

Gender Discourse in Popular Culture: The Case of Television Series in Turkey

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Introduction

The 1990s were a period of rapid change in the political, economic, cultural, individual and social realms in Turkey. Various terms such as “globalization,” “crisis of modernism,” “postmodernism,” “late-modernism” were attached to that particular period, each underlining various aspects of the same era of transformation. But it became increasingly significant to track the phenomenon of change, which is immanent to human history, with its projections in mass communication devices together with the amazing scale that technology had reached. It is possible, directly or indirectly, to follow lived experiences in other places in the world, especially through the medium of television or the products that are manufactured somewhere else. In this way, we have the opportunity to obtain data of far-away places through the transfer of other geographies’, societies’ or culture’s products or realities. These data are also important in the context of their impact on the change of local, universal, and global cultures. In particular, devices like TV, cinema and electronic communication have both homogenizing and alienating effects.

The importance of debates on popular culture in this context is on the rise (Williams 1993: 184) because cultural studies about the private realm, everyday life or micro-relations have the function of understanding social and power relations in society. When aiming at understanding the characteristics of these social power relations, one will come to view the folkloric elements which are commonly depicted as being “peculiar to people” as rather unrefined products taking shape within the borders of this popular culture realm (Özbek 1991). The proliferation and spread of the private TV channels during the rapid changes of the 1990s that were experienced in the cultural realm carried the debates on “popular culture” to the academic platform.¹ While TV channels formerly were broadcasting mostly serials from the US or Latin American series of Brazilian or Mexican provenance, nowadays they are more likely to broadcast Turkish series.

¹ It is possible to watch these series every single day of the week. For example, the areas where the series *Asmalı Konak* is set attract huge numbers of tourists, and the traditional scarves from that region are being sold all over Turkey. Ağva, a small district, witnessed a real boom in tourism trips after *Bir İstanbul Masalı* began to be shown on TV. The number of examples might easily be augmented.

These Turkish series were at first set in districts like Kuzguncuk, Maltepe, Samatya and Çengelköy, where traditional bonds and *hemşerilik*² relationships were and are more powerful, yet recent examples seem to indicate that peripheral places like Nevşehir, Urfa, Mersin, the Ege coast and Edirne are becoming more popular. What is common to all these localities or places is the nice scenery and emotionally comforting themes they provide for people who are suffering from rapid social change. The artificialness, depression, distance and alienation from the natural environment that are the outcome of modernization and urbanization carry with them an increased need for the warmth and security of traditional relationships (Fiske 1997: 32-34). The series serve both worlds, however. In this sense, they depict a world where authentic elements and all kinds of modern luxury coexist together.³

The aim of this study is to depict the form and extent of gender relationships; symptoms, modes of behavior, roles, identities and finally codes that are presented in and represented by these kinds of series. Then we will try to decipher the unequal and hierarchical relationships and the hegemonic language between the sexes in the period that is widely claimed to have witnessed a large process of change, breaks, dissolutions and reconciliations (Williams 1993: 22-30). Rather than scanning all TV series or analyzing one of them in detail, we have preferred to look at examples of various kinds of series that may be termed as traditional, modern, urban, local or rural. Our aim here is to assemble that amount of data that will be sufficient for us to analyze the gender roles, codes and relationships that are perpetuated in those series and to decipher the social relations both vertically and horizontally (Corner 1986: 49-52).

Firstly, by pointing out the contexts in which concepts like popular culture and gender are employed, we aim to justify our use of TV series as popular culture products in analyzing the gender roles and relationships and the reason why this particular area is important. In a second step, by taking the TV series broadcast after 2000 as a starting point, we aim to bring the general prospect of gender relationships and identities to light.

The Concept of “Gender” and “Popular Culture”

Approaches to popular culture in general can be categorized into three groups: The Frankfurt School, which denounces popular culture (Hall 1995: 23), the culturalist approach, which affirms it (Özbek 1991: 68) and finally Gramsci's theory of “hegemony” which involves a more complex approach to its evalua-

² *Hemşerilik* is used in Turkey in the meaning of ‘being from the same city, or town as another’.

