CINEJ CINEMA JOURNAL
ISSN 2159-2411 (PRINT) ISSN 2158-8724 (ONLINE)

Oral History Study on Erotic Cinema: Turkish Cinema from 1974 to 1980

Bahadır Kapır, Marmara University, bahadirkapir@gmail.com
Ferhat Zengin, Istanbul Gelisim University, ferhatbzengin@gmail.com

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

Abstract[1]

This study examines the "erotic film influx" period in Turkish cinema between 1974 and 1980. The research was conducted using information obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with individuals who worked as projectionists during the erotic era, using a qualitative research design, such as oral history. The new developments that emerged during the influx were explored through the observations of the film projectionists, testimonies, memories, and experiences. Therefore, the study excluded the production practices of erotic films and focused on the distribution and exhibition of these films. The study found that the erotic film influx in Türkiye quickly created a new audience and cultural atmosphere which resulted in the emergence of a new, male-dominated audience, isolated from their families.

Keywords: Turkish cinema; erotic cinema; cinema projectionists; oral history; sex film influx

Oral History Study on Erotic Cinema: Turkish Cinema from 1974 to 1980

Bahadır Kapır

Ferhat Zengin

Introduction

A historical continuity is observed in the artistic and visual representation of the phenomenon of sexuality (Barss, 2011, pp. 7-8). Erotic elements, which have been present in various art forms since ancient times, reached a revolutionary turning point with the invention of photographic technology in the 19th century. The camera laid the foundations for modern eroticism and pornography by enabling the easy production and access to a wide audience of sexually explicit images (Soydan, 2009, pp. 35-40). According to Joseph Slade (2006, p. 28), the first photograph depicting sexual content was taken in 1846, although the exact dates are debatable because such photographs were taken secretly and kept in private collections during this period (Rosen, 2023, p. 246). Sexuality has also been present in the moving image technology that forms the basis of cinema art from an early period. The Kiss (William Heise, 1896), shot in Thomas Edison's studios, attracted criticism and was subjected to censorship at the time because it was the first film in which two actors kissed (Library Of Congress, 2023).

Therefore, it can be said that sexuality has been an object of desire almost since cinema's infancy (Slade, 2006, p. 28; Church and Schaefer, 2018, pp. 141-146).

From 1907 onwards, films with erotic content began to be produced in Europe and America, and the lack of legal regulations facilitated the spread of these films[2] (Perrottet, 2007; Thompson, 2007, p. 38). By the 1960s, the adult film industry experienced a major boom, with films spreading globally, ushering in a kind of sex influx in cinema. This was due to the publication of sexually explicit magazines like Playboy (1953) prior to this period, which increased the social acceptability of previously prohibited sexually explicit images (Altman, 2001, pp. 118-119). In addition, the sexual revolution, which reached its peak in the 1970s in America, led to the breaking down of many existing taboos about sexuality. The rise of the "counterculture consisting of anti-war, anti-racist, anti-capitalist and ultimately anti-patriarchal activities" (Williams, 2008, p. 8) under the influence of the revolution caused significant transformations in the social sphere. In light of these developments, "in the early 1960s, sex films began to emerge as a distinct genre within the history of cinema, developing a distinctive aesthetic and dramaturgy" (Roloff, Seeßlen, & Weil, 1996, p. 295).

The 1960s were a period when censorship practices were eased under the influence of the sexual liberation movement (Korukçu, 2009, p. 118). The process, which began with

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

Denmark's legalization of adult films in 1968, made the 1970s the "Golden Age" of this genre (Wosick, 2015, p. 416). With productions such as Deep Throat (1972) and Behind the Green Door (1972), pornographic films emerged from the underground and became an important part of the commercial film industry (Paasonen & Saarenmaa, 2007, p. 23; Kutlar, 2010, p. 128). During the same period, when the widespread use of television reduced the number of cinema audiences, film producers in countries such as Italy and England, who suffered financial losses, turned to sex films as an economic solution (Asman, 2023, p. 360).

In parallel with the fact that eroticism became the main element of films in world cinemas in the 1960s and 1970s, similar trends were also seen in Turkish cinema in the same years. Especially in the 1970s, erotic film screenings spread like an epidemic in Turkish cinema, the phenomenon of eroticism, which constituted the main element of the films shot, was largely replaced by pornography, and the screening of these films in movie theaters, which we can call a public space, became widespread (Akdemir, 2018, p. 87). *The sex film influx*[3], which began in the second half of the 1970s, radically transformed the production, distribution, and exhibition practices of Yeşilçam, which was experiencing its Golden Age (Abisel, 2005, p. 75). However, this development, which occurred in a certain period of Turkish cinema, was ignored by both the filmmakers of the period and the writers of cinema history, in the words of

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

Scognamillo and Demirhan (2002), “with a feeling of mixture of shyness and disdain”; The sex film influx of the 1970s was merely mentioned and dismissed. So much so that Alim Şerif Onaran (1994, p. 179) stated that he did not include these films in his work, saying, “We left out of the scope of this book the violent and sexual films made just to hunt the lumpen gang.” However, academic research on the period has largely been limited to general descriptions of producers, directors, and actors. The neglect of the experiences of cinema projectionists, who were crucial actors in the distribution and exhibition processes, constitutes a significant shortcoming. Based on this deficiency, the study aims to examine the erotic film influx period through the perspective of cinema projectionists.

Methodology

Cinema projectionists are not only the only individuals who have firsthand experienced the changes in film, space, and viewing culture, but also played key roles in the projection and management of erotic films in particular. Therefore, gaining information about the period by using the experiences, memories and memoirs of film projectionists will illuminate the missing or hidden aspects of the erotic period and will also enrich the historiography of Turkish cinema. For this main purpose, the data of the research were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with people who worked as cinema projectionists in Türkiye in the 1970s, within the framework of the oral history method, one of the qualitative research designs.

Oral history, which draws on individuals' life stories and experiences, provides new perspectives on official history. According to Thompson (1999, p. 18), who states that oral history expands its scope by incorporating life into history, it is "a tool for radically changing the social meaning of history." This approach, based on the premise that every person's life story is a part of history (Metin, 2002, p. 32), is a third source in historical research, as important as written sources and material culture (Öztürkmen, 2025, p. 307). The ability to make use of the experiences of ordinary people, especially in areas where society is inadequate to leave written documents, allows oral history interviews to be accepted as primary sources (Caunce, 2001, p. 8). The oral historian's fundamental advantage is the ability to identify intersections between narratives by interviewing numerous individuals around a single topic (Öztürkmen, 2025, p. 308). Therefore, oral history methodology has the capacity to overcome the methodological limitations of historiography based on conventional archival documents and construct alternative historical narratives through collective memory mechanisms. In this context, Halbwachs's (1992) theory of collective memory provides an important framework for explaining the memory-driven nature of oral history.

In Halbwachs' theoretical approach, human memory gains meaning in a collective context, and memories support each other to form a coherent system (1992, p. 38). Collective

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

memory “draws strength from a cohesive community of people,” and the memories evoked by those belonging to the same group represent the collective memory (1992, pp. 22, 42). This perspective provides an important framework for understanding the shared experiences of projectionists working during the erotic film era of the 1970s and the collective memory of the cinematic transformations that occurred during this period.

The oral history approach also carries the potential to make visible experiential forms of knowledge that remain outside hegemonic historical discourses. This methodological approach functions as an analytical tool that enables alternative forms of knowledge production against the one-dimensional structure of official historical narratives. In this context, the research examines the “erotic film influx” period in Turkish cinema between 1974 and 1980 through the observations, testimonies and experiences of people who worked as cinema projectionists in those years. Using a snowball sampling method, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 veteran projectionists who worked in movie theaters across Türkiye and are still alive. The findings were evaluated using descriptive analysis and presented under thematic headings.

