



The reflection of the struggle against male violence on digital platform TV series: *Hükümsüz* and *Mezarlık*¹

Received: 05 October 2023; Accepted: 30 October 2023

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“Isn’t the real life of women so different from fairy tales? Cinderella drops her shoe while running away from the ball, and in reality women run away from their murderer” (*Hükümsüz*; season 1, episode 7).

Abstract

On digital platforms, works challenging patriarchal ideology are becoming increasingly available. Notably, the television series ‘Hükümsüz,’ which premiered on the Exxen platform in 2021, and ‘Mezarlık,’ which made its debut on Netflix in 2022, have emerged as groundbreaking projects shedding light on the alarming surge in femicides in Turkey in recent years. Both ‘Mezarlık’ and ‘Hükümsüz’ address critical issues: the former reveals the involvement of the police and the state in the murders of women, while the latter underscores the role of gender inequality in femicides and questions the patriarchal system. This study takes a feminist perspective to examine these series as vehicles that challenge male dominance. The representations within these dramas are analyzed concerning gender roles, perpetrator accountability, the portrayal of female victimization due to male violence, the politics of femicide, state responsibility, and efforts to struggle male violence. Utilizing textual analysis, a qualitative research method, it becomes evident that these series are intentionally crafted to subvert the prevailing patriarchal ideology.

Keywords: male violence; digital platforms; TV series; *Hükümsüz*; *Mezarlık*

1. Introduction

The second-wave feminism argument, “*the private is political,*” can be seen as a turning point in women’s history (Gürkan, 2020). Since many domestically harmful situations, especially “violence” as a phenomenon that highlights gender power disparities, now exist. The issue of violence, which is confined to the private sphere as a domestic issue, expressed in our culture with the words “an arm is broken but remains in the sleeve”, will be brought into the public sphere and discussed by feminists. Violence, which is used by men to establish their dominance over women and to subjugate them in the patriarchal system, takes the form of physical, sexual, and economic control, and humiliation, which reduces women to subservience and makes them reliant on men (Yarar, 2015: 21). When the woman refuses to submit to the man, in another sense where he is unable to establish his dominance over her or, to put it another way, carries it to the highest level, he could kill her.

¹ This paper was presented at the International Conference Congenere 2023 in Girona.

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As Radford and Russell point out, violence against women is linked to their gender, and this long-term violence can have fatal consequences (Campbell & Runyan, 1998: 347). With a straightforward question, Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood determines how women experience the threat of being killed. Atwood asks what aspect of the opposite sex makes a woman and her friend, feel most threatened. While her male buddy fears being mocked by women, women fear being killed by men (Caputi & Russell, 1992: 13). In her book *Dead Women's Hometown*, Burçe Bahadır uses a woman's experience to illustrate this situation: "Let a woman believe a man if he threatens to kill her" (Çavlin, 2020: 378-379). Masculine power is a component of state power in this social framework founded on unequal power relations between the sexes. In the patriarchal social order, the state is empowered to determine who is entitled to live, whose life is valuable, and who is worthless. We are dealing with a system where the state defends men in many ways while they murder women for reasons such as upholding their honor, tradition, or even out of jealousy. While women who do not accept gender roles and do not conform to norms are punished by men, the patriarchal state that protects them can side with men in this punishment process.

Seda Kurt's killer², whose case I followed after she was murdered by her lover in 2019, was only apprehended thanks to the Women's Defense Network's involvement. The fact that the murderer was only apprehended thanks to the women's movement's assistance amply demonstrates the state's attitude regarding the crimes committed. The fact that femicide has escalated in Turkey over the past few years is also a sign of the political establishment's responsibility, as seen by the claim that "femicide is political". Violence, according to Ertürk (2015: 18–19), "*increases even more when the government is shaken, persuasion mechanisms fail, and tensions between alternative, competing segments of society rise*". The dominant family structure also broke down and the gender aspect of violence became more evident with the destabilization of the nation-state following the Cold War, the dissolution of the normality imposed by the state, and the destabilization of power in the private/public arena. Violence against women also rose in tandem with women's rights demands. Turkey left the Istanbul Convention³, a crucial international accord to address violence against women, by presidential decree in 2021, increasing the accountability of governmental agencies in such incidents of assault.