³ In other words, it is basically class-based and cultural relationships which have no social and real counterparts in a way recalling Baudrillard. See Baudrillard 1996: 60-69.

tion (Hall 1997: 88-96, Zoonen 1997: 301-307). The Frankfurt School takes popular culture as a part of the industrial realm created by the bourgeoisie, who consolidated its power with the rise of industrialization. Its aim, according to the Frankfurt School, is to create and spread the “capitalist values” within the logic of free market ideology.⁴ Capitalists instrumentalize this realm with profit maximization motives. In contrast, the culturalist approach takes popular culture as a sign for and expression of everyday life and the majority of the people. In this view, popular culture is seen as a mirror of society, which both produces and consumes that culture itself (Özbek 1991).

According to Gramsci, who is one of the leading Marxist theorists in cultural studies, popular culture is neither a one-sided process which is definitely determined by the capitalist class and its manipulative efforts nor the realm of a perfect reflection of what is peculiar to the masses. Gramsci is moving beyond these views of strict determination and exaggerated culturalism when he argues that popular culture is a field of power and struggle. In other words, it is a “hegemonic place” where diverse social tensions collide and sometimes reconcile (Hall 1997: 88-96, Özbek 1991: 81). Bourgeois capitalist ideology, then, may constitute its hegemony only to the extent that it succeeds to occupy a place within the borders of the culture and values of the opposite class. Popular culture is a realm of struggle and negotiation between conflicting classes (Hall 1999: 121).

Intermingled with inequalities in society, these cultural and ideological practices offer models and clichés by creating myths and icons. In this sense questions as to what extent these series –such as *Asmalı Konak* (Asmalı Mansion)⁵, *Bir İstanbul Masalı* (An Istanbul Fairy-Tale)⁶– reflect or represent the truth are not the basic questions of this study.⁷ However, because popular culture, consciously or unconsciously, reflects the society that produces it, popular culture simultaneously holds a “clue” for the society and paradoxically forms “models of roles” in a particular historical conjuncture. The aim of this study is to analyze the gender based models of roles and relationships as represented in those series that we have selected.

⁴ Studies using this approach convey a detailed research on the reproduction processes, use of technology of these TV shows, series, newspapers, journals, etc. For an example, cf. Marris et al. (eds.) 1996: 60-123.

⁵ *Asmalı Konak* is one of the most popular Turkish TV series in the new millennium. The story is about relations of a rich and feudal family in a small town, especially the contradiction of gender roles in the different generations.

⁶ *Bir İstanbul Masalı* is the story of relations between a rich, modern family and a servant family. The main subject of this story is the love affairs between members of the second generations of these two families. The contradiction of social classes is another theme in this series.

⁷ The main concern of this study is to analyze the roles and relations by using TV series, not to question to what extent these relationships are real or not. We take these data as some “hints” for our evaluation of social reality. A more feasible method for understanding social reality would be a large and systematic sociological field survey.

The course of feminist struggles and feminist criticism has showed us that almost all forms of social relationships and cultural products are masculine (Steeves 1999: 127). Therefore many forms of social practices in political life, history, arts and business life are masculine and gendered. That unequal reality is recognized as a historical practice without, however, defining it in absolute terms using an essentialist approach. Thus, through appropriating the practices of manhood and womanhood one can try to analyze its constitution and construction processes (Williams 1993: 188-189). As is known, the term “gender” differs from the term “sex,” which defines male and femaleness. “Gender” reaches far beyond the concept of sex so that it sometimes even seems to involve a contradiction. According to this promising and innovative approach, femininity and masculinity are modes of existence that are fixed and closed to social change. Gender, on the other hand, is a socially constructed mode of existence and an identity (Acar-Savran 2004). Gender suggests that the subjugation and oppression of women, inequalities between men and women do not arise from sexual differences that are determined biologically but states that these differences are exploited by and for discriminatory practices. This criticism made possible a break with biological determinist approaches. Underlining that ultimately the qualities of both femininity and masculinity were not naturally given but socially and historically constructed categories, this approach enables us to go beyond the limitations of an abstract and absolute understanding of sex.⁸

The concept of “gender” that is the contribution of the second wave of feminist criticism provided us with a base from which we are able to deconstruct the gender divisions and oppositions in the unequal and hierarchical- patriarchal order.⁹ This means that our gender roles, attitudes and conditions are determined by social practices, a realization which resulted in an increase in the definition of gender as a direct or indirect outcome of sociological practices. In addition to male and female identities, transsexuality, bisexuality, and homosexuality must also be counted as legitimate identities. The patriarchal heterosexist order which is articulated along unequal class, race, nation, religion etc. relations emerged as a contradictory totality. Resistance or deconstruction attempting to turn this discourse inside out can display the gendered system, which is essentially based on binary opposition. What enables us to realize and analyze the dual opposition and split in gender relations that are constructed through language, discourse, practice, attitude and relationships, are the deconstructive studies on both femininity and masculinity (Hall 1999: 108, Modleski 1996: 371-381). These studies make clear that the biological differences are used to generate an exclusionary

⁸ For a detailed discussion on sexuality and gender see Acar-Savran 2004: 233-310.