The Cyclical Situation and Developments in Türkiye Before the Sex Influx

Turkish cinema experienced its Golden Age from the 1960s to the mid-70s, but the political, economic and social crises in the 1970s negatively affected the industry (Lüleci, 2020, p. 502). The period of political instability that began with the March 12, 1971 Memorandum

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

also marked a turning point for the film industry (Esen, 2010, p. 130). Furthermore, the negative repercussions of the Cold War, the 1973 oil crisis, the 1974 Cyprus landing, and subsequent embargoes left Turkish society facing a heavy economic price. Increased street events due to political instability also caused great social unrest. Television, which became widespread in this cyclical environment, became the new entertainment tool for the Turkish people experiencing economic hardship and for the Yeşilçam audience who abandoned cinema due to unsafe streets. Providing a much cheaper and safer entertainment environment, television quickly became a staple in most Turkish homes and, in Sevin Okyay's (1996, p. 227) words, transformed Yeşilçam audiences into "television audiences." The number of televisions, which was 100,000 in 1971, exceeded 3 million in 1980, while cinema audiences dropped from 247 million in 1970 to 77 million in 1979 (Atalar, 2016, p. 59; Erkılıç, 2003, p. 134). As emphasized by the producers of the period, Murat Köseoğlu and Hürrem Erman, local films no longer did well in places where television was widespread (Boz, 1974, p. 63).

The conditions of the period, and especially the declining audience numbers from the mid-1970s onward, also collapsed the Regional Management[4] system, the cornerstone of Turkish cinema's production structure, and financial difficulties (cash shortages; payment problems with advances, bonds, and checks) began to emerge in Turkish cinema. Yeşilçam

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

producers, struggling with budgetary constraints, sought a new way out. Şükran Esen (2010, p. 135), who states that the emptying of movie theaters resulted in the crisis of commercial cinema, emphasizes that producers changed their target audience as a way out and said that they turned to "men who were dragged to cities by migration and were far from their homes and wives." According to him, producers of the period discovered that they could exploit the sexual appetite of these audiences by adding sexual elements and nudity to their comedies.

This target audience determination has led to the further strengthening of "the male perspective that makes the representation of women problematic" as stated by Mert (2022, p. 14). According to Mulvey (2008, p. 219), citing Budd Boetticher, "the woman who falls in love with the male hero and becomes his property has begun to become an isolated, ostentatious and exposed figure through films." As Depeli (2016, p. 134) emphasizes, "the ideal femininity constructed within the melodramatic template advised female audiences to be devoted to men, to adapt to his gaze both physically and socially, to obey, and not to seek rights." In this process, "men have always been placed in a dominant position of choosing and judging."

This "sexual hunger" strategy discovered by the producers brought about a radical transformation in the film industry. This new approach, which had no foresight into the future and was aimed solely at saving the cinema business of the day, resulted in the families that

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

formed the backbone of Yeşilçam cinema being completely disconnected from cinema, and the cinemas were handed over entirely to the "man in the street" (1996, p. 286) as Oran put it, or to a "complex and partly lumpen" audience as Scognamillo stated (2003, p. 370). The producers of the period, targeting the previously mentioned audience, started the sex influx by producing hundreds of low-quality erotic comedy films, mostly 16 mm[5], with the names of "Beş Atış Yirmibeş, Hasan Almaz Basan Alır, Civciv Çıkacak Kuş Çıkacak, Öttür Kuşu Ömer, Tornavida, Em onu, Dam Budalası, Kartal Pendik Gittik Geldik, Vur Davula Tokmağı, Fırçana Bayıldım Boyacı, Beş Dakikada Beşiktaş" (Yakın, 2002, p. 208). Furthermore, these films, with their titles appealing to the sexual fantasies of a male audience, clearly reflect the masculine perspective of the period. The female body and sexuality began to be marketed as objects of male desire. However, as emphasized by cinema critic Burçak Evren (2014, p. 294), this new trend later led to Turkish cinema entering the "Lost or Dark Years".

The Erotic Period of Turkish Cinema

The erotic film influx of the 1970s is not a new phenomenon in Turkish visual culture. Schick's (2021) study demonstrates the uninterrupted continuity of the erotic visual tradition, beginning with the Ottoman period. According to him, Ottoman visual culture produced a significant amount of sexual content, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. This tradition began with abstract examples in the 17th century, and by the end of the 18th century, "the

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

subjects of erotic miniatures became more individual" to bear "distinct personalities." The transformation accelerated with the spread of printing in the 19th century, leading to "a significant increase in the number of obscene examples in popular literature". Schick argues that amateur erotic content produced during the final years of the Empire and the early Republican era constituted a critical transition point. Çolak's (2024) study of erotic humor magazines from the 1930s also supports this historical continuity. Beginning with the Ottoman period, erotic visual culture has been seamlessly transmitted to modern Türkiye. Erotic humor magazines such as *Piliç, Bıldırcın, Çapkın Kız*, and *Güvercin*, published in Istanbul in the 1930s, are concrete examples of this tradition. These magazines "contributed to the formation of modern visual consumption culture" and "created an atmosphere in which erotic films were shown in the increasingly widespread movie theaters" of the period (Çolak, 2024, p. 426). Nezih Erdoğan's work "The First Years of Cinema in Istanbul" provides important information about the early presence of erotic-pornographic films in Istanbul. The existence of such content in film screenings in Istanbul in the early 1910s is supported by the example of a child "coming back home crying because he was not allowed in because obscene things were being shown inside" in Hüseyin Rahmi's short story "Forbidden to Children". The first suggestive (obscene) films shown in Istanbul were offered in special sessions for men only, with tickets delivered to men only in secret envelopes, and these screenings were often advertised in foreign

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

newspapers of the time under names such as “Blue Soirees” or “Black Nights.” In the program announcements, the phrase “A novelty for Constantinople. Obscene Cinematograph (cinématographe suggestif)” attracts attention (p. 128). This tradition developed over time and became concrete as “Yeşilçam producers focused on Italian cinema long before the cinema crisis and followed the strategy of gradually adding eroticism to popular genres by adapting Italian B-type genre films” (Yaren, 2017, p. 1367). Indeed, it can be said that erotic connotations based on the female body have been implicitly present in films since the early period of Turkish cinema. In his memoirs, titled “My Memoirs of the Committee of Union and Progress”, Kâzım Nâmi Duru describes how, after the normal sessions, “pictures of naked women taking a shower” were shown to private individuals during the cinematograph screenings held at the White Tower on the Thessaloniki docks in 1903 (Duru, 1957, p. 20).

The first film to address sexuality in Turkish cinema was Sedat Simavi’s 1917 film, *Pençe*. This film was also the first thematic film shot in our cinema. According to Özgüç, the film was criticized as obscene at the time for its daring scenes (Özgüç, 1990, p. 17). Ahmet Fehim’s 1919 film *Mürebbiye*[6], one of the first feature-length films in Turkish cinema, is, as Demirci (2004, pp. 18-20) describes it, the first Turkish film in which the theme of sexuality completely dominates the script. This film is based on sexuality, gender, and love (Öztürk,

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

2000, p. 53). Madam Kalitea, who starred in this film, which featured the first kissing scene in Turkish cinema, is considered the first female vamp in Turkish cinema (Özgüç, 1988, p. 13). The first erotic actress in Turkish cinema was Cahide Sonku. Sonku's 1940 film "Şevket Kurbanı" (The Victim of Şevket) established the sexually explicit female character in Turkish cinema (Özgüç, 1988, p. 25). Thus, the 1950s marked the beginning of a covert sexuality in Turkish cinema, while the 1960s saw the rise of "female vamp" actors. The 1970s, on the other hand, saw the implicit eroticism in Turkish cinema give way to pornography (Demirci, 2004, pp. 20-23).

