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Mediated Fantasies of the Family on Turkish Television

Nükheth Sirman

- 1 This paper is an attempt to show that media discourses on the family articulate a particular fantasy of married life and the family. These fantasies provide the contours of the form and the content with which national subjects are attached to marriage and the family. The media in which these discourses take place range from different television reality shows to newspapers and social media posts and blogs. Each of these mediatic forms offers different possibilities and forms through which fantasies of the family are articulated. The sheer numbers and ubiquity of these fantasies point to their importance for society and the subject. Although content-wise these fantasies are certainly not identical, the variations they display only reinforce the strength with which they are able to keep ideas about the family within an especially circumscribed space that will not allow seriously different fantasies to take root. In this paper, I will concentrate on televised fictional series and reality shows aired on television to discuss the setting out of fantasies of the family and the way they encourage strong forms of attachment to their content.
- 2 After briefly discussing the use of the concept of fantasy, I shall provide a panorama of the different media through which the fantasies of the family were made public. Keeping this panorama brief will not be easy since mainstream cultural products such as film and literature have, from at least the turn of the twentieth century, been preoccupied with depicting proper families. While the concept of fantasy will allow me to dwell on which kind of attachment to a particular idea of the family is reinforced, a study of the variations in content will shed light on the changing norms regarding the family that are prevalent at any one moment.

Fantasy and Its Uses

- 3 The concept of fantasy is useful because it indicates that notions about the family are not just ideological but are lodged deep within the subject and therefore difficult to get

rid of. Concepts such as ideology or discourse rely too much on cognition and are unable to take into account the force with which a subject is attached to desire (Ahmed 2004). The shortest way to define fantasy is indeed a setting out of desire. A fantasy is an imagined scene where the subject sees his or her wish being fulfilled or thwarted. The wish usually takes the form of a narrative that promises happiness by overcoming a lack, an absence or a shortcoming and reaching a state of being that is whole or complete once more. Thus, fantasies act as the support for a desire for wholeness which the fantasy scenario sets out (Cowie 1997). Whether the desire is fulfilled or not is not important; what matters is that the desire has been posited in images, sounds and words and that the subjects get very strongly attached to the narrative that sets this desire out. These narratives are powerful and affective and make us move. A fantasy is more than ideology suggests Glynos because not only does it “furnish the subject with an ideal and an impediment to the realization of an ideal,” but because it is also linked to a structure of enjoyment and desire (Glynos 2011: 72). This enjoyment may lie both in the setting out of the desire itself and in its transgression, a transgression that subjects try to cover up and feel guilty about. Thus, the investment of the subject in this structure makes fantasy powerful because it is linked to the very constitution of the subject as a subject of desire. The dissolution of the fantasy is tantamount to the disappearing of the subject as a subject of desire (Glynos 2011:73). Thus, Glynos underlines the specificity of fantasy as describing a specific and strong mode of attachment to a particular scenario, the thwarting of which produces serious disruptions to the subject.

- 4 The work of fantasy in forging strong attachments is not only limited to setting out a narrative of desire, but also serves to cover up the anxiety associated with the intimation that the subject is not full or wholesome, or that life is full of precarity and uncertainty. Imparting this kind of false security has its uses in forging collectivities as well. As argued by Cowie, fantasy “has never been simply a private affair.” (Cowie 1997:137) The narratives provided by fantasy are invested in by citizens, making imagined communities such as the state solid, eternal and invincible. Rose goes as far as claiming that fantasy is the “psychic glue of social reality” (Rose 1996: 3) and because of this, it is a necessary concept in the study of politics. As “fierce blockading protectiveness” (Rose 1996:4), fantasy works to secure state power rooted beyond reason, while, at the same time, indicating by its very presence that there is something in that power that needs to be hidden from view.
- 5 In this paper, I presume that it is not only the state but the family, too, that operates with an excess of authority and solidness that can only be explained by its reliance on a fantasy structure. Since the 1870s, politicians advocating for change in the form of government have turned to the family as a metaphor for forms of sovereignty as well as the basic institution that needed to be transformed. Changing the structure of the family was tantamount to changing the structure of the polity (Sirman 2007). A nuclear family based on the companionship of like-minded spouses would, it was argued, put an end to strife not only within the family, but also within the polity at large. The problem was to create the desire for this kind of marriage and family life among the subjects of the Ottoman Empire and the citizens of the Republic.
- 6 Indeed, fantasmatic narratives of the family have been in circulation for a long time. Novels and films are the two classic forms through which fantasies have circulated. The public narrative that is most current in Republican Turkey’s films and novels goes