⁹ Thinkers like Foucault and Butler employed “deconstruction” in order to understand the multi-centered power structure of society. Judith Butler, for instance, used this method to analyze “femininity.” Butler 1999.

opposition in the gender realm through naturalizing and fixing differences. While there is a possibility to see the difference based on reproduction and fertility as a complementary difference, it has in fact to be seen as an exclusionary and oppressing difference serving to justify segregation. By the mystification of the anatomy of reproduction two aims are achieved simultaneously: reinforcing the gendered and discriminatory capitalist division of labor and situating sexuality within the borders of heterosexist hegemony.

Consequently, gender studies are at pains to demonstrate that sex, sexuality and gender are not naturally determined but socially and historically constructed identities and categories. Therefore we need to understand this construction process in detail. Moreover, conducting our research on popular culture with an adequate background and critical attitude that we may inherit from gender studies will help us to contribute to popular culture studies more productively and with analytically more convincing results. As is well known, gender relationships have their own oppressor/oppressed, exploiter/exploited dichotomies, which are expressions of extremely hierarchical and unequal relationships. Our sexual identities, roles and practices have been shaped in these structures of inequality. This process is multifaceted and self-contradictory; and it includes various elements.

Heterosexist patriarchal identities and relationships are constructed in culture, nature and history. While nature is an element that determines the limits of human conduct, labor and action form together another element that is significant in the relationship between nature and human beings. The deconstructive and transformative perspective is based on the severe criticism of the discourse of nature; in other words, these studies base themselves on praxis. To exaggerate, to deepen, to manipulate and negate the natural differences as underlying elements of inequality is seen as important techniques of deconstruction, but the intersection of class, culture, race, language, religion and familial is gender. This process consists of opposition and exclusion, which are imminent in linguistic, discursive, social and psychological structures (Laclau 1993: 100).

Using the perspective discussed above in our analysis of popular culture, which can be seen as one of the leading realms where these gender differences, inequalities, hierarchical, heterosexist, capitalist and patriarchal characteristics are represented and reproduced, will form the theoretical backbone of this paper. This is because mass communication devices like newspapers, journals and magazines, television and radio are very effectual in forming, reproducing and fixing the sexist stereotypes (Brunsdon 1997: 115). They determine the rules and dispositions by constituting models. Popular TV series set significant examples and are consumed widely. Therefore one is very likely to glean the everyday forms of femininity and masculinity in these popular TV series (Onur and Koyuncu 2004: 44).

Models of both men's and women's life styles are constructed and represented in these series, and through their collective reception the sexist culture is repro-

duced.¹⁰ This enables sexist control and dominance and spreads it. It is, therefore, important to depict these relationships. Hegemonic codes, motifs, relationships and attitudes are constructed and cultivated by certain processes. These codes, models and icons form a system of categories and values that determines all segments of society including women, men, and children.

Thus, taking the TV series as a starting point for looking at “gender” in popular culture will enable us to understand the construction process of gender. Different relationships that are formed in different places and localities (such as the work place, homes, streets, coffee houses, urban places and cars) all take shape within the practices of the heterosexist system. Despite the fact that the “masculine discourse” is a construct, it corresponds to a certain concrete “subject” that is shaped within power relations of reality.

Gender Identities in TV Series: “Roles” and “Relationships”

As discussed earlier, TV series are important popular culture form, and they have been an academic subject for decades. Academic interest in series has a twofold reason: first of all, these series represent a mirror of social relationships, structures, roles and models; secondly, they have a determining role in “forming and reproducing” social practices (Onur and Koyuncu 2004: 44). What makes TV series more available and more accessible to analysis than more refined cultural forms like literature or art is the technological development and the huge infrastructure it is based on (Brunsdon 1996: 389, Alayoğlu 2004: 34-35). Thanks to technological change, mass communication devices have become tremendously widespread, easily attainable and consumable on a global scale. That makes it important to understand and decipher the sexist hierarchical system through this type of TV programs.