It can be said that the first harbinger of the sex influx in Yeşilçam was the adventure-erotic film *Parçala Behçet* (1972), directed by Melih Gülgen and starring Behçet Nacar. However, it has been suggested that the real beginning of the influx was the 1974 sex comedy *Beş Tavuk Bir Horoz* (Oksal Pekmezoğlu), an adaptation of the Italian film Homo Eroticus (1971) (Özgüç, 1990, p. 91; Evren, 2014, p. 294). This film, which also featured famous actors of the period such as *Zeki Alasya, Münir Özkul, Nebahat Çehre,* and *Mine Mutlu,* also had sequels under the title *Erkek Dediğin*. Thus, a new genre, the "epidemic of sex comedies" (Özgüç, 1990, p. 91), began in Turkish cinema. The situation defined by Mulvey (2008, p. 218) as "the main motif of the sexually objectified and exposed woman in erotic spectacle" has begun to become concrete in Yeşilçam. According to Evren (2014, p. 294), "this trend, which initially

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

developed in the form of sex comedy, later experienced a rapid decline and transformation, leading to soft porn and then hard porn" (Dorsay, 1989, p. 16). Furthermore, with the easing of censorship on films with sexual content in world cinemas in the 1970s, there was a significant increase in the production and screening of these films. Turkish cinema was also greatly influenced by this development in world cinemas (Özgüç, 1988, p. 116). This influx, which started in 1974, exploited sexuality as an object of desire and continued to increase its popularity until 1979 (Özgüç, 1988, p. 109). During this period, the erotic cinema industry developed its own unique production and exhibition practices. For example, during this period, imported foreign porn movie clips were placed between erotic movies. These porn pieces placed between erotic films were called "Block-sex" at that time. Apart from this, new concepts such as "remake film" and "reproductive illusion" also emerged during the influx period. According to Özgüç, a remake film is a film where 8mm foreign pornographic film fragments are inserted between the films and released with new posters and new titles. Reproductive illusion, on the other hand, is the use of close-ups of famous stars and the addition of extra bodies that do not belong to them while having sex. According to Özgüç, this is a method of deception, because the audience thinks that the extras' bodies are the stars they see in close-up (Özgüç, 1988, p.116).

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

Erotic filmmakers of the period also developed the "transmission" (*şanzıman*) method to evade inspections. In this method, in cinemas with two cinema cameras, one would be ready to play a normal film while the other played a block-sex piece. The projectionist would suddenly stop the film during the normal film screening and start the backup machine, which was equipped with the block-sex piece. This allowed them to evade police raids without being caught (Özgüç, 1988, p. 117). It is also noteworthy that the sex film industry, which developed at the heart of Yeşilçam and grew in production, screening, and audience, continued to exist despite the censorship regulations of the time, while political authorities turned a blind eye to this situation. This trend continued uninterruptedly during the periods of different governments between 1975 and 1980 and was never driven underground (Yakın, 2002, p. 215)[7]. Aydemir Akbaş, one of the main actors of sex comedy films, said, "These films were made when the far right government was in power!" statement and Fikret Hakan, another famous Yeşilçam actor, said, "They turned a blind eye to sex films, and these were religious people. They were supposedly the most religious segment of the right! But if there was anything even slightly critical, they would hit the nail on the head!" (Kaya, 2014) reveal this reality. According to Yalçın Lüleci (2020, p. 522), the main reason why erotic films were not banned was "the weakening of state authority in the anarchic and polarized environment of the 1970s." Burçak Evren, one of the cinema writers of the period, argued that erotic films distracted the masses

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

from social rebellion and that the sex industry was created specifically by the ruling classes for profit (Yakın, 2002, p. 207). According to Nebil Özgentürk, these films created a "kind of social analgesic, narcotic, tranquilizing" effect on society (cited in Yakın, 2002, p. 215).

As a result, the erotic film influx impacted the Turkish cinema industry between 1975 and 1980, transforming into an influx. Atilla Dorsay (1989, p. 15) summarized this information by stating, "130 of the 193 films released in 1979 were sex-adventure films." According to Ağah Özgüç (1988, p. 118), this number was 131, marking the peak of the influx in Türkiye. Orhun Yakın (2002, p. 209) estimates that, at best, around 500 erotic/comedy and "hardcore" films were produced during the "sex influx," which appealed to Turkish (male) audiences from the mid-1970s and ended on September 12, 1980. This situation also affected the directors, producers, actors and screenwriters of the period and many cinema workers had to work in these films or commercial films (Lüleci, 2020, p. 505). Additionally, the influx also led to the social change of many images associated with Yeşilçam cinema. For example, the pure, clean, innocent, family-girl protagonist of Yeşilçam cinema gave way to the new star image created by sex films (Özgüç, 1988, p. 33). However, Depeli (2016) argues that even this "pure, clean, innocent" female image was actually constructed within the framework of masculine fantasy. According to Depeli, even in traditional Yeşilçam melodramas, female characters were shaped

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

by masculine fantasy and positioned as objects of male desire (p. 129). In this sense, the erotic film trend represents the transition from the masked to the overt form of the masculine hegemony that already existed in Yeşilçam. Scognamillo (2003, p. 370) defines Yeşilçam cinema as a family cinema "consumed by middle-class audiences, with its stars, photo-novel narrative, stereotypes and characters, melodramas and comedies." But the influx has driven this group of people away from cinema halls and offended them. The influx, which paved the way for sloppy, cheap, and simplistic productions, caused lasting damage to Turkish cinema for many years to come, only ended with the September 12, 1980 coup. However, although it falls outside the scope of this study, it can be said that the transition from the era of "family melodramas" to the era of "sex films" also created a particular grievance for female stars. When the aftereffects of the erotic film era are examined, dramatic differences in the careers of male and female actors are observed. As Sarya Toprak (2025) emphasizes, while the male actors, directors, and producers of the period continued their lives as they were, female actors who starred in erotic films experienced the opposite. In conclusion, this process experienced in the erotic period of Yeşilçam should be seen not only as a cinematic transition but also as a reflection of gender inequality in the cinema industry.

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

Research

The Sex Influx or the Fragmented Years from the Perspectives of Cinema Projectionists[8]

The Changing Audience Profile of Turkish Cinema

In interviews conducted with cinema projectionists, witnesses of the period, most participants stated that audience numbers in cinemas declined significantly in the 1970s. This confirms the impact of the social crisis following the March 12, 1971 Memorandum on cinemas. The primary reasons cited by participants were the proliferation of television, the escalation of social unrest, economic hardship, and the decline in film quality. This observation demonstrates that the widespread use of television, emphasized throughout the study, was not merely a numerical increase; it also fundamentally altered the social function of the film industry. As a result, cinema operators changed their target audience and turned to erotic films with a potential audience. This strategic shift demonstrates how the film industry exploits gender dynamics. The shift in target audience, emphasized by Esen (2010, p. 135), towards "men driven to cities by migration and far from their homes and wives," is not merely a marketing strategy but also the film industry's commodification of the social atomization experienced by Turkish society during the urbanization process. This represents a new form of exploitation emerging at the intersection of the discovery of male sexuality as a commercial resource and the weakening of the family's social control mechanisms. The economic potential of this new target audience is strikingly documented in the projectionists' testimonies. Ayhan Sarı (1956, Adana) said, "*A*

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

350-seat theater would be full from morning till night," while Mithat Parmaksız (1946, Istanbul) described the audience dynamics of the period with the words, "The cinema playing erotic films would fill up and then empty, and your mind and imagination would come to a standstill." Sarı's emphasis on the fact that erotic films have "a massive audience" implies that this new audience is not just a temporary phenomenon but also an indicator of a structural transformation. This also demonstrates that the film industry has become a completely male-dominated commercial structure. In this period, when the commercial potential of erotic content was being discovered in Western film industries, for example, in France in 1974, pornographic films accounted for 15% of ticket sales revenue (Kutlar, 2010, p. 128), this was part of global capitalism's process of commodifying sexuality. Turkish cinema's adaptation to this trend was not only an economic imperative but also a local reflection of the global conjuncture. However, this process, combined with unique social dynamics in Türkiye, manifested itself in the disintegration of the traditional family structure and the creation of male-dominated spaces. The most dramatic change during this transformation was the complete withdrawal of traditional family audiences from cinemas. Yılmaz Atadeniz (1932, Istanbul) emphasizes the social cost of this transformation when he says, "…*When a woman and child leave a cinema, that cinema ends. Above all, unfortunately, when films similar to Italian sex films were shown, when similar films began to be made, and when erotic elements were added to them, we lost the audience.*"

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

Atadeniz's testimony also illustrates the spatial political economy of the situation. The exclusion of women and children from movie theaters is not just a demographic change, but a process of gender repartition of public spaces. Indeed, the contradiction between economic necessity and social values is a fundamental dilemma faced by cinema operators of the period. Şuayip Kanaat (1953, Ankara) summarizes the economic and social dimensions of this contradiction when he says, "Film operators tried to attract the decreasing audience with erotic films. They were successful, but they lost the family." Kanaat's ironic use of the concept of "success" highlights the contradiction between capitalist profit maximization and social values. The dissolution of the "family cinema" character, as defined by Scognamillo (2003), represents not only an aesthetic change but also a shift in cultural hegemony. This process marks a turning point in the confrontation between traditional values and commercial logic, where commercial logic prevails.