The media, which occasionally uses language and imagery that legitimizes this violence, is one of the mechanisms behind it, along with political power contributing to violence against women. When violence that sows fear and demands total submission to authority is depicted on television, according to Gerbner (2014: 341), it is related to "social norms and relationships, about goals and means, about winners and losers, about the risks of life and the price paid for breaking society's rules". It makes several points. In this context, the hegemony of the patriarchal order is reinforced by the reproduction of violence against women in the media. As Wykes & Welsh (2009: 14) point out, women are portrayed as responsible for their deaths in media reports about femicide. This is how the report on Sara Thornton's

2 In front of her 4.5-year-old child, Seda Kurt's boyfriend killed her in Avcılar, Istanbul, in 2019. After the murder, the accused fugitive Ercan Akkas left the country and was gone for a while. The fight of the women's defense network led to the discovery of an eyewitness in Georgia who was then brought to Turkey to give testimony. The court decided to extradite the offender to Turkey as a result of the witness' testimony. However, soon after the eyewitness account, it was revealed that the defendant/perpetrator Akkaş, who was detained in Georgia, had passed away. The struggle of the feminist movement has aided in the murder's investigation.

3 (2) "The Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence is a major human rights treaty establishing comprehensive legal standards to ensure women's right to be free from violence".

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murder by her former policeman husband was put together in the Guardian newspaper. The news about Thornton includes Sarah's abortions, how she spent her earnings, her previous marriage, her attempts at success, her mental illness, her career, her trips to conferences and her dislike of underwear. Thornton was declared guilty by the media both for these qualities and for being too liberal, too independent, and too feminist. As can be seen, the media portrays femicide and male violence as a continuation of the patriarchal ideology. Instead of defending the victim and exposing the offender, it justifies masculine violence (Çavlin, 2020: 386). This scapegoating of women and justification of violence are both conceptual constructs that represent patriarchal ideology.

Ideology, however, can also be represented at the level of representations that express the interests of the lower social strata and enable them to define themselves in the political sphere rather than just as an illusion that hides the historically and socially established inconsistencies in reality. Hegemony is constituted at this level, according to Sançar (1997: 30). The attempt of the dominant class to establish hegemony as a means of domination and a way of consenting to the system sometimes meets with resistance and instability. The dominant ideology constantly encounters resistance that "consistently contradicts the picture that the dominant ideology draws of itself and its social relations" as it attempts to re-establish social order (Fiske, 2003: 225). By building a counter-hegemony in the areas of language practices, cultural values, habits, and ritual activities, this resistance is accomplished (Eagleton, 1996: 165). In the words of Foucault, "Where there is power, there is resistance". No power relationship represents total superiority; thus, it always contains forces that are hostile to it and might even work to destroy it. Using the democratized message delivery of mass communication by countercultural groups can also liberate classes that will fight against the hegemonic ideology. Many feminist theorists also find this concept of resistance within power relations beneficial; (Mills, 2003: 125; Oskay, 2000: 337) argues that problems arising from social, political and cultural forces can only be solved by socio-political intervention and resistance (McPhail, Busch, Kulkarni, Rice, 2007: 818-820 cited: Yarar, 2015: 20). In addition, the media's reporting on women who have been murdered and subjected to violence, as well as various institutions' discourses on the issue, have increased awareness of the violence that women endured (Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, 2020: 7). The possibility of resisting violence is also reflected in some of the dramas that are broadcast on digital platforms belonging to the media. The feminist perspective in crime series is revealed in this context by Gray Cavender and Nancy C. Jurik's (2017), *Feminist Themes in Television Crime Dramas* and Jessica Ford, and Amy Boyle's (2021) *The Emotional Detective: Gender, Violence, and the Post-Forensic TV Crime Drama*. According to Cavender and Jurik's (2017) research, the feminist crime genre emerges with the representation of women as police officers or private detectives. These series build a woman-centered narrative genre by touching on social issues related to women. However, Ford and Boyle (2021) contend that even though crime shows with female detectives sometimes take a sexist, sometimes postfeminist, sometimes feminist, but generally ambivalent approach to women, emotions, violence, and investigative labor, the shows have a woman-centered narrative that looks into violence against women. The subject of this research Hükümsüz, a television series that premiered on the Exxen⁴ platform in 2021, and Mezarlık, a series that premiered on Netflix