Gender and Division of Private/Public Sphere: “Inside” and “Outside”

The division of labor according to the patriarchal and hierarchical order also reflects the class-based divisions in society.¹¹ It is now possible to see the sexist division of labor and all its manifestations in the public and private distinction of modernism. Wealthy women mostly do not work, and we usually glimpse them at home, in sports centers or restaurants while the women from low-income families are working either at home or in the homes of their employers. We

¹⁰ Connell calls this “hegemonic masculinity,” see Connell 2001.

¹¹ For detailed discussions on the concept of “public sphere”, see Özbek 2004.

mostly see them working in the kitchen preparing food or cleaning the house. Women who have to have a job in order to earn a living have to work “inside” rather than “outside.” Wealthy men, on the other hand, are either at work in a company, riding in their car, or sitting at a bar. Sometimes we see them eating food at home, watching TV or reading the paper. Men are like guests in their homes but like homeowners at work. Class differences do not generate much of a problem for men in defining the “inside” and “outside.” Working class men, on the other hand, work as drivers or night guards, but their position at home is not different from that of wealthy men. They too watch TV and eat, but it is clearly observable that they do not see themselves too closely connected to their “homes,” which are a place for men to rest (Kuhn 1997: 143-154).

Almost all series depict a peculiar relationship between servant and house owner that recalls Hegelian master slave dialectics, and this relationship is mostly characterized as reciprocal respect and affection based on reconciliation. *Asmalı Konak*, *Bir İstanbul Masalı*, *Zerda*,¹² *Haziran Gecesi* (A Night in June)¹³ and other similar series promote a message of reconciliation as if there were no gender-based inequality nor class conflict in public or private spaces.

Upper-class women do not work, and their chief obligation is to regulate and control the private space, in other words the “inside.” On the one hand the upper-class woman decides the menu and organizes the house work, and on the other hand she takes care of the children and their education; and last -but not least- she participates in certain “philanthropic” activities. Upper-class men are mostly represented as successful business men. This casting clearly supports the idea of gender-based public/private distinction and reproduces the capitalist patriarchal view of women’s place in society: she belongs to the private, definitely not to the public sphere. In addition to that sexist division of labor which puts women in a passive role while it posits men in an active one, we can clearly observe a dichotomy between an aggressive and violent discourse connected with men and an emotional, kind and peaceful discourse connected with women. These discursive dichotomies, easily visible in almost all the series, reinforce and reproduce unequal gender-based social positions.

The limits of female sexuality are all determined and decided by men. Seduced and tempted men juxtaposed with sexually repressed women lead us to imagine a kind of women who have no sexuality.¹⁴ The same dichotomy also di-

¹² *Zerda* is the story of a large, traditional, rich and feudal family from East Anatolia in Turkey. The main story revolves around the struggle of a young educated woman - Zerda - against the traditional gender roles and conservative rules in rural areas.

¹³ *Haziran Gecesi* is another Turkish series set in the year 2000 and after. Again the story of this series is a big rich family in a big city. The main subject is the contradictions of gender roles in this family.

¹⁴ In *Aliye*, for example, the star of the serial is a woman who is betrayed by her husband and who is cheating at the same time. She is in love with another man but cannot express her sexuality freely. See, Arslan, A. and Okay M. 2006: 16.

rects us to imagine men as sexually free subjects who cheat regularly and have a life based on sexual pleasure.