This radical change in audience composition also transformed social class dynamics. Nejdet Kabal (1949, Istanbul) describes the situation with the words, "The audience profile is changing completely. Wherever there are low-lifes, they are coming to the cinema." Beyond class prejudice, the Cabal's "low-life" expression reflects the defensive reflex of cultural elites in the process of disintegration of traditional social hierarchy. This expression illustrates the

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

emergence of the "man in the street" (Oran, 1996, p. 286) and the "complex and partially lumpen" (Scognamillo, 2003, p. 370) masses in movie theaters. The occupation of cinema spaces by heterogeneous and marginalized groups, replacing the homogeneous social character of the traditional Yeşilçam audience, represents a process of redistribution of cultural capital. The most obvious dimension of this change in social structure is the radical transformation in the gender composition of cinemas. Cinema spaces of the period became male-dominated spaces. Gürcan Gürler (1941, Izmir) clearly emphasizes the gender dimension of this transformation when he observes, "The audience started to be exclusively male." Gürler's simple statement summarizes the radical shift in the gender coding of cinema spaces. This situation illustrates the process by which the "male perspective that problematicizes the representation of women," as emphasized by Mert (2022, p. 14), becomes hegemonic not only in films but also in the physical composition of cinema spaces. The occupation of movie theaters by male-dominated audiences is a concrete example of the patriarchal restructuring of public spaces. A particularly striking observation in this regard comes from Ramazan Nartoğlu (1962, Konya). Nartoğlu explains the shift in social dynamics with a concrete example when he says, "When a drunk person comes, they disturb the family; that family would never come to the cinema again." Nartoğlu's observation of the "drunk audience" represents not only an issue of individual behavior but also the process of disintegrating the social norms of cinema spaces.

This situation also reveals the weakening of social control mechanisms in public spaces. The escape of the family audience is not only a choice, but also a change in the perception of spatial security and the social atmosphere becoming intolerable.

The role of technological factors in this transformation process is also critical. The impact of television on the film industry, in particular, radically altered content strategies. Based on the observation that "TRT started showing one film a week," Sabri Şenevi (1958, Adana) argues that "audiences would see in the cinema what they couldn't see on television." Şenevi's analysis reveals not only the decisive influence of media technologies on content but also the complex relationship between technological determinism and gender dynamics. Ultimately, the projectionists' testimonies reveal that the transformation Yeşilçam underwent in the 1970s was a multifaceted process. This change represents a structural rupture emerging at the intersection of economic necessity, technology, and gender dynamics. The transformation of movie theaters from family-oriented public spaces to male-dominated spaces created an irreversible turning point not only in the history of cinema but also in the social structure of Türkiye.

Movie Theaters Turning to Erotic Films

According to the projectionists who participated in the study, cinemas were divided into two categories during the erotic influx: elite cinemas that refused to show erotic films (e.g., Beyoğlu Emek Cinema) and those that did. This divergence, beyond mere content preference,

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

is an indicator of a process in which ideological and economic lines become clearer in the Turkish cinema industry. Participants noted that audience numbers in cinemas showing erotic films steadily increased during the influx, while those that refused to show erotic films saw their attendance numbers continue to decline and experienced financial difficulties. For this reason, it has been explained that cinemas that resisted erotic films were forced to either show erotic films or close their cinemas over time. This process is a concrete example of how market forces overcome cultural resistance. What almost all participants emphasized was that during the sex influx, theaters showing erotic films sold out and generated significant revenue. The most striking example of this economic pressure is seen in the experience of Ali Demirci (1952, Bursa). "When the sex influx was at its peak, we used to show family films at the cinema I ran. I showed family films for ten months straight. Three or five people would come every evening," Demirci says, describing the collision of his idealistic approach with economic reality. Demirci states, "I always showed films for three to four people". The statement "I saw that it wasn't working, so I turned to erotic films. Believe it or not, the cinema was full that evening" reveals the contradiction between idealism and pragmatism in the capitalist cinema industry. This situation shows how the producers' strategy of "taking advantage of sexual hunger" (Esen, 2010, p. 135) is implemented at the business level.

Nihat Çiçek (1961, Istanbul), evaluating the long-term effects of the influx on the film

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

industry, examines the process from a historical perspective. He emphasizes the structural effects of the influx by saying, “That 10-year period [70-80] was a period when Turkish cinema died. These erotic films increased, and a period of decline began in Turkish cinema.” Çiçek’s observation that “all the large theaters there perished; the owners survived, while the others closed down” demonstrates how the screening of erotic films influenced class dynamics within the film industry. Regarding the intensity of audience demand, Fatih Emir’s (1957) testimony is quite striking. “Believe or not, in the 1970s, there were lines for Behçet Nacar’s [erotic] films, stretching all the way to Galatasaray!” he says, describing the audience passion of the time. Emir’s assessment, “People had an insatiable appetite, a hunger for erotic films back then,” is a symbolic expression of the explosion created by the social repression of sexuality. Mustafa Sur (1949, Adana), who also emphasizes the economic motivation behind the situation, explains the initial dynamics of the process. “When anarchic events began in 1975, cinemas got into a crisis. When the crisis began, sex and erotic films began to be produced, he emphasizes the impact of political instability on the film industry. Sur’s observation, “Initially, these films were very attractive to cinema operators. Thanks to these films, we did a lot of business,” also concretely illustrates how the social crisis following March 12, 1971, shaped the cinema economy. However, the social cost of this economic success was also heavy. Ali Koçoğlu (1954, Istanbul) summarizes the paradoxical consequences of the influx when he says, “When

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

erotic films started to be shown, most summer and winter cinemas were closed because of these films since families didn't come." Koçoğlu's observation demonstrates the contradiction between erotic films' short-term economic gain and their long-term social loss. This situation reveals the spatial dimension of the dissolution of Yeşilçam's "family cinema" character and concretizes the economic consequences of the process of exclusion of women and children from public spaces in the theory of the male gaze.

The Producers' Add-Remove Method

Cinema projectionists stated that due to the intense interest and profit margins shown by audiences in erotic films, many well-known production houses, in addition to smaller ones, have turned to these genres. This demonstrates how the economic crisis affected all segments of the film industry. Participants noted that major producers of the period produced such films through intermediaries, but they were particularly hesitant to name the production houses. This timidity demonstrates how selective collective memory processes are and the role of social shame in memory formation. Mithat Parmaksız (1946, Istanbul), a cinema projectionist who worked in many cinemas in Istanbul in the 1970s, expressed the producers' tendency towards erotic films shot on very low budgets by saying, "Even quality bosses turned to such films [erotic films]. Why? There are no expenses, there is no cast, you make a film right away." Parmaksız's phrase "quality bosses" suggests that the prestigious producers of traditional

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

Yeşilçam are also transforming under economic pressure. Nejdet Kabal (1949, Istanbul), who evaluated the historical perspective of this process, summarizes the situation with the following concise words: “If a certain investment had been made during that period, the bright period I mentioned, and if quality films had been continued to be shot even if they were not profitable during the period when the audience was low, the situation could have been very different...” While Kabal’s emphasis on the “bright period” nostalgia demonstrates the longing for the golden age of traditional Yeşilçam (the 1960s), the expression “the sharpest companies” proves that the prestigious actors of the industry have also succumbed to economic pragmatism. This observation explains the industrial dynamics of Yeşilçam’s transition from its “Golden Age” to its “Lost or Dark Years” (Evren, 2014, p. 294).