4 Acun Ilıcalı, the proprietor of Acun Medya, established the digital broadcasting platform Exxen, which debuted in 2021. Ilıcalı explained the founding story of the platform as follows: "Young people and kids are seen holding

in 2022, both brought attention to the subject of women being murdered, which has been more prevalent in Turkey in recent years. They are innovative productions that address this issue in this way. The *Hükümsüz* series, which questions patriarchy and tells the story of femicide from a political perspective, and the *Mezarlık* dramas, which also reveal the role of the police and the state in the killing of women, are examples of productions that are examined in this study as being critical of the dominant ideology. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

(i) Whether or if the dramas *Hükümsüz* and *Mezarlık* discuss violence against women in the context of sociocultural gender power dynamics or as a personal matter?

(ii) Do digital platforms give performances that challenge patriarchal hegemony more opportunities?

(iii) Do dramas concerning femicide have a structure that runs counter to the prevalent patriarchal worldview, depending on the feminist perspective?

In this study, a comprehensive analysis of the series was conducted using parameters that encompass gender roles in dramas, the accountability of the perpetrators, the portrayal of female victimization in cases of male violence, the underlying politics of femicide, the state's responsibility, and approaches to combating male violence. Simultaneously, in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from women's organizations such as *Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı*, *Kadın Savunma Ağı*, *Kadın İşçi*, *Ekmek ve Gül*, and *Üniversiteli Kadın Kolektifi*.

2. State-Media Relations, the Feminist Movement and the Fight Against Femicide

Women face significant risks, as exemplified by a woman interviewed by Burçe Bahadır (2014) for her book *Kadınlar Memleketi*, who emphasized the need for women to take threats seriously (Çavlin, 2020: 379). The increasing incidence of femicides in today's society is not detached from the prevalent culture of violence. Ertürk (2015: 18–19) attributes the surge in violence, particularly from the last quarter of the 20th century, to the breakdown of persuasive processes and escalating tensions among different societal sectors. Power dynamics in public and private spheres are waning, leading to blurred lines of normality defined by the hierarchical nation-state power. In this context, violence becomes a central tool for competing power entities and assumes a dominant societal role. The dissolution of the traditional family structure has exposed the gendered aspect of violence. While women increasingly assert their rights, violence against them is on the rise. Throughout history, violence against women has served as a means of social control over the female body, normalization of gendered labor, and the subordination of women. Consequently, the dominance of men over women and the embedded gender hierarchy results from unequal gender relations (Ertürk, 2015: 32-33). Violence is a significant component of masculinity, employed to gain acceptance, respect, or resolve problems. Additionally, men exercise control and dominance over women through physical, sexual, economic manipulation, and psychological abuse (Türk, 2015: 91; Yazar, 2015: 20).

Men who cannot control women resort to extreme violence and revoke their right to life. The term femicide, which refers to the killing of a woman as a result of gender discrimi-

phones and tablets and watching content on them. My goal is to get into these devices. We'll employ a distinct montage and quick, concise content" (Hürriyet, 2020).

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nation, was first used by Diana Russell when she testified about femicide at the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Brussels in 1976 (Widyono, 2008: 7). Despite being used throughout this time, the phrase was not defined. The term femicide was defined in 1990 by feminist American cultural studies professor Jane Caputi and feminist writer and activist Diana Russell as “the killing of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of possession of women”. In 2001, Roberta Harmes and Russell referred to femicide as “the killing of women by men because they are women”. As a result, the phrase has evolved to embrace all manifestations of male sexism and is no longer just used to express anger (Russell, 2008: 27).