something like this: to be strong and to withstand the trials and tribulations of life, one has to form a family based on love and respect (Scognamillo 1998). These families can then form a nation that will be able to stand up against its enemies. What is needed to form a family is a sound marriage based on rational love and understanding. Companionship between spouses, love towards the young and respect towards the elderly thus summarises the formula proposed by Turkish modernism. The protagonists strive for this kind of relationship because they are in the thrall of an uncontrollable emotion called love. However, this is a volatile and deceptive feeling unless it is transformed into a reasoned emotion by going through a whole series of trials and ordeals. This scenario, articulated since 1871 by Namık Kemal in *Vatan Yahut Silistre*,¹ has been reiterated endlessly and is always the same but through forms of representation that vary enormously. The first novels of the nation state, the tradition of the Yeşilçam² film industry and now TV serials repeat this basic scenario and its numerous variations.

- 7 Treating these scenarios as fantasies allows us to study them in terms of what Glynos calls the mode in which the subject is attached to them, that is, as ways to understand the pleasure derived from complying to and resisting accepted scenarios (Glynos 2011: 74-75). The mode of attachment directs attention to the way the subject invests in a particular fantasy. Not only are we concerned here with the foundational relation between the subject and the fantasy, but we are also able to trace the pleasure of transgressing the norms embedded in fantasies. The fantasy itself is in the form of a narrative an analysis of which can give us a clue as to the content of the fantasy, what Glynos calls the normative aspect of fantasy. As with any narrative, what allows the existence of a narrative is that it, in some way or other, involves the breach of a norm (Bruner 1991). What follows is an analysis of the public fantasy regarding the family that dominates Turkish television screens at the moment. I shall look at both the ways this fantasy narrative is set out and the way it is transgressed in TV serials and reality shows. This, I suggest, will serve to provide a way into the study of the forms that violence takes in mediated narratives of marriage and the family.
- 8 The content of fantasy narratives on television screens provides us with a way of identifying the norms that exist regarding marriage and the family, how they are breached, and the way the narrative structure proposes to make things good again. Fantasies regarding married life concentrate on a number of issues ranging from love and its role in making a good marriage, what needs to be done to be happy once in marriage, what relations with children and/or in-laws should be like to what happens when something prevents this scenario from being realized. Usually, a lie or a secret that comes to haunt from the past turns into the precipitating event that launches the narrative. These public stories/narratives have been mediated through some form of representation which becomes the principle way through which subjects make sense of their own lives. A consideration of the circulation of these differently mediated public fantasies raises the question of the extent to which these fantasies work to reinforce public norms and reintegrate transgressive events into socially acceptable lives.
- 9 It has been argued that Turkish television programming has been structured through a basic division based on time: daytime television, supposedly producing 'light' entertainment
- 10 programmes, human interest stories and domestic issues and prime time television, usually starting with the evening news at 7:00 p.m. and continuing either with TV

serials or with 'serious' discussion programmes that go on until midnight, after which repeat programmes take over. Serials themselves are also of two types: series aired everyday hark back to radio plays (*Arkası Yarın*), forms of popular entertainment that dominated before the advent of television in the 1970s and melodramas aired once a week that tend to last at least one season.³ Both of these types of programmes deal with fantasy narratives and their breaches. Their main difference is that daytime television is supposed to deal with real events whereas prime-time serials deal with fictional ones. Such a distinction is not tenable since not only do both sets of narratives share the same foundational fantasy narrative, but they also seem to liberally borrow from each other.