The most critical aspect of this economic transformation was how producers overcame state censorship mechanisms. Participants who explained that the producers of the period found their own solutions to avoid the censorship board and its bans reveal the existence of a systematic deception. This demonstrates the practical implications of the weakening of state authority discussed during the erotic film era. Gökhan Pamukçu’s (1945, Istanbul) detailed account reveals the workings of this system: When he says “*The film was being sent to us [the censorship board] for a work permit. However, in the copy of the film that came to us, they had*

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

already removed the scenes that we would not accept [pornographic scenes]," he emphasizes the producers' approach. Pamukçu's statement, "It passed the censorship that way and got its approval. But after the film was released, those removed sections were added again into the film," demonstrates how state control mechanisms were circumvented. The most striking detail lies in the question: "'Do you want the part in or not?' In other words, do you want it in its official censored form, or do you want it normal?" While this quote demonstrates the customer-oriented service approach of the erotic film industry, the naming of pornographic content as "normal" symbolizes the value transformation of the period. Mustafa Sur's (1949, Adana) testimony explains the technical aspects of this deceptive method: "Companies that produce erotic films, in particular, shoot the film as scripted, but they remove the sex scene and insert a musical number into the copy submitted to the censorship commission," thus describing a systematic process of manipulation. Sur's observation that "a five-minute musical scene is actually a sex scene" demonstrates how artistic form and pornographic content have shifted. This clarifies the technical dimension of Esen's (2010) strategy of adding sexual elements and nudity to various films. Osman Kaynar's (1954, Bursa) statement, however, reveals the commercial dimension of this system: "Films weren't shown without a censorship slip. The censorship slip was included with the film, but apart from that, the man would send a separate piece to his censored film so that he could 'make a business out of it,'" he says, demonstrating

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

how legal obligation and commercial pragmatism coexisted. Kaynar's statement, "Let it make money," demonstrates that pornographic content is perceived as an economic commodity, with commercial success surpassing moral concerns. The negative impact of this economic-focused approach on film quality is a common observation among projectionists. Participants frequently noted that producers' shift toward erotic films to make more money leads to a decline in both content and formal quality. Özkan Tükelman's (1951, Istanbul) emphasis that "the level and quality were gradually declining" summarises the aesthetic cost of the influx. Similarly, Nejdet Kabal's words, "We also had to comply. Just think; there are no new films coming out, there are no quality audiences, but you have to earn your living," illustrate the dilemma that cinema workers find themselves in. Kabal's phrase "the necessity to comply" demonstrates how economic determinism suppresses artistic idealism. Ali Koçoğlu (1954, Istanbul), assessing this process from the perspective of the audience, says, "The audience has decreased. Why? After Yeşilçam films ended, they started making erotic films. Some companies were only aiming for profit," revealing his careful approach to not confusing cause with effect. Koçoğlu's dialogue with the audience is particularly meaningful: "I used to ask the audience, 'Why don't you come?' They would say, 'There are no quality films anymore!'" While this determination demonstrates the resistance of the quality audience against the erotic trend, it also embodies the process of dissolving the character of "family cinema consumed by middle-class audiences" as

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

defined by Scognamillo (2003, p. 370).

The producers' "add-remove" method demonstrates the capitalist film industry's creativity in overcoming legal boundaries, while also providing concrete evidence of how artistic quality is sacrificed for commercial considerations. This process represents an irreversible turning point in Turkish cinema history, not only in terms of content but also in terms of production ethics.

3 Movies in 1: Announcing Pornographic Movies

The testimony of Ali Aktaş (1961, Istanbul) describes in detail the functioning of this verbal announcement system: "The ticket collector at the door would already be addressing the audience, saying, 'piece by piece,' 'pass, pass, pass, pass,' 'continuous, continuous, continuous…', 'three films, three films, in pieces.' It was the same in Beyoğlu. …people knew." This "coded" language conveyed by Aktaş demonstrates how prohibited content is coded in the social sphere. Innocent terms such as "piece by piece" and "continuous" demonstrate its use in the process of social legitimization of pornographic content. Aleksandre Senkopopowsky's (1949, Istanbul) observation reveals the body language dimension of this coding: "You would go to the cinema without seeing the poster. The people inside would point to it and say, 'inside, inside.'" This form of visual communication demonstrates how forbidden content is symbolized

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

in the social sphere, while exemplifying the practical application of the strategy of "ignoring" (Lüleci, 2020, p. 522).

A particularly striking detail in the narratives is the cinema projectionists' remarks that the erotic film to be shown in the cinema differed from the film posters hung on the doors. This reveals the visual propaganda dimension of this strategy to evade legal oversight, while also demonstrating a complex coding system developed between the audience and the operator. The projectionists explained this as a method of encryption between the cinema operator and the audience. Ramazan Nartoğlu's (1962, Konya) detailed narrative reveals the operating mechanism of this coding system: "*For example, if the same poster is hanging outside, they think, 'The same film is playing inside,' and don't enter. But when the poster changes, they think the film has changed, that another erotic film has appeared, and they enter again*."Nartoğlu's observation demonstrates how audience behavior is conditioned and how visual cues become a means of communication. The most striking detail is hidden in the following example: "There's a poster of Zerrin Egeliler outside. He goes in, watches a bit of Zerrin Egeliler, and then the cinema moves on to foreign films. They enter foreign scenes [of porn], in other words." This demonstrates how the image of Yeşilçam stars is used to mask pornographic content. From an economic perspective, Fatih Emir's (1957) testimony strikingly

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

demonstrates the profitability of this system: "*We were receiving 60-minute erotic films, 45 minutes long. I couldn't even play the whole thing because after that fifteen-minute piece of extremely erotic [porn] film, which we inserted as a fragment, was inserted, the viewer would leave*." Emir's statement shows that the pornographic content overshadowed the entire main film and that what the audience was really looking for were these "*fragments*."

The following observation proves the economic efficiency of the system: "Then the man goes out and says, 'Is there anything different?' in the sense of another erotic movie, and buy a new ticket. We would do 20-25 screenings a day like this, and the cinema would always be full. We would make a lot of money." This statement demonstrates the capacity of pornographic content to create customer loyalty and demonstrates the effectiveness of the sexual starvation strategy.

Sabri Şenevi (1958, Adana), who addressed the geographical dimension of this system, said, "*Erotic films were shot in Istanbul and sent to us, placed among normal films. Certain cinemas would show erotic films anyway; for example, not all of them in Adana would show them,*" thus emphasizing the selective character of erotic film distribution. Şenevi's observation, "*Moviegoers knew where erotic films were shown anyway. They would go there*," demonstrates how this illegal industry built a customer network. The most interesting detail is the example

of Malkoçoğlu: "*For example, a poster for Cüneyt Arkın's Malkoçoğlu film would be hung. An erotic film would appear in between*." This demonstrates how traditional Yeşilçam heroic figures were instrumentalized to mask pornographic content. Ali Demirci's (1965, Bursa) brief but concise observation summarizes audience motivation: "*Some viewers were simply waiting for this part of the film.*" This statement demonstrates that pornographic content had completely overshadowed the main film and that the function of cinema had radically changed. Cinema had become a place not for storytelling but for voyeuristic pleasure.

Showing Erotic Films in Theaters

Most of the projectionists of the period who participated in the interviews admitted to showing erotic films. Some, between shyness and embarrassment, could not give a clear answer, and a very few stated that they did not show erotic films. This hesitation demonstrates the selective nature of collective memory processes. Despite being prohibited, erotic films were shown in many cinemas during the period. As Tarık Vardar (1942, Izmir) emphasized, operators, "*not content with erotic films, began showing pornographic films to attract more audiences,"* forced the projectionists to hold these screenings. Ali Aktaş's (1961, Istanbul) experience demonstrates how projectionists were integrated into the system: "*They were bringing us parts. Since we didn't know what it was, we were just watching and seeing. It turns out they were bringing in a pornographic piece and making us put it in.*" Aktaş's detail of

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

"*putting it between the sixth and seventh sections of the second reel*" demonstrates the technical aspect of how pornographic content was integrated into the main film. Emir's observation, "*The audience watching that piece would also ask, 'Has the new piece arrived?*'" proves that pornographic content creates customer loyalty. Mustafa Sur (1949, Adana) makes a significant observation regarding the evolutionary process of this system: "*However, these erotic films later began to dissatisfy audiences. When audience numbers began to decline, filmmakers turned to other pursuits. They began showing pornographic films illegally*." Sur's observation demonstrates that the evolution of erotic content into pornographic content is determined by market dynamics. Necati Haylaz's (1955, Istanbul) assessment, however, clarifies the social dimension of this process: "*Frankly, as a nation, we showed a great deal of interest in erotic films for a while. When the theaters began to fill up, filmmakers realized that this was a good way to generate income and began showing pornographic films more frequently*." Haylaz's statement "as a nation" emphasizes that pornographic consumption is a social, not an individual, phenomenon.