The political nature of violence against women and femicide has been demonstrated by linking it to sexism. As a result, the problem can only be remedied with the rise of the feminist movement and the development of a gender-based perspective. Since the 1980s, feminists have made significant progress in the eyes of nations and the international community. The Nairobi Conference, a civil society gathering in 1985, was the first to bring the issue of violence against women to the world’s attention. The conference’s final text stressed that ending violence in both the public and private spheres was the only way to bring about peace (Ertürk, 2015: 70). The 1993 Vienna Conference, which determined women’s rights as human rights (Quote from Joachim, 1999: Kurtoğlu, 2020: 35), paved the way for violence against women to be considered a crime against humanity. Combating violence against women was outlined as a strategic priority during the Beijing Conference in 1995. With the help of the feminist movement in the 1990s, significant strides toward women’s rights were made in Turkey. Local progress in the battle against violence against women was made in 1990 with the formation of the General Directorate for the Status and Problems of Women and Turkey’s ratification of CEDAW (Kurtoğlu, 2020: 35). In the 1990s, independent women’s movements and feminist formations had a significant impact on the founding and formulation of policies at organizations like *KAMER*, *Kadın Dayanışma Vakfı* and *the Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı* (Ülker, 2020: 116).

Particularly significant actions in the fight against violence against women include the Istanbul Convention (2014) and Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence Against Women (2012). The Istanbul Convention is unquestionably significant since it is the first convention to define gender-based violence against women as “violence against women because they are women or that disproportionately affects women” (Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, 2020: 14). There are laws that the state was compelled to pass and agreements reached under the influence of the women’s movement. However, these are insufficient (the Istanbul Convention was withdrawn in 2021). In order to effectively address femicide and violence against women, the state must take more proactive measures. Marcela Lagarde, President of the Mexican Special Femicide Commission in 2004, emphasized the primary responsibility of the state for femicide and defined femicide as a state crime. Lagarde suggests that femicide is a result of “the state not providing any guarantees to women and not creating any security conditions for their lives in society, at home, even in work and recreation areas” (Special Commission on Femicide cited by Widyono, 2008: 10-11).

Therefore, violence against women cannot be called an issue above politics, as stated by Derya Yanık, who serves as the Minister of Family and Social Services in Turkey (T24, 2022). Because, as Foucault stated, the state “constitutes an important element of the

biopower mechanism with its ability to centralize and coordinate". The State must assume responsibility for femicide by creating methods to monitor on potential offenders, safeguard victims, and maintain their survival (Ecevitoglu, 2021: 461). However, while femicides have been increasing in Turkey in recent years, it is clear that the government is powerless to stop the killings. Moreover, statistics on women dying due to male violence are not officially compiled and disclosed to the public. Domestic abuse and male violence are not even listed as causes of death by the Turkish Statistical Institute. Furthermore, data only provide scant details regarding the number of women killed. Studies on the risks and priority groups that must be known to avoid violence have not been conducted (Çavlin, 2020: 373-374). As a result, the state legalizes this status by judicial rulings and social customs which specify that women are legally dependent on men. After the murder, neither a femicide statistic nor a battle strategy is implemented to deal with this circumstance. *The Male Violence Report of the Independent Communication Network Bianet* and the data reports of the *Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platform* are, in this perspective, the most significant data sources addressing femicide in (Bianet, 2019 and Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platform, 2019 cited: Çavlin 2020: 374). Bianet's male violence tally only includes women reported in the press and lost their lives due to male violence.

While the media plays a pivotal role in shedding light on femicides and bringing them to the public's attention, it is essential to recognize that these incidents are often framed through a patriarchal lens in media reporting. Instead of unequivocally siding with the victims and holding the perpetrators accountable, media narratives sometimes rationalize male aggression (Çavlin, 2020: 386; Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, 2020: 7-8). It is worth noting that violence against women can be exacerbated when the media perpetuates gender inequality through its representation (Aslan & Kırışkan, 2022: 100)

3. Shattering Patriarchy in Dramas on Digital Platforms

In traditional media, works challenging the dominant ideology are often marginalized; however, digital platforms have provided a more inclusive space for such productions. Productions that address themes related to sexual freedom and gender equality have gained prominence in the realm of digital series, effectively challenging patriarchal norms. These digital platforms offer more flexibility in presenting diverse narratives and challenging conventional norms (Oduncu & Karaduman, 2021: 84).

Digital platforms, which cater to a different audience than traditional television, are more receptive to innovative and groundbreaking content that spans various genres (Deniz Şaşmaz Oflaz, interview dated October 25, 2021; cited: Özbulduk, Kılıç 2022: 38). These platforms showcase the extraordinary lives of individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those with marginalized identities based on factors such as religion, class, and gender (Özsoy, 2022: 241). These platforms strive to create content that is distinct from what is available on traditional television, aiming to attract a unique and engaged audience (Şenyüz, 2022: 47).