Setting Out Desire in Prime Time Melodrama

- 11 What I call the foundational fantasy is the formula for a companionate type of marriage where reason and passion are balanced with one another to produce the family as a harmonious unit desired by all subjects so as to constitute the social foundation upon which the everyday of the nation-state can be built.⁴ This fantasy scenario is not only the most widely circulated narrative in Turkey, but it has also become normative. Any deviance from getting married, forming a family and having children is considered to be a breach of the norm. The television serials aired on prime time are variations on this basic narrative and start with a breach that set out what the breach is and what needs to be done to rectify the problem and return to the norm. As viewers of TV dramas, the audience takes pleasure in tracing how the story will unfold, and although the desire is for a happy ending, viewers do not want the story to end. And as authors of our own private wish scenarios, we know deep down that the fulfilment of one wish will only be the excuse for developing another story, another scenario.
- 12 Turkish TV serials have by now become famous the world over, especially with family melodramas that were being watched in 75 countries in 2017 throughout Asia, Africa, South America and Europe.⁵ These melodramas narrate what it takes to make a sound family by starting out with a state of turmoil. This turmoil is caused by a serious breach in familial norms. In three of the 13 most watched TV melodramas in September 2018, the breach is precipitated by a rape, and in three others by a baby born out of wedlock.⁶ Other stories imagine other types of breaches: stolen babies, abandoned babies, ill babies, mixed-up babies and the like. The resolution is reached when the guilty party is penalized and the rightful familial (and social) order is re-established: the child is returned to its rightful parents, the lovers are united, broken families restored to normative fullness. Script writers and TV channels that air the series compete to produce the newest and least expected form of breach, one that will address and attract as many viewers as possible. This then produces endless variations of the same narrative of breach, and how this breach is overcome by what redressive action.
- 13 Competition also takes place regarding various stages of the narrative. A trope introduced in one narrative catches on, is repeated and embellished in subsequent plots and finally becomes normative. One such example has to do with the form in which proposals of marriage take place. The man organizes a veritable *mis-en-scène*, with music, flowers and ambience carefully plotted. The main element is surprise and a favourite is the man suddenly kneeling down in the middle of a busy but plush restaurant, the woman taken by surprise and dithering for a few minutes before finally

accepting the proposal in the midst of applause from the other patrons of the restaurant. Variations include standing in the midst of a field of yellow daffodils, or being walked blindfolded to a pergola full of roses and sweet-scented candles, a walkway strewn with rose petals, helium-filled balloons and even airplanes tagging the marriage proposal.⁷ Along with such scenes of proposals, other scenarios also accompany these fantasies of marriage: the inevitable white wedding gown, often turned into an important moment of the narrative, marking either the discord and the tension that accompanies a 'wrong' marriage or the harmony and companionship that a 'right' marriage brings. These symbols of a happy marriage now also colour the pages of glossy magazines, blogs and Facebook posts as well as in life story accounts of marriage and the family where the same scenarios are turned into indispensable norms.⁸

- 14 These scenes are designed to fulfil a desire for romanticism imputed to women and legitimized simply by being repeated in series after series. This means that 'female desire' is, to use a phrase coined by Coward (1984), depicted as men displaying their romantic attachment through planned action, proving that they care, that they, too, share the fantasy scenarios that women are supposed to live by. The desire for this romantic behaviour also restricts such behaviour to special occasions, to a time out of the ordinary, allowing and legitimating the everyday aggressive masculinity supposedly needed to protect the family. The special, ritualistic occasion that the marriage ceremony marks is replete with acts that have become normative through repetition: tying a red ribbon around the bride's waist by her brother or father, showing that she is a virgin is, for example, one such ritualistic act which become normalised through repetition in serials. Another ritualistic act that has become normative is the final kiss on the forehead that the groom gives to the bride after the completion of the formal procedures. This act, which in one series⁹ was explained as marking an insoluble bond that has been fated rather than a passionate bond that could be ephemeral, is a symbolic way of turning marriage into a relationship of honour between unequal parties rather than sexual desire, displaying, as it does, the kissing man and the kissed bride.¹⁰ It should, however, also be remembered that in serials as well as in traditional Yeşilçam movies, the forehead is also where a bullet is placed when the individual transgresses the honour code.
- 15 Many commentators find that serials deal with norms on which most viewers would agree and that they therefore articulate the most conservative positions regarding the family and gender positions within the family.¹¹ And yet in the last 10 to 15 years serials that seriously questioned these accepted positions have been produced and appreciated by audiences (Akınerdem, Sirman 2018). Serials such as *Merhamet* (Kanal D, 2013), *Kara Para Aşk* (ATV, 2014) and *Hayat şarkısı* (Kanal D 2016) depict women who have a mind of their own and are not dependent on men for a living. However, the fact that they too end up with a kiss on the forehead makes the norm all the more powerful. Nevertheless, these serials do open up a space in which traditional gender roles are made visible and thus turned into issues for discussion. Marriage stories revolve around a limited number of plots based on socially accepted norms: a good marriage is a marriage of equals and marrying the enemy as a way of making peace are two such plots.¹² In what follows I shall briefly look at one example from each of these plot types in order to show how the fantasy that serves to re-establish the norm is set out. Since

fantasy is structured as a narrative, I shall use narrative analysis in depicting the fantasies which these two rather typical series set out.¹³

