many theorists and historian."Hewitt, referencing the suggestion of Adorno "Totalitarianism and homosexuality belongs together", self fashioning, self reflecting magnifies authoritarian personality. Being anonymous in totalitarian and militarist system overlaps with the desire towards " being the same".

In Lacan's mirror stage, the baby watching her/himself admiringly, Narcisus falling in love with his own reflection is identified with loving the same sex in homosexuality. (as cited in Corbin, 2008) At this point, it should be reminded that Foucault created a connection between normality and dependence to authority. "Decomposed positions shaped with injustice of value and power distribute expedience to the privileged.

This expedience is only possible with: dependence. (as cited in Cogito, 2011). Military, one of the dominating groups that operates as representation and signification systems has become one of the corner stones of heteronormativity. After given the theoretical background above, it can be claimed that the artist Erinç Seymen, criticizes male privilage in Turkish society by using queer viewpoint in the "Portrait of the Pasha" in this anti-militarist artwork. "Surface, body, violence and penetration representations in the Portait of the Pasha positions a masochist pleasure economy with a visual narrative to turn militarist masculinity upside down. According to Seymen, he says that he questions normalisation of every sort of violence: every sort of hate speech, militarism, transfobia, racist nationalism, class eliticism etc..." (as cited in Yardımcı, 2013). Cüneyt Çakırlar (2013) draws attention to the delicate position of Zeki Müren in the Turkish hetenormative society with the description of a "Penetrated, rotten body" with the masculine view point. Body of the drag singer Zeki Müren "disapproved, attacked, in danger of destruction" is controlled with sexual violence by being "penetrated" with bulletp. Homophobic intervention from verbal to action by the society increases the fragility of queer identity. For example, in the 16 07 1955 dated news with the headline "Zeki Müren was beaten" by Milliyet Newspaper (Figure 1) it was claimed that the singer was attacked because he didn't sing the requested song. This reflects the fact that the singer appears as vulnerable as a women singer. At the same time, likewise in Judith Butler's queer melancholy term, Zeki Müren looks like the queer loser in the heterosexual society with this defencelesnesp.

However, in the Portarit of a Pasha, inspite of its fragibility, Zeki Müren's image smiles charmingly and has eye contact with the viewer. In response to the metaphor of dimilishing, Zeki Müren's existence come into life in contrast and inspite bulletholep. Smiling image of Zeki Müren is being fetishized as an object of desire and his drag image is brought into existence by the masculine militarist violence. Within this context, it overlaps with the fact that Zeki Müren was in peace with militarism and nationalism inspite of his queer identity, and his popular image created by the heteronormative system itself.

Figure 2: Erinç Seymen, Us ,2005, Acrylic on Canvas



Afterwards , it's necessary to talk about Erinç Seymen's other anti- militarist artworkp. In Erinç Seymen's artwork (Figure 2) we can again observe a robotic masculine expression on the soldiers' face. The Crowd of soldiers symbolise victimisation , seen as a bulk of meat digested by the monster, totalitarian system. Object of desire in the totalitarian regime is under the cover of heroism, masculinity, machoness and being suppressed. For Lucas (2011), men in military suit is a switch point in between desire and death. (as cited in Halberstam, 2011) Faceless, war machines, high rank soldiers, symbols of authority pressure on the public are illustrated as a metaphor of Giant Gulliver and the public as lilliputs remind us of 1984 disutopia. (figure2) Illustrated as faceless masses, the public consists of one type of male figure. It can be suggested that there is a link between the hierarchy, superioty- subordinate relationship within militaristic system and the superioty- subordinate relationship culture in Ancient Greek homosexuality. The homosexuality culture patten in ancient Greek was that the older and economically superior men took the active role while the younger and economically weaker one played the passive role. This formal hierarchy rule stated by the Ancient Greek system reminds us of the strict hierachy system in military; the power relation between who holds down and the one bows down.