The most detailed explanation from a technical perspective comes from Gökhan Pamukçu (1945, Istanbul): "*There would be another machine waiting at the ready. On top of the machine, there's what they slangily call a 'lookout' movie running – another film is loaded, which is rated 16+, meaning it's an erotic movie that has already been approved by us*." Pamukçu's

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

statement, '*When your police officer comes from the hall and asks where the machine room is at the ticket office, the man on duty downstairs rings a bell*' demonstrates how businesses organize against police raids. Ayhan Sarı's (1956, Adana) statement, 'The expression 'throwing parts' comes from there. Otherwise, you can't put it in the film. Because [in a raid] they have to smuggle the film out so there won't be any evidence if we're caught' explains the security aspect of the system. This demonstrates the practical solutions developed against state authorities.

Precautions to Protect Against Police Raids

It was stated by the interviewees that even though pornographic films were prohibited from being shown in cinemas, the current governments tried to ignore such film screenings during the period. This situation solidifies the observation that state authority weakened in the anarchic and polarized atmosphere of the 1970s (Lüleci, 2020, p. 522). Şuayip Kanaat's (1953, Ankara) words, "*Everyone knew where erotic films were being shown*," reveal this reality. Projectionists stated that the existing measures were for show and on a small scale. However, despite this policy of "*ignoring*," projectionists were in the most precarious position during the erotic film influx. One of the most paradoxical aspects of the influx period was the imposition of legal responsibilities on projectionists, not the primary decision-makers, but the implementers. In police raids on cinemas, projectionists, as the individuals responsible for film

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

screenings, were held responsible, rather than the owners. Nihat Çiçek (1961, Istanbul), who made the most general evaluation of this issue, summarizes the dilemma faced by the projectionists when he says, "*Most projectionists were showing erotic films at the time, but if they were caught, the morality police would take them away. Some were caught*." This statement reveals the situation of the workers, who were stuck between economic necessity and legal risks.

The random and unpredictable character of raids increases the uncertainty experienced by drivers. Özcan Uslu's (1959, Istanbul) experience epitomizes this: "*One year, when I was working in Bursa in 1978-79, we experienced a raid. A normal erotic film had come to the cinema. Not pornographic, in other words, erotic*." Uslu's statement, "*The film had passed the censors, they cut it, but they only kept that scene out. It wasn't a scene that would have a significant impact on the customer, but they took the film because of that scene*," demonstrates the unpredictable and arbitrary nature of the inspections and reveals the inherent inconsistency of the censorship system. The most dramatic example of police raids is the experience of Fatih Emir (1957). "*One day, we experienced a police raid at the Rüya Cinema. A prosecutor came to the cinema and watched the film. Then he informed the police*," says Emir, describing the preparation process for the raid. While Emir's statement, "*During that raid, I left the entire machine and ran from the roof to the Emek Cinema and from there outside,*" is tragicomic, his

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

statement, "*I stayed there for about 19 days*," shows how severe the punitive dimension of the system is.

The basis of this legal grievance lies in the fact that film projectionists are considered cinema experts by the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry's declaration that projectionists had the authority to decide which sections of a film would be cut and which would be played placed the legal responsibility directly on the projectionists. The objection of Şuayip Kanaat, the president of the cinema projectionists' association at the time, to this situation is quite significant: "*No projectionist would want to show erotic films. The real culprit here is the owner of the property*." Kanaat's subsequent analogy emphasizes the absurdity of the situation: "*Now, you are the owner of the cinema, and as the owner of the cinema, you say to the projectionist: 'You will play pornography here.' If the projectionist plays pornography, who is to blame? The projectionist!"*

Despite these legal risks, the protection networks developed by the companies allowed projectionists to work comfortably. One of the most interesting aspects of the influx period was the social organization of prohibited activities and the development of protection mechanisms. Projectors stated that some theater operators were informed in advance of raids by the police department. Explaining the logic of this protection system, Şuayip Kanaat stated, "*The fact that*

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

officers [police] watched these films doesn't mean anything; what will they do if there's no evidence?", thus highlighting the weakness of the system. This observation demonstrates how the fact that legal action cannot be taken in the absence of concrete evidence was exploited. Mahmut Korucu (Adana), emphasizing the importance of relationships established at the local level, said, "*Those films [erotic films] were banned, the police did not allow them. But relations between the police and the filmmakers were good, they allowed them to be shown*," thus revealing the difference between official prohibition and practical tolerance. Explaining the technical aspect of the early warning system, Yılmaz Atadeniz (1932, Istanbul) said, "*The state tried to prevent this, but it was always breached. The phone was being called from below, and the machine immediately moved to the second machine*." This shows how effective the organization was. This explanation also illuminates the security dimension of the "two-machine system," discussed in the previous section. The economic dimension of the system was most strikingly demonstrated by Mithat Parmaksız (1946, Istanbul). He said, "*Many men [projectors] went in and out. Nothing happened. Once you paid the money [the bribe], the case was over*," thus emphasizing the prevalence of corruption. Parmaksız's observation that "*There was a lot of money involved. They were pouring in so much money*" demonstrates how the economic power of the pornographic industry purchased legal control.

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

End of the Influx

Participants noted that filmmakers making and showing erotic films earned substantial sums of money during the influx, while also stating that Turkish cinema suffered significant losses. This contradiction highlights the long-term artistic and cultural costs of short-term economic gain. According to participants, this influx, which lasted from 1975 to 1980, ended abruptly with the 1980 coup. The most striking observation about this abrupt end comes from Fatih Emir (1957, Istanbul): "*After the 1980 coup, everything stopped like a knife*." Emir's metaphor, "*cut off like a knife*," embodies the sharp rupture that the military intervention created in all areas of social life. His subsequent assessment clarifies the psychological dimension of this change: "*After the coup, those who produced those films and the audiences who watched them were a little afraid, a little frightened."* This state of "fear" and "fright" demonstrates how the social crisis was suppressed by military intervention.

However, the most dramatic dimension of the end of the influx is seen in the lasting consequences of gender inequality. The particular victimization of female stars caused by the transition from the era of "*family melodramas*", which formed the basis of Yeşilçam, to the era of "sex films" became even more evident with the end of the trend. As Sarya Toprak (2025) highlighted, while the male actors, directors, and producers of the period continued their lives as they were, female actors who starred in erotic films experienced the opposite. The ease with

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

which male actors and film workers returned to traditional roles after the influx stemmed from the patriarchal structure's protection. Female actors, in Toprak's words, were "*scapegoated, and many of their careers were terminated. This situation is also evidence of how male domination instrumentalizes women and subsequently sacrifices these same women."*

The projectionists' silence is a reflection of this male-dominated structure. Their failure to address the victimization of female actors throughout the interviews demonstrates the sexist nature of collective memory processes. While male projectionists detailed their own professional and financial hardships, they remained silent about the destruction of female actors' careers. This silence demonstrates how gender dynamics are normalized and how women's victimization is rendered invisible.

Şuayip Kanaat (1953, Ankara), who evaluated the situation from a legal perspective, summarizes the situation with clearer expressions: "*After the coup, erotic films also ended. Because they were banned.*" However, Kanaat's truly important assessment concerns the long-term effects of the influx on Turkish cinema: "*The sole reason for Turkish cinema's deterioration was erotic and pornographic films produced with the mindset of "let's save the day.*" This observation summarizes the long-term consequences of an approach that "*had no foresight for the future, focused solely on saving the cinema business of the day*." Mustafa Sur

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

(1949, Adana), who assessed the historical significance of the influx, describes the process as "*the beginning of an irreversible collapse*." Sur's emphasis on "irreversible" demonstrates that the influx constituted a structural breaking point in Turkish cinema history. Gürcan Gürler (1941, Izmir), approaching the issue from a personal perspective, states, "*That environment was the worst period for filmmaking,*" summarizing what the era meant for cinema workers.

The projectionists' testimonies reveal that the erotic film influx was not merely a cyclical phenomenon, but also a structural rupture that perpetuated gender inequality. The sudden end of the influx with the 1980 coup symbolizes a process in which the male-dominated film industry sacrificed female actors while reproducing itself.