- 16 Serials which focus on the marriage of equals is based on the notion that these are right marriages and that marriage between partners who are not equal are wrong marriages. A wrong marriage will eventually bring chaos and destruction to the family. Equality can be achieved in many forms: in social status and wealth, in education, or in morals. *Fazilet Hanım ve Kızları* (Star TV, 2017-2018) was a story of a young woman from a poor background who falls in love with a rich and frivolous young man, a love that is impossible. The young woman, herself serious and realistic, knows very well that that is so, but a series of events brings the two together and they start dating. The young man has an older brother who, like the young woman, is a serious and responsible young man. He falls in love with his brother's girlfriend but, like any honourable man would do, he keeps his distance, respectful of his brother's feelings. Things really become impossible when she too realizes that her love is really for the older brother, that her feelings towards the younger brother were just a meaningless infatuation. From this point onwards, the viewer wants the lovers to unite and somehow overcome this moral obstacle and watches the series to see how this desired end will come about.
- 17 The norm that allows the lovers to unite is one that states that marriages should be concluded between people who are of the same status, a form of homogamy. The series therefore has to show that the relations between the older brother and the young woman are between equals. This is achieved in two ways: the younger brother is made to act in unacceptable ways and deserves a punishment which he receives at the end by falling into abject poverty through his own desire to revenge his injured pride. Secondly, the older brother is shown to be adopted, the son of a poor construction worker accidentally killed by his boss who then adopts the baby. Equalisation in class origin is reinforced by equalisation in family history too when the young woman finds out that her father was not the epitome of moral righteousness when she learns that he had forced her mother into marriage by raping her. Like marriages like, the villains get punished, the rich and powerful family is destroyed, but true lovers live happily ever after.
- 18 But there are also other norms that are breached in this story. One of the most current ethical principles of masculinity in Turkey is that men must not lust after their brothers' (and friends' since all men are brothers) women.¹⁴ Women, in this formula, are seen as devious manipulators who plant the seeds of discord among men. Thus, the plot of the series has to strain itself to find a way to overcome these principles and legitimately unite the true lovers. In the world of series, this is not difficult. The younger brother finds out about the feelings of the two and begins to taunt them without letting on that he knows. But the real punishment he meets out to his brother and girlfriend comes when he exposes the family secret: his older brother is really the son of a construction worker accidentally killed by his father who subsequently 'buys' the son and brings him up as his own. This plot has many twists and turns, such as the widow of the construction worker looking for her son, the story of the other brothers and sisters of the protagonists, and, above all, the DNA test to establish parenthood, one of the recent staples of television melodramas. What is important here is that although the viewer agrees with the norms of femininity and masculinity depicted in the series, it nevertheless desires an escape from these norms, a space where subjects can enjoy this transgression. It is also the transgression, the breach of the norms, that

makes the punishment meted by the younger brother acceptable, but only to a certain degree. Having gone too far in his revenge, the taunting and the exposition of the DNA test are evaluated as forms of violence that are excessive. Thus, one of the subplots of the story distinguishes just violence and unjust violence: although the younger brother and the biological mother have been wronged and deserve retribution, they both take their revenge too far and end up being punished themselves.