*Discourse of Reconciliation:
“Romantic and Sublime Love”*

In spite of dissimilar class-based contents, sexist hierarchical order functions in similar ways with some minor differences. The idea of public/private or inside/outside roles is founded on the same constructive bases. At this particular point the discourse of romantic love is created in order to provide reconciliation and inter-transition between the wealthy family (it might be traditional or modern, feudal or bourgeois) and the people who serve them (Ryan and Kellner 1997: 236). The capitalist patriarchal system softens this sexist masculine discourse (actually makes it seem nonexistent) and reproduces it.¹⁵ A reflection of the continuity and fixation in above-mentioned roles and identities in real life can also be gained from public surveys. For instance, various responses of male viewers concerning characteristics of Seymen Ağa show how they construct masculinity and its typical features: “Seymen Ağa is an exceptionally successful businessman. He has a victorious commercial career and he acts in coordination with his mind rather than his emotions” or “I would like to be a successful and noble employer and businessman like Seymen Ağa.”¹⁶ Underlined features are success and reason rather than emotions. Women viewers on the other hand focus on Bahar’s magnificent love with Seymen: femininity and “sentimentality,” which are strictly attached to each other. Bahar is a well-off person educated in America and interested in “painting,” a passionate art form. To live for “marriage” and “to be married” are the core characteristics of Bahar, and she does it for her love; she can easily dispense of her career and her place in the external world.

Excluded “Other Woman”

Focal points of masculinity and femininity in TV series direct us to this general tableau: Women live a home-centered life mostly with their children. This is valid for all women from all segments of society including the wealthy and the poor, the educated and the non-educated. Taking good care of one’s children

¹⁵ The sexist mentality, women’s inferior role and inequalities in casting can clearly be observed in all kinds of series, independent of their form and content. In both *Asmalı Konak*, which is about traditional values and filmed in feudal settings, and *Bir İstanbul Masalı*, which is set in the “modern” world and filmed in a metropolis, characters like Behiye Hanım and Sümbül Hanım may deceive us into thinking that they are ultimate decision makers. One is represented in a bourgeois setting, the other in a feudal setting, but both of them are the only old women of their houses.

¹⁶ Demolho et al. 2005. In addition cf. <http://www.tempodergisi.com.tr/eglenme/tv/00837>.

and being a good wife are depicted as more valuable than being a successful business woman. This sterile dichotomy locates women at home (cooking, taking care of children, serving the food, etc.) and men in the public space (driving, going to coffee houses or bars, and finally working in their work place). In other words, women are inside while men are outside. In this way, the public space/private space distinction of modernity is reproduced and reinforced on a sexist level.¹⁷ However, some examples of women who exist in the public space as professionals and educated individuals are also presented. These are women who have managed to exceed the private realm and to gain a certain place in the public sphere.¹⁸ Yet these are “bad natured” “problematic,” “ambitious,” “loveless” women who generally do not have healthy relationships and partners in their lives. They have a desperate “will to power” and they are presented as “unhappy,” “dissatisfied and mostly “ugly” (İmamoğlu 1996). They are unmarried women (they could not marry indeed) who fall in love with their bosses and destroy happy marriages. They are “demanding women” (Arslan 2004: 11). Şahika in *Bir İstanbul Masalı* for instance, is a successful business woman, but at the same time she is a spy and she also destroys people’s marriages; she devotes herself to her job since she is by definition an unhappy person. She has succeeded in constructing a public identity for herself in some way, and she has reached a successful point in her career. But her inner conflicts, contradictions and competitions do not take place in the public space but in the private space of her boss and his life. She is defined with respect to the “real woman” at home, the wife of her boss.

Another example of the “other woman” cliché is the mother-in-law. *Asmalı Konak*, *Aliye* (female name), *Bir İstanbul Masalı*, *Zerda*, *Haziran Gecesi*, all these series feature unhappy and dissatisfied mothers-in-law who engage in constant competition with their sons’ wives. Sexist patriarchy constantly underlines the inner competition between women and demonstrates this as the only struggle in the realm of women. Women cannot share men but have to vie for their glorification, while, ironically, they are represented as victims of this competition. This prevents us from seeing the responsibility and role of men in this so-called competition. These roles make it impossible to track and to question the masculine codes within sexist ideology and cultural social practices. These models and relationships prevent us from seeing the hegemonic position of masculinity and conceal masculine power (Onur and Koyuncu 2004, Cengiz 2004: 50-71).

To sum up, we can argue that the male discourse conceals the hegemonic masculine codes and, in addition, that it depicts femaleness and femininity in a

¹⁷ The slogans of the second wave of feminism “private is political” and “we have the streets” are direct challenges to the divisionary structure of the patriarchal system.