Figure 3: Erinç Seymen ,Babişko, 2011, Ink onPaper ,100 x 70 cm



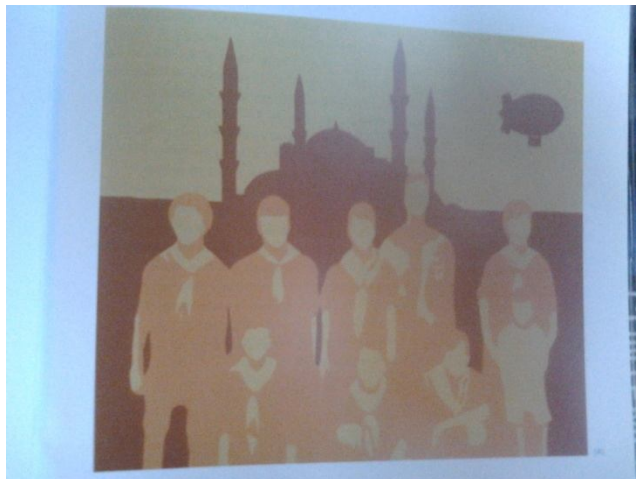
Seymen's other work called "Daddy, Popi" (Babişko) emphasizes another power figure. (Figure 3) It visually describes father authority which he identifies with state authority in this case, a militarist authority figure. By associating family father and state fatherhood, the artist reminds us of father's role of taking son/daughter under his wings; father, the reason of their existence, even how destructive he could be to them is ironically criticized with a soft term "popi". In the patriarchal system, men who is released from fathers authority is sent under the authority of male soldiers in the army quarterp. The male switch's from the authority of the father to the military to bow down and serve as his important manhood responsibilities. After this important step to become an "individual" he then gains the right to marry and be a father to become an authority himself. Specially in Turkey, if the value given to the military institution is considered, serving military is perceived as an honour and manhood responsibility, people who didn't serve the army is seen as a half man who didn't fullfill the expectations of manhood. Apparently, as an anthropological aspect, circumsion is perceived as a first step to manhood and serving military as the second step to reach the third and the mandatory step; marriage as an intuition. In Turkish anthropological rituals, farewell ceremony for men joining mandatory military mission, parents attending military oath ceremony, ceremony of welcoming soldiers coming home are inevitable customs that praise masculinity.

Figure 4: Erinç Seymen, Untitled, 2011.



Manhood and being anonymous find expression where two soldiers with anonymous faces appear in different uniforms (Figure 4). Figures look like they are drawn with stencil or reproduced with photocopy. In which case, the artist also technically emphasizes the prototype. Anonymity of manhood is being repeated in Figure 5.

Görsel 5: Erinç Seymen, Untitled, 2011.



With no facial details, soldiers' faces are pictured from the same template. They look like their memory photo has been taken. At the background of the picture, we see a mosque symbolizing religion which is another pressure institutor of the state.

A war plane is seen flying in the sky that metaphors militarism and nationalistic aspect. Related contextually to the two artworks above by depicting memory photos, in another artwork of Erinç Seymen (Figure 6), he ironically illustrates again about soldier memory photos where he uses kitsch materials to reflect the kitchens of these photos. He embroidered the work with flakes and reinforced the irony. Besides being kitsch, it reminds us of Miriam Shapiro's female as a feminist art under the effort to categorize embroidery and sewing to oppose "high art". The artist inexplicitly refers to the happiness of couples holding each other under an homoerotic effect. Reminding a cliché and kitsch romantic moment, where a couple is looking at a nature scene in this case goose. Finally, these artworks all have common political backgrounds of criticizing militarism. The first work analysed "Portrait of Pasha" has a different technical approach. The portrait of the Turkish queer singer Zeki Müren is installation art made with bullet holes while other artworks analysed is graphic, illustrative and stencil like painting. But, Portrait of a Pasha looks also quite graphic inside its technique. In the name of criticizing heteronormative pressure points of the society, the artist uses graphic and prototype symbols of a totalitarian political system. Therefore he succeeds in emphasizing prototypization. Although, it can't be claimed that the artist aimed to use precisely queer aesthetics, these artworks all aim to criticize masculine power in relation to symbolise queer viewpoint. We can only consider that the kitsch material and the choice of kitsch associates these artworks to kitsch therefore to queer aesthetic.

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