- 19 The other series, *Siyah Beyaz Aşk* (Kanal D, 2017-2018) is a reverse version of the taming of the shrew where it is the man that gets tamed through marriage and love rather than the woman. The relationship is wrong from the start. He is a hit man for a mafia-like character and she is a brain surgeon. He tricks her into treating a man who was shot and she hears and sees things she should not have seen or heard. He then forces her to marry him as a way of keeping her alive and ensuring her silence. His anger and violence are explained by the fact that, having witnessed the murder of the man he thinks is his father, he avenges this death by killing the murderer. The plot is more complex, with negotiations regarding what fatherhood and motherhood mean, whether it is nature or nurture that makes a father, the role of relatives in a person's life, the right balance between passion and companionship in marriage and the like. Through the various episodes we watch her see the good heart that he has, his bravery and his sense of fairness. He, in turn, shows her that life is not black and white and that even the most honourable person can commit a crime. She experiences this firsthand when she shoots the man who has killed her brother, thus equalising the protagonists, one having killed for his father, the other for her brother. It all ends well when she manages to make him see that it is not the biological father, but the man who brought him up who gave him the values that he has been living by. This narrative is based on a well-known female desire: the woman and love as healers and redeemers of a man, a trope which the narrative verbalises when the man says "you loved me for my weaknesses, my wounds." Having thus faced his problems and seen the good in himself, he is rightfully worthy of becoming a father and, with the death of the biological father and the eviction of his relatives from the house, they live happily ever after as a reconstituted nuclear family: mother-father-baby and father's widowed mother.
- 20 The series also shows the process through which partners are equalised but what makes this story really enjoyable is the theme of marrying the enemy. Thrown together in this marriage, the man and the woman are attracted to one another but nevertheless keep their distance from each other for 12 episodes before succumbing to the passion growing in them. Marrying the enemy narratives require a strong woman, one who can hold her own in a contest of wills. This then requires the depiction of a femininity that is outside the accepted gender norms. Indeed, towards the end of the serial, the surgeon asserts that it was she who decided that this forced marriage would continue and this assertion turns into a declaration of a woman's determination and tenacity. And yet in the series as well as in the numerous films, novels and serials that use this formula the strong woman also gets tamed in the process of turning the volatile young man into a respectable head of the family.¹⁵ Thus we are again faced with a transgression of gender norms that provides enjoyment, but which then gets reversed in the final resolution when both protagonists are made to accept the required gendered position.
- 21 This series also has something to say about crime and its punishment. The focus here is the issue of proper fatherhood as exemplified by the relationship between the mafia

strong man, the man he thinks is his uncle and the man who brought him up. This uncle, the protagonist's biological father, is the real villain who uses a hitman to kill his son's adopted father and then makes his son kill the hit man to avenge the death of his father. This uncle/father is the source of all the evil that the series recounts and meets his own end by burning alive in a fire he himself has kindled. This death by burning seems to expiate all the crimes committed by the protagonist. The surgeon also pays her debt to society for having shot a man by being almost suffocated to death by her niece. Thus, here too, violence is introduced in the equation of norms and their transgression, carefully delineating what a just measure of violence would be for each type of transgression.

- 22 These two serials conform to another important norm of Turkish familial love: understanding the difference between love and passion. Sound marriages are founded not on passion, which is fleeting, but on true love, which requires companionship, respect and an acceptance of hegemonic gender roles. Events and their resolution bring the protagonists to this understanding. These serials thus set up rational love (as opposed to passionate love) and marriage as the proper desire for both men and women and by placing innumerable obstacles in its realisation, attach the viewer to the normative fantasy, while also allowing her to enjoy the transgression of the norm. Visual images of ideal homes and dress codes designed according to the requirements of class accompany the stories, allowing desire to attach itself to particular objects: a fashionable dress or an L-shaped sofa that end up by indexing the fantasy itself. The narratives thus make transgression temporary and enjoyable because they guarantee a safe return to the norm. It also makes violence acceptable as long as it will lead to a happy and just resolution.¹⁶ The series makes us ponder over the norms, allow space for enjoying transgressions but then reasserts the norm. What has been achieved is the creation of nuances, of if/then clauses that complicate the straightforward application of the norm, providing caveats and quid pro quo's in the negotiation of the subject with the norm.
- 23 The type of mediation of the fantasies proposed by a serial are both general and extremely personal. The viewer can and does invest in this fantasy to varying degrees. This is because the viewer views, that is, is positioned at a distance from this fantasy. She (or the viewer) will assess the story, see whether it is plausible or not, accept some of the proposition, reject others without being entirely at the level of consciousness. These public fantasies are mediated through other televised forms such as reality shows. A brief description of narratives on daytime reality shows will show the extent to which familial narratives share the same fantasy scenarios.