¹⁸ This woman makes us think and ask this question: “How was she able to find a job?” Occasionally we think “There must be something wrong with her.” Moreover, mostly these women provide an element of color as the main subject is the male characters.

specifically exaggerated and distorted way thus reproducing and reinforcing the multi-layered heterosexist perspective. In addition to that, this discourse puts forth the following assumptions:

- a) A successful woman, be it in the public or in the private realm, is a bad woman. She lacks certain morals and she is problematic. Her definite place is in her marital “home,” the home of her husband; she is attached to nature and unable to experience her bodily desires and fertility.
- b) The conflict among women is essential, not the conflict between men and women. Women’s struggle among themselves is about men, men are the reference point and women have no particular identity or their own individuality.¹⁹

Militant Sexist Roles

Traditional masculine and feminine roles and sexual identities are strictly and in an exaggerated way underlined by these TV series (Uçan-Çubukçu 2005). We encounter men with guns, and masculine violence in almost all kinds of series.²⁰ On the one hand masculine and feminine identities are exaggerated and conveyed in extreme ways; on the other hand, marginal identities like bisexuality, homosexuality or transsexuality are completely concealed. These exaggerated roles –e. g. *Kurtlar Vadisi* (The Vally of the Wolves)²¹– exaggerates the male status, *Melekler Adası* (Islands of Angles)²² exaggerates the female status) do not have real, actual counterparts in society. These exaggerated and extreme representations of sexual roles and identities are signs of fundamental breaks (Onur and Koyuncu 2004, Cengiz et al. 2004). What lies beneath this exaggeration is a subtext that implies the crisis of sexual and gender identities. With reference to Gramsci and his concept of hegemony (Hall 1997: 88-96, Gans 1999: 55-59), we can argue that these harsh and extreme representations of sexual identities (espe-

¹⁹ For the dichotomies between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law like Ayşe Melek and Bahar, Behiye Hanım and Zerda, etc. see Danişmend 2005: 3.

²⁰ Marginal sexualities are only depicted with humiliation and as unusual figures of entertainment. They are generally excluded, and even when included, we see them marginalized within the heterosexist way of understanding. In addition all these series, *Kurtlar Vadisi*, *Asmalı Konak*, *Zerda*, *Melekler Adası*, etc., underline the male, father, husband in a very strict and ironic way. *Asmalı Konak* also emphasizes exaggerated forms of masculinity and femininity. (Aliye is another extreme. Her motherhood is exasperated and her sexuality is degraded). See Özcan 2006.

²¹ The story of *Kurtlar Vadisi* is the dirty, illegal and scandalous relations between the state, mafia and politicians in Turkey. The masculine roles, violence and power are sublimated in this serie.

²² The subject of *Melekler Adası* is the complicated relations between men and women; these are played out in love affairs, crime, murder, and so on. The women’s characters in this series are not so real; because the women are always characterized as having psychological problems and devilish personalities. In contrast, the men in this series are characterized as ordinary and good people.

cially the role of masculinity) are open to severe discussions and quarrels; in other words, this sharpness reflects the hegemonic struggle.

One of the main tools of this fixation process is “violence.” Violence of men against men and women, as well as war among men are used to affirm masculinity and intersexual power relations.²³ “Defeated men,” “excluded women” and “women subjected to violence,” these themes are taken as bases for hegemonic reproduction (Hall 1999:121). Affirmation and legitimacy are endowed through television series.²⁴ Dying, killing, depression, paranoia, jealousy, crime, obsession, despotism, rapist features, codes, stereotypes and attitudes are all embodied in male characters (Somay 2004: 18).

Hegemonic masculinity, which is constructed within homo-social structures such as the military, sports, finance and the police force, is normalized as the plural male perspective within the real practices of everyday life. Even more important is the legitimation of the realm of competition. Here, we can talk about exclusion and inclusion as two separate but interconnected layered processes of the exclusion of women and the hierarchical relationships between men.²⁵ Beyond physical, emotional and psychological violence, we observe one more realm of violence against women: the economic realm. Women in the public sphere are usually represented as servants, cooks, childcare providers, secretaries, teachers or family planning counselors. These are low income jobs which are easy to give up.²⁶ Thus, the secondary and inferior role that is attributed to women is once again reproduced in the negotiation processes of this sphere. Weberian “ideal types” of man and woman are thus becoming separate clichés with different class belongings.