Conclusion

The 1960s are notable as a period when films with sexual content became widespread worldwide and influenced cinemas. Turkish cinema was also affected by these developments, and the erotic film influx had a significant impact on Turkish cinema's production, distribution, and exhibition practices. This study examines the "Sex Film Era" in Turkish cinema from 1974 to 1980, which began with the screening of "erotic films" in the early 1970s and evolved into the "pornographic film" influx by the mid-1970s. Within this framework, in-depth interviews were conducted with cinema projectionists who worked during these years, and the findings were categorized under thematic headings.

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

The findings from the research conducted in terms of the main reasons and economic dynamics of the sex influx in Turkish cinema show that although there are many sub-reasons underlying the sex influx that emerged in Turkish cinema, the main factor is the direct influence of television and the gradual decline in the quality of Turkish-made films due to repetitive scenarios and the fact that Turkish cinema audience have started to leave the theaters. In this context, cinema operators were forced to turn to screening erotic or pornographic films due to the dwindling revenues associated with the small, undisclosed producers of the time. Consequently, this process emerged through a unique and specialized workflow between producers seeking quick riches through low-cost erotic films and operators seeking to maintain high profit margins.

Findings regarding the radical change in the audience reveal that there was a very intense interest in erotic and especially pornographic films shown during the period. Cinemas showing these films sold out. However, behind this economic success lay a dramatic social transformation. The audience that went to the cinema changed radically, and apart from female audiences, male audiences from all socio-economic segments of society went to watch these films. The most critical aspect of this transformation was the transformation of cinemas from family-oriented public spaces to male-dominated spaces. Consequently, the audience profile changed, and a new, male-dominated audience replaced the family audience, creating the new

audience profile of the period.

While the revenues of cinemas showing erotic and pornographic films increased significantly in economic and business strategies, cinemas that avoided these films and did not show sex films experienced financial difficulties. Many summer and winter cinemas also had to close. Some movie theaters of the period, unable to cope with financial difficulties, tried to survive by showing these films. This process reveals the long-term cultural and social costs of short-term economic gain.

Although the influx period was ignored by the ruling powers of the time in terms of state authority and legal regulations, some cinemas that showed films with sexual content, even if only for show, were raided. It has been determined that the businesses established news networks and developed various security mechanisms before these raids. The most striking finding was that business owners, especially during police raids, blamed the cinema projectionists. In this context, during the influx period, projectionists assumed the most risky positions, with working conditions such as arrest, fines, and termination of employment. The study found that most cinema projectionists of the period screened erotic and sex films. It also revealed that some projectionists who refused to screen these films were threatened with dismissal by the operators.

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

During the influx for cinematic and technical advancements, the term “fragment” entered the Turkish cinema lexicon. These fragments, shot or provided by producers, were inserted or interpolated into erotic or non-erotic films during their running time by film projectionists. It has been determined that these fragments were introduced to cinemas secretly and outside the system, bypassing the censorship board. It has been determined that businesses showing erotic films announce that they are showing part-time films inside the cinema through verbal calls and special posters in front of the cinema. This communication system demonstrates how prohibited content is codified and normalized in the social sphere. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that audiences already knew which cinemas were showing fragments. During the viewing, the audience was waiting for the pornographic parts to intervene and left the cinema when the parts ended; It has been discovered that operators run too many sessions during the day using this method.

One of the most significant findings of the study, in terms of gender dynamics and long-term effects, is that the influx not only had economic consequences but also perpetuated gender inequality. This demonstrates a process in which the male-dominated film industry sacrifices female actors while reproducing itself. The projectionists’ failure to address this female victimization throughout the interviews demonstrates how a male-dominated perspective shapes collective memory processes.

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu

In terms of methodological contributions, this study demonstrates the importance of oral history in Turkish film historiography. The testimonies of cinema projectionists have made visible areas of experiential knowledge inaccessible to official archival documents. Findings obtained through collective memory processes hold significant potential for overcoming the methodological limitations of conventional film historiography.

In conclusion, in Turkish cinema, which we consider the "Sex Film Era," a short period between 1974 and 1980, an erotic film created a distinct cultural atmosphere throughout its entire process, from producer to operator, from screening to audience. This cultural environment was only brought to an end by the 1980 coup. However, the effects of the influx left lasting marks not only in cinematic terms but also in terms of gender inequality, spatial political economy, and cultural hegemony. This period reveals not only the aesthetic but also the sociological dimensions of the transformation experienced in Turkish cinema. The influx created an irreversible turning point in the modernization process of Turkish society, with its functional transformation of cinema spaces, the hegemony of the male-dominated perspective, and the perpetuation of problematic approaches to women's representation.

REFERENCES

Abisel, N. (1994). *Popüler sinema ve türler*. Alan Publishing.

Abisel, N. (2005). *Türk sineması üzerine yazılar.* Phoenix Publishing.

Akdemir, B. (2018). *1970'ler Türk sinemasında seks filmleri furyası ve artan müstehcenliğin toplumda yükselen gerilim üzerinden incelenmesi* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Marmara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Radyo Televizyon ve Sinema Anabilim Dalı.

Altman, D. (2001). *Global sex.* The University of Chicago Press.

Asman, İ. C. (2023). Once upon a time in Türkiye: The sex influx, gender inequality, and revisiting past pornographies. *Porn Studies, 10*(4), 358–367. https://doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2023.2187870

Atalar, M. M. (2016). *Türk sineması-seyirci ilişkisi* [Unpublished proficiency in arts thesis]. Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Institute of Fine Arts, Department of Cinema-TV.

Barss, P. (2011). *Erotic engine: How pornography has powered mass communication, from Gutenberg to Google.* Doubleday Canada.

Boz, Y. (1974). TV ve Türk sineması. *Çağdaş Sinema, 2*(2), 63–75.

Caunce, S. (2001). *Sözlü ve yerel tarihçi* (B. Bilmez & A. Can, Trans.). Tarih Vakfı Yurt.

Church, D., & Schaefer, E. (2018). Introduction. *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies, 58*(1), 141–146.

Çolak, E. (2024). Naked modernisation: The rise and fall of the erotic humour magazines in 1930s Türkiye. *Visual Studies, 39*(4), 422–439. https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2024.2385561

Demirci, C. (2004). *Araya parça giren yıllar.* İnkılap.

Depeli, G. (2016). "Emine Mine, hepsi sensin be kızım": Yeşilçam sinemasının eril fantezisi / The male phantasm. *Fe Dergi, 8*(2), 124–137. https://doi.org/10.1501/Fe0001_0000000170

Dorsay, A. (1989). *Sinemamızın umut yılları: 1970–80 arası Türk sinemasına bakışlar.* İnkılap Publication House.

Duru, K. N. (1957). *İttihat ve Terakki hatıralarım.* Sucuoğlu Matbaası.

Erdoğan, N. (2017). *Sinemanın İstanbul'da ilk yılları.* İletişim.

Erkılıç, H. (2003). *Türk sinemasının ekonomik yapısı ve bu yapının sinemamıza etkileri* [Unpublished proficiency in arts thesis]. Mimar Sinan University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Cinema-TV.

Esen, Ş. K. (2010). *Türk sinemasının kilometre taşları.* Agora Kitaplığı.

Evren, B. (2014). *Türk sinemasının 100. yılı.* Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On collective memory.* University of Chicago Press.

Kaya, C. (Director). (2014). *Motör: Kopya kültürü ve popüler Türk sineması* [Film].

Kaymaz Mert, M. (2022). Türk sinemasında toplumsal cinsiyet gerçeğine farklı bir bakış: Değişmek zorunda olan kadınlar. *YAZIT Kültür Bilimleri Dergisi, 2*(1), 9–24. https://doi.org/10.29228/yazitdergisi.2

Korukçu, M. (2009). *Bir anlatım aracı olarak erotik ve tiyatro estetiğinde kullanımı* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Dokuz Eylül University, Institute of Fine Arts, Department of Performing Arts.

Kutlar, O. (2010). *Sinema bir şenliktir.* Yapı Kredi Publications.

Lüleci, Y. (2020). 1970'li yıllarda Türkiye'de iktidar ve sinema ilişkileri. *Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi, 18*(36), 495–502.