Stories of Transgression

- 24 Reality shows on daytime television in Turkey are often adaptations of formats taken from the United States (Akınerdem 2015). They do, however, also have a more local precedent. The third page of newspapers are known to carry what are called human interest or 'social issue' stories which, in effect, turn out to be harrowing stories of familial or, indeed, familiar violence: cases of child abuse, violence against women and murder are displayed here alongside stories of violence perpetrated by neighbours and acquaintances. The type of stories found in these pages are more or less comparable to those that appear on daytime television. They are all stories of violence.¹⁷

- 25 In the shows, families apply to the hosts of the shows in order to solve some familial problem. Müge Anlı (*Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert*, ATV), working with the police force, hosts a show which investigates crimes that have been covered over, while Esra Erol defines her show (*Esra Erol'da*, ATV) as dealing with issues regarding the “custody of children and of emotional losses.”¹⁸ Families who have applied to the shows are present in the studio in front of audiences composed of viewers supplied by relevant agencies. The problem the family wants to resolve is laid out by the applicants in such a detailed way that it is often difficult for the uninitiated to follow the thread. These details, involving various family members, friends and neighbours are as complicated and entertaining as the complex plots of the serials and resemble them so much that one is made to wonder who is borrowing stories from whom. These stories are often complex cases of theft, deceit and, in the case of Müge Anlı, even murder. The guests in the studio often include parties accused by the applicant of having wronged them and inevitably quarrels erupt between the parties, voices are raised and the hosts try to keep a semblance of order with difficulty.
- 26 Both shows aim at finding an answer to the query that applicants come with. The hosts have a team of investigators at their disposal who undertake the work of finding missing persons, documents and links between the protagonists that will illuminate the case at hand. This means that one query continues over a number of episodes, as long as it takes to find the answer. Sometimes the perpetrator or the missing person is found, sometimes the application turns out to be a hoax and, sometimes, it becomes clear that no solution will be possible. The shows are aired every day at the same hour. Each case receives enough time to set out the issue, listen to all the parties involved and to decide on a course of further action regarding who is going to be heard and what investigation is going to take place. When everything is known about a case at any one moment, the host introduces another case which she also exhausts. The following day the same cases are brought before audiences, especially if there are any developments with the case. Such appearances continue until a conclusion is reached.
- 27 The repetition of the cases over time produces a sense of familiarity in viewers who form their own opinions about who is right, who is lying and who is the real victim. The concatenation of the same case over time produces the effect of a serialised story with a narrative that viewers are familiar with from watching prime-time serials, a narrative that deals with fantasies of the family and their transgression. The hosts and the guests as well as the studio audience evaluate the narrative presented by the applicant in terms of the normative narrative of the family and they carefully identify and name each norm that the act discussed has breached. Each breach is also accompanied by the setting out of the price that the perpetrator of the breach has to pay. Thus, when a woman who runs away with another man leaving her child behind is barred by her in-laws from seeing the child, this will be seen as rightful punishment by the audience. The hosts and guests might also approve of a woman trying to divorce her violent husband as long as she does not have an affair with another man. Many of the narratives that applicants provide have their counterparts in narratives on which prime-time serials are based. Demands for a DNA test is an example of such a narrative trope and lead to accusations of false parenthood, a favourite topic on these shows. Mothers-in-law will claim that their daughters-in-law tricked them into thinking that her child was their biological grandchild when, in fact, she had conceived it in an adulterous relationship.¹⁹