Comparable forms of relationships can also be observed in the “use of place.” Representations of places (like neighborhoods, houses, cars, companies, courtyards, coffeehouses, bars, restaurants, etc.) and the physical presence of man and woman (Ayata 2002: 37-56) and their agency in those places shape and institutionalize the patriarchal forms of relationships (Onur and Koyuncu: 31-50). What do the men do and what don’t they do at home? Or, what do the women do and what don’t they do? If we look for answers to these questions, we find the following: men watch TV, read newspaper, sleep, eat and chat; women, on the other hand, clean, cook, prepare the meals and wash the dishes, etc.

²³ Mafia series like *Kurtlar Vadisi* provide the leading examples. See Koçak 2005.

²⁴ Hooligan culture in real life, for instance.

²⁵ According to Anthony Giddens, breaks in modernity would have the severest and most radical effects on gender roles. “Masculinity” is seen as the victim of modernization. The reasons for this are that women have gotten their right for representation in public after their long-term struggles, and the advantage that technology provides women. Although masculinity is in crisis, people still internalize the codes in the cultural realm and structure. See Giddens 2004: 11-16.

²⁶ Esmâ and her elder sister in *Bir İstanbul Masalı* teach courses free of charge despite the fact that they are both university graduates and have jobs.

Series like *Bir İstanbul Masalı*, *Zerda*, and *Asmalı Konak* tell the tales of modern urban or rural feudal forms of relationships.²⁷ Although some kinds of relationships change over time, they continue in a form of sameness. For instance, in both contexts the housewives deal with the pedagogical education of their children (Acar-Savran 2004). When we look at the households and ask to what extent the man stays at home, we meet the same panoramas over and over again: the man appears either at breakfast, or while watching TV or in the bedroom. When we look at the homes and ask to what extent the woman stays at home, we notice another particular set of panoramas: the woman appears to be at home almost every hour of the day while doing the housework. In contrast, men instrumentalize their home for their peculiar needs. With this objectification, man dominates the private realm – inside – with the power he gets from the public realm. As discussed above, by regulating the household in general and the woman’s body, identity and attitudes in particular, modernism conceals man’s existence and makes it invisible and, therefore, makes us believe it is constant. At the same time, imprisoning women at home defines household as natural and trivial. The man controls, looks and watches (in a sense like a guest in his home) while the woman irons, washes and cooks. The upper class woman on the other hand deals with the education of her children and the organization of the servants at home. In the public realm rich women engage in philanthropic activities which are not part of the production process. In addition, women, not men, are the subjects of the subjects related to house and housework.

Yet we can still give examples of some breaks in the conditions of masculinity and femininity. For instance, we can assert that the typology of the tough man (*taş firm erkeği*) in *En Son Babalar Dıyar* (The Fathers Learn of it Last)²⁸ started a discussion on the limits of masculinity. Although the traditional place of mother and father is still the same in this particular instance, the ironic depiction of a harsh and seemingly despotic father makes the series different. But it would go too far if we took this example as the expression of a critical evaluation of masculine dominance; rather it represents and reproduces the same uncritical division of space at home (Ayata 2002: 37-56). The *taş firm erkeği*-father is a caricaturized man, who obeys his wife completely. The henpecked man and father of the house is the ironic character of this series. Unlike other models, these models and roles are examples of construction of masculinity in the private realm (Öncü 2002: 183-200).

Another prominent device that is used to reproduce the masculine discourse is the “language” itself (Hall 1999: 108). While tough and despotic men generally use a more violent language (both in form and content), women use more mod-

²⁷ They essentially fix the lived experiences that modernity is unable to overcome or has exactly inherited.

²⁸ *En Son Babalar Dıyar* is a story of a typical middle class family relations. Even though the father is characterized as a masculine role, the family relations are not so male-dominated.

erate language. Women in general speak about their children, health problems, nature, etc. while men speak about their problems at work. Their hard, rational and logical language is attached to masculinity and imagined as male language. Of course, the extent of this generalization varies according to class positions, yet we can still assert a certain classification.

In other words, the way language is used here is a construction of active men as opposed to passive women. Aggressiveness, violence, carnal pleasures (especially in the context of husbands cheating on their wives), rationality, physical occupation, desire, lust are all characteristics that posit men in an active situation. On the other hand, compassion, slowness, softness, emotional sensitivity, romanticism, etc. are features that are attached to passive women.