Library of Congress. (2023, October 14). *May Irwin kiss.* Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/item/00694131/

Metin, C. (2002). Sözlü tarih ve Türkiye'deki gelişimi. *Türk Kültürü Dergisi, 40*(469), 288–299. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11834/484

Mulvey, L. (2008). Görsel haz ve anlatı sineması. In S. Büker & Y. G. Topçu (Eds.), *Sinema: Tarih–Kuram–Eleştiri* (pp. 235–256). Gazi Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi.

Okyay, S. (1996). Bugünden yarına. In S. M. Dinçer (Ed.), *Türk sineması üzerine düşünceler* (pp. 223–232). Doruk Publications.

Onaran, A. Ş. (1994). *Türk sineması (Cilt 1).* Kitle Publications.

Oran, B. (1996). Yeşilçam nasıl doğdu, nasıl büyüdü, nasıl öldü ve yaşasın yeni sinema. In S. M. Dinçer (Ed.), *Türk sineması üzerine düşünceler* (pp. 277–292). Doruk Publishing.

Özgüç, A. (1988). *Türk sinemasında cinselliğin tarihi.* Broy Publication.

Özgüç, A. (1990). *Başlangıcından bugüne Türk sinemasında ilkler.* Yılmaz Publishing.

Öztürk, S. R. (2000). Feminist film politikası: "Mürebbiye" örneği. *Kültür ve İletişim, 3*(1), 51–70.

Öztürkmen, A. (2025). Sözlü tarih'in yerel tarih araştırmalarına katkısı. *Türk Folklor Araştırmaları Derneği Dergisi, 370*, 305–311. https://doi.org/10.61620/tfa.62

Paasonen, S., & Saarenmaa, L. (2007). The golden age of porn: History and nostalgia in cinema. In K. Nikunen, S. Paasonen, & L. Saarenmaa (Eds.), *Pornification: Sex and sexuality in media culture* (pp. 23–32). Berg.

Perrottet, T. (2007, August 8). Good old-fashioned porn. *The Smart Set.* https://www.thesmartset.com/article08290701/

Roloff, B., Seeßlen, G., & Weil, C. (1996). *Erotik sinema: Cinsellik sinemasının tarihi ve mitolojisi* (V. Atayman, Trans.). Alan Publishing.

Rosen, D. (2023). Pornography and the erotic phantasmagoria. *Sexuality & Culture*, 27(1), 242–265. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-022-10011-9

Schick, I. C. (2017). Between the abstraction of miniatures and the literalism of photography: Amateur erotica in early twentieth-century Türkiye. *Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East & Central Eurasia, 1*(5/6), 1–26.

Scognamillo, G. (1979). Bir dönemin anatomisi Türk sineması 1960–1977. *Kurgu, 1*(1), 98–107.

Scognamillo, G. (2003). *Türk sinema tarihi.* Kabalcı.

Scognamillo, G., & Demirhan, M. (2002). *Erotik Türk sineması.* Kabalcı.

Slade, J. W. (2006). Eroticism and technological regression: The stag film. *History and Technology: An International Journal, 22*(1), 27–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/07341510500497236

Soydan, E. (2009). *Görsel medyada pornografi ve kültürel yansımaları* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. İstanbul University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Radio, Television and Cinema.

Toprak, S. (2025, January 14). Yeşilçam'da erotik film furyası: Günah keçisi kadınlar oldu. *Birgün.* https://www.birgun.net/haber/yesilcam-da-erotik-film-furyasi-gunah-kecisi-kadinlar-oldu-530574

Thompson, P. (1999). *Geçmişin sesi: Sözlü tarih* (Ş. Layıkel, Trans.). Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı.

Thompson, D. (2007). *Black and white and blue: Adult cinema from the Victorian age to the VCR.* ECW Press.

Williams, L. (2008). *Screening sex.* Duke University Press.

Wosick, K. (2015). Pornography. In J. DeLamater & R. Plante (Eds.), *Handbooks of sociology and social research* (pp. 413–435). Springer.

Yakın, O. (2002). Malum dönem filmleri. *Kebikeç, 7*(13), 207–224.

Yaren, Ö. (2017). Turkish erotics: The rise of the sex influx. *Journal of Popular Culture, 50*(6), 1356–1375. https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12627

Zengin, F. and Kapır, B. (2023). *Beyaz Perdeyi Aydınlatanlar: Sinema Makinistlerinin Gözünden Yeşilçam*. IstanbuL Gelisim Universitesi Yayinlari

Interviewed Projectionists:

Aleksandre Senkopopowsky, 15 Jan 2018, İstanbul.
Ali Aktaş, 28 Jan 2018, İstanbul.
Ali Demirci, 14 April 2018, Bursa.
Ali Koçoğlu, 8 Dec 2017, İstanbul.
Ayhan Sarı, 8 April 2018, İstanbul.
Fatih Emir, 26 Dec 2017, İstanbul.

Gürcan Gürler, 11 April 2018, İzmir.
İlknur Gökhan Pamukçu, 16 December 2017, İstanbul.
Mahmut Korucu, 10 April 2018, Adana.
Mithat Parmaksız, 15 January 2018, İstanbul.
Mustafa Sur, 10 April 2018, Adana.
Necati Haylaz, 28 January 2018, İstanbul.
Nejdet Kabal, 21 November 2017, İstanbul.
Nihat Çiçek, 16 December 2017, İstanbul.
Osman Kaynar, 14 April 2018, Bursa.
Özcan Uslu, 11 December 2017, İstanbul.
Özkan Tükelman, 2 February 2018, İstanbul.
Ramazan Nartoğlu, 21 July 2018, Konya.
Sabri Senevi, 10 April 2018, Adana.
Şuayip Kanaat, 9 April 2018, Ankara.
Tarık Vardar, 11 April 2018, İzmir.
Yılmaz Atadeniz, 8 February 2018, İstanbul.

ENDNOTES:

[1] The summary of this study was presented at the Near Eastern University 3rd International Cinema Symposium held between 6-10 November 2023 under the title "Yeşilçam'ın Erotik Film Furyasında Sinema İşletmeciliği Ve Gösterim: "Parça İstiyor Musun İçine?"

[2] These films are the oldest adult films to have survived to the present day. It is believed that these films were not the first adult films to be recorded. Considering the cost of duplicating film reels with the cinematic technology of the time and the difficulties of storing these reels in suitable environments, it is thought that the first adult films were recorded much earlier, but no information about them has survived to the present day (Thompson, 2007, pp. 37-41).

[3] In the 1970s, films with sex and arabesque themes came to the fore in mainstream Turkish cinema. However, during the period, "comedy and 'historical costume adventure' films were also at the forefront. Furthermore, the first examples of the "Revolutionary Cinema" and "National Cinema" movements were also produced in these years (Lüleci, 2020, pp. 505-510).

[4] Regional Management, with its core pillar being the audience, is a system where filmmakers submit reports to operators about films popular in their regions and request similar film commissions. In this context, Turkey is divided into six cinema operating regions: Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana, Samsun, and Zonguldak.

[5] According to the research of Nilgün Abisel (1994, p. 107), at least half of the 195 films shot in 1976 were very cheap sex films, some of which were shot in 16 mm and released in certain theaters.

[6] The film Mürebbiye is the first production in Turkish cinema to be subjected to censorship (Onaran, 1994, p. 15).

[7] The sex film craze survived during the governments of the Nationalist Front (AP, MSP, CGP and MHP) (April 1975-December 1977), a coalition of CHP, CGP and DP (January 1978-October 1979) and finally the AP, MSP and MHP governments (November 1979-September 1980) and despite the fierce censorship debates, it never went underground" (Yakın, 2002, p. 215).

[8] The findings were prepared by utilizing the information obtained from the interviews conducted by the authors for the documentary film *Büyülü Fener Bekçileri* (Keepers of the Magic Lantern) (2021) and the book Zengin and Kapir (2023), published by Istanbul Gelisim University Publications. Transcripts of interviews not used in either the documentary or the book are also included in this section.

Volume 13.2 (2025) | ISSN 2158-8724 (online) | DOI 10.5195/cinej.2025.752 | http://cinej.pitt.edu