- 28 The anchor women, the hosts of the programmes, provide the identity of the shows. Müge Anlı is aggressive, “scientific” and logical while Esra Erol is more emotional, caring and understanding of the dilemmas her guests are faced with. Müge Anlı is even seen as being more masculine since she is investigating crimes, a task associated more with men (Çavdar 2019). It is these characteristics of the hosts which lend the shows their character and make them watchable over time. Nonetheless, the shows share the suspense, the drama, the normative dilemmas and even the plot that characterise the narratives of prime-time serials.
- 29 In one Esra Erol case a young man and a young woman brought up in a state orphanage get married, the woman then runs away with another man, gets divorced and then regrets her action and asks for ex-husband’s forgiveness. A serial aired in 2018, (*Çarpışma*, Show TV), tells the story of a woman whose policeman father gets killed in action as a result of which she is placed in an orphanage where she meets the boy who becomes the love of her life. But then, he becomes a policeman and fearing that he will suffer her father’s fate, she leaves him. The similarity between these stories are striking. There is, of course, an important difference between the serials and live shows. The former are fictional constructions and an easy resolution can be reached quickly, whereas in the live shows solutions are always temporary and nothing gets resolved easily.
- 30 The shows encourage friends and neighbours, people who know something about the case, to call in and air their opinion; sometimes a protagonist who does not want to appear in the show is contacted by phone. Present in the studio also are experts, psychologist, or lawyers who present their opinion on the case. Often, people who apply to the show do so as part of a strategy of defeating an opponent. They will have a goal in mind and will try to use the show in order to achieve it. In one case on the Esra Erol show, a woman applied saying that her daughter-in-law had kidnapped her son and that her grandchild was in fact another man’s. The inevitable DNA test was conducted, showing that the grandchild was indeed her son’s and, as it turned out, the son, wary of the bickering between his mother and his wife, had packed up his house and family and moved to another town. What is, of course, interesting is that the applicant had asked for a DNA test because she knew that Esra Erol’s program format was about establishing parenthood. Similarly, in one infamous case on the Müge Anlı show, the Palu family applied to the show because two women from the family were missing. It turned out, however, that the family knew very well that the women had been murdered by their son-in-law, a criminal who posed as healer and sage. The women had, in all probability, used the show to get rid of this powerful man who had managed to put the whole family under his control.²⁰
- 31 What is most apparent in these shows is that all the stories are stories of transgression and extreme violence. These cases show instances of family strife that are as far removed from the fantasy scenarios as possible and yet they are made possible because of the fantasy scenarios. It is as if they are there to demonstrate the dark side of the family. But what these shows demonstrate most blatantly is the violence with which transgression is punished. During the airing of these shows the screen turns into a veritable display of an array of emotions ranging from anger to grief and repentance. Abuses are hurled right left and centre, especially when the parties accuse each other of lying in front of the cameras. The television studio turns, in effect, into an informal courthouse with the camera acting as judge. The intensity of these emotions displays

the extent to which we should understand emotions as investments in social norms and fantasies (Ahmed 2004:56).

Conclusion

- 32 The norms and fantasy scenarios through which they circulate have power because people invest in them. Those who transgress these norms are therefore often faced with varying degrees of violence. If the violence in the studio, or indeed in the words of newspaper reports on family violence, show the intensity of the subject's and society's investment in fantasies of the family, they also indicate that pleasure too is derived from these transgressions. However, pleasure can only be had if the transgression is kept within certain limits. In the series, the transgression is always rectifiable; the unfolding of the plot reduces the amplitude of the intensity with which a breach of the norm is received, finally turning it into a memorable event that makes the fantasy of the family even more pleasurable. In the studio, it is the format of the show that contains the violence by providing not only a safe place where disputes can be acted out, but also allowing for small measures of revenge and retribution by the injured party. Moreover, the violence shown in cases of transgression is not only limited but also justifiable. These forms of violence are not necessarily regarded as transgressions themselves but as just punishment for the breach of norms.
- 33 There are also instances where the violence that comes with transgression is excessive even if still seen as just. This is the violence that comes when the fantasy is exposed for what it is, a fantasy scenario without which neither the family nor the nation can see itself as being whole. Such is the case when violence is perpetrated by women on men rather than the other way around. A number of cases have appeared before Turkish courts where women have murdered their partners in self-defence and have received much higher sentences compared to men who murdered their spouses. One case in particular, where the woman spectacularly cut off the head of the man who had been raping her for a number of years, is worthy of attention. She is now serving a life sentence, an excessive punishment for an excessive act. Such excessive violence draws attention to the injustice involved in gender relations and exposes the patriarchal premises on which fantasy scenarios rely. The violence meted out to acts targeting the fantasy itself and aiming at its dissolution is geared to annihilating the perpetrators rather than simply admonishing them.
- 34 Many commentators have argued that media representations of violence against women perpetrate this violence through the way they represent it (Ekal, Eldén 2014). To use de Lauretis' terms, they argue that the depiction of the rhetoric (or here, the act) of violence is itself a rhetoric of violence, effecting a discursive form of violence on what was already violence (De Lauretis 1987). What I have argued here is that this violence of the rhetoric is not just produced by mass media representations, but just like the pleasure derived from fantasy scenarios, is inherent to the fantasmatic foundation of the stories they relate. This violence should be seen as the accompaniment of the pleasure that subjects derive from transgressing the norms regarding the family. Looking at mediated representations of the family and of familial violence in Turkey, therefore, requires the recognition of the fantasmatic desire that characterise notions of the family. Treating family scenarios on TV screens as mediated

fantasies of marriage therefore can go a long way in accounting for their ubiquity, their repetitiveness and the various forms of violence that surround them.