Heterosexist Hegemony: “Invisibility of Homosexuals”

What is most striking in these series is the coexistence of “invisibility” and the “exaggerated” role of homosexuals within heterosexist-patriarchal language. We only come across exaggerations and travesties of their lives; but we never see homosexual identities outside shows and entertainment programs.²⁹ Zekeriya’s sudden death in *Bir İstanbul Masalı* precisely at the time when the audience learns about his homosexuality is not a simple coincidence. Viewers who did not see that particular episode had no chance to understand that Zekeriya was a homosexual.³⁰ Series fix women in the private realm as “lacking individuals;” men on the other hand, are fixed in the public sphere with all their good or bad sides. Another reading is also possible: there are male homosexuals in this scene (whereas transvestites, bisexuals, transsexuals are excluded), but they actually do not exist. Moreover male homosexuality is used to insult people and is generally depicted as a corrupted, effeminate form of masculinity. In *Avrupa Yakası* (The European Side)³¹, which tells humorous stories of modern and western people, has a similar view of homosexuality: it is just a theme of mockery.³² The so-called

²⁹ *Kurtlar Vadisi*, where hegemonic masculinity is reproduced through all kinds of violent activities; *Melekler Adası*, where the victimization of women is also exaggerated; and finally *Bir İstanbul Masalı*, where heterosexist love affinities are constructed with the help of class negotiations. All these reflect dissimilar aspects of the same dominant discourse.

³⁰ Mehmet Bilal, the scriptwriter of *Aliye*, told me that he stopped showing the homosexual identity of Zekeriya after some objections from both TV administration and viewers. Uçan-Çubukçu, Sevgi, Mehmet Bilal’le görüşme, 25 Şubat 2005, İstanbul.

³¹ *Avrupa Yakası* is a typical example of a sitcom on Turkish TV.

³² Ally Mc Beal is also about well-educated, working, middle class young people, but there is no limitation on displaying different sexual identities. Problems, conflicts, negotiations that those existences derive are not only a matter of discussion on an emotional or psychological level but also on a legal level where norms are constantly re-questioned. For an

representative of the western face of Turkey, i.e. *Avrupa Yakası*, at least talks about homosexuality; other series about rural Turkey and the feudal relationships in underdeveloped parts of the country (*Asmalı Konak*, *Zerda*, *Haziran Gecesi*) pay no attention at all to homosexual identities.

Consequently, there is no place for homosexual identity in these series. Of course, it is possible to track the traces of these identities in other art forms that are essentially based on individual production like literature or cinema (Somay 2004: 18). This kind of cultural products may enable us to follow the traces of repressed dimensions of our sub-conscious or collective unconscious. But heterosexist patriarchal models, roles, norms and practices are realized as forms of inner contradictions even in these rare and valuable examples (Probyn 1997: 137). Moreover, there are no challenging views put forth against heterosexist patriarchy. Furthermore the homosexual does not exist as a “concrete person” as the collective unconscious is afraid of homosexuals as it is afraid of the concrete and full existence of women.

Conclusion: “Negotiation Realm”

We have tried to portray the increasing effect of TV series on popular culture in forming gender stereotypes and reproduction of heterosexist inequalities. Unlike art and literature, TV series have a high tech advantage and thereby are accessible to large portions of society. Looking at TV series from the perspective of power relations enabled us to see encounters, conflicts and most importantly negotiation realms, and this in turn allows us to make visible repressed codes, veiled identities and relationships.

As a result, TV series that we can watch every day realize the militant sexual identities with exaggerations, repressions, insults, ignorance and exclusion. Of course, another reading of the Turkish adventure of modernization, which is based on sexist, patriarchal and capitalist relationships, is also possible, and we may argue that what we encounter is the result of a “legitimation crisis.” That is why I take these TV series as places of hegemonic struggle and negotiation, which I believe is crucial in such a context.

As for the crisis, it has, I think, some basic causes: It is essentially connected with the overall crisis of modernity; however, one might add the fact that the actual presence of women in the public realm, however limited, and the second wave of feminist criticism have not been without effect.

The masculine discourse that we tried to make explicit by examining TV series shows us that there are some breaks in hegemonic masculinity and its social

even more extreme example, one can look at *Angels in America* and more sophisticated forms of relationships and sexual identities.

practices in Turkey. The threat that these carry appears on the level of sexual identities and practices and also as exaggeration/repression mechanisms. The place that gender roles occupy in TV series both constructs the hierarchical structure based on social oppression and violence and provides us with an enormous amount of data to depict the contradictory whole of social conflicts and reconciliations.

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