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NOTES

1. A play written by the writer and statesman Namık Kemal (b. 1840- d.1888) considered now to be the first nationalist play of the Ottoman period. See Şerif Mardin 1962. For an analysis of the play in terms of the setting out of gendered national desires, see Sirman 2000a. For an account of the role of love in early Turkish novels, see Sirman 2000b.
2. Yeşilçam is the name of the street in Istanbul on which most film production companies were situated. The term is used to depict the melodramas that were produced there that have become the hallmark of what we mean by Turkish film.
3. Recently many such serials have been cut short because they have not had the required numbers of viewers. See Akınerdem, Sirman 2018 for a review of these serials.
4. The use of the family as a vehicle to talk about the nation is not peculiar to Turkish TV dramas. Many BBC series such as *Poldark* (2015) or British Netflix series such as *Outlander* (2014) use the same trope. What is different is the means through which the nation-building nuclear family is constructed. While sex and class are prominent in British dramas, their Turkish counterpart emphasize sacrifice and undifferentiated organic community.
5. Fatih Metin, Avaz, Deputy Minister for the Economy, TRT AVAZ, June 29, 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qabyMBvvbok>
6. *Can Kırıkları* (ATV) and *Gülperi* (Show TV) are two examples of serials that start out with rape, and in *Ağlama Anne* (ATV) and *Kızım* (TV8), the female protagonist has a child out of wedlock. I calculated the number of viewers of the serials ratings serials for a period of one month by following the ratings published in various blogs such as @raniniTV.
7. Entries on facebook and other social media accounts show that such forms are sought after by contributors to these pages. See Feyza Akınerdem in this issue.
8. See the papers by Feyza Akınerdem and by Belgin Tekçe in this issue.
9. *Karağül* (Fox, 2013-2016).
10. One commentator sees these acts as provincial traditions that have now come to take root in modernist urban settings as part of a conservative gender regime that serials are reintroducing. See Tekelioğlu 2010.
11. See Tekelioğlu 2010.
12. For an analysis of love and marriage in early Republican novels, see Sirman 2000b.
13. The analysis that follows is based on plots and narrative structure, the characters as actants, and the form the resolution takes place in each case. Apart from exemplifying two different forms of plot, the choice of serial is deliberately quite arbitrary. Any other two serial could equally well illustrate the point.
14. Other serials such *Kuzey Güney* (Kanal D 2011) deal with brothers in love with the same woman. Nazım Hikmet Ran, well-known poet, refers to 16th century cleric şeyh Bedrettin's phrase to describe the brotherhood of men as “together in everything apart from the cheek of the sweetheart” (*Yarin yanağından gayrı her yerde her şeyde hep beraber*) in his *şeyh Bedrettin Destanı* (Ran 1978).
15. This formula was first used as trope for gender by Halide Edip Adivar in her novel *Kalp Ağrısı* (Sirman 2000b).
16. See Akınerdem, Sirman 2018 for an analysis of melodramatic serials from the perspective of truth and justice.
17. For an account of newspaper reports of violence against women, see Ekal, Eldén 2014.

18. Akınerdem, personal communication. Akınerdem, in her doctoral dissertation studies a marriage programme hosted by Esra Erol which has since been found to conflict with the family values of the nation and was thus removed from the screen by legal decree. This is the new format that Erol has designed.

19. In point of fact, there is a serial on prime time running since 2018, *Bir Zamanlar Çukurova* (ATV) that deals with this same issue.

20. The familial relations in the family were so complicated that one newspaper even published a genealogical chart to help readers follow the case. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/palu-ailesi-olayi-nedir-41079786>

ABSTRACTS

This paper proposes to study TV serials as instances of a nationally sanctioned fantasy of the family. They set out, in an exaggerated mode, everyday problems encountered in families and thus allow viewers to negotiate between their own realities and the norm and follow the resolution offered by the serials to issues of family and desire. The concept of fantasy, it is argued, is useful in looking at affective cultural products such as melodramatic TV serials since they deal with the nature of attachment to others and the acceptability or not of desire. The paper compares TV plots with those that reality shows deal with, indicating the extent to which these plots are similar to one another. In both cases, the notion of fantasy allows us to see the relationship between desire and the transgression of a norm, as well as the violence that accompanies these transgressions.

INDEX

Keywords: TV serials, reality shows, fantasy, attachment, desire, transgression, violence

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