Moreover, the absence of strict regulatory authority such as RTÜK on digital platforms provides more freedom for storytellers to explore a wide range of themes and genres (Oduncu & Karaduman, 2021: 80). Screenwriters and industry experts have noted that digital platforms allow for the depiction of non-family stories, anti-heroes, unconventional narratives, and styles that liberate creative expression (Oduncu & Karaduman, 2021: 80).

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While digital platforms offer greater creative freedom, it's important to note that RTÜK has the authority to intervene with on-demand internet broadcasts, as introduced in Law No. 6112's 2018 addition of Article 29-A. RTÜK has recently increased its inspections of on-demand internet broadcasting and can take punitive measures for content that contradicts national values, moral standards, and the principle of protecting the family. For example, the series "Elite+" on Netflix and an episode of "Love, Victor" on Disney+ were fined for perceived violations of these principles (Bianet, 2023).

Despite RTÜK's interventions, digital platforms continue to host productions that challenge traditional gender conventions, particularly those that center around LGBTI+ stories. These foreign productions have influenced Turkish TV series, contributing to a transformation in women's portrayals in media. Strengthening the women's movement has led to more diverse, empowering, and realistic depictions of women in TV series. These portrayals help dispel preconceptions and sexist attitudes, tell women's stories, and reinforce a feminist perspective. Turkish TV series are also evolving, showcasing women as strong, independent, and unbound by societal norms. Notable examples of local productions featuring strong female characters include Netflix's "Fatma" and "Yakamoz 245," BlueTV's "İlk ve Son," and Exxen's "Hükümsüz".

This evolving landscape in the media is intricately tied to the feminist movement and the progress it has made in terms of gender equality and women's rights, as media representations transform in response to these societal changes. Women in TV series are no longer solely portrayed as helpless and passive, but also as empowered individuals who break free from traditional norms, reclaim their freedom, and become the protagonists of their own lives. The depiction of strong, resilient female characters is becoming a prominent theme in both digital and traditional media, reflecting the growing influence of the women's movement in Turkey.

4. Methodology

This study uses textual analysis from a feminist perspective to examine "how rhetorical-formal devices structure gender difference and what views are expressed about the relationship between men and women in the series" (Pravadelli, 2006: 146; cited: Lopez, 2018: 279). In this context, the TV series *Hükümsüz* and *Mezarlık*, which tell the story of femicide and highlight asymmetrical power relations, are examined. The narrative in the TV series are divided into four categories: (i) gender roles in dramas, (ii) the responsibility of the perpetrator and the victimization of women in the representation of male violence, (iii) the politics of femicide and the responsibility of the state, and (iv) practices of combating male violence.

Members of feminist women's organizations who have viewed the series were also interviewed. Organizations such as *Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı*, *Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu*, *Cinsel Şiddetle Mücadele Derneği*, *Cinsiyet Eşitliği İzleme Platformu*, *Kadın İşçi*, *Ekmek ve Gül*, *Mor Dayanışma*, *Kadın Savunma Ağı*, *Üniversiteli Kadın Kolektifi*, and *KADAV* were contacted as part of this study. Five representatives or members from these women's organizations, specifically *Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı*, *Kadın Savunma Ağı*, *Kadın İşçi*, *Ekmek ve Gül*, and *Üniversiteli Kadın Kolektifi*, expressed their willingness to watch the series and participate in the research. The interviewee from *Ekmek ve Gül* has only viewed "*Mezarlık*". The representatives and members of these women's groups were questioned on the following topics:

-What can you say about gender roles in the TV series *Hükümsüz* and *Mezarlık*?

-How is violence against women represented in *Hükümsüz* and *Mezarlık* TV series which are broadcast on digital platforms?

-Is there an emphasis on the political nature of femicide in these TV Series? Is violence viewed as a personal issue or a societal one?

-Do you believe that the police are preventing violence against women as that seen in the television series *Mezarlık*?

-Which attitude is shown in the TV series toward the sentencing of the male offender? How does the TV series depict the state's and the criminal justice system's perspectives on this matter? How would you assess the similarity or difference between the TV show's situation and the actual world?

-How would you evaluate the fight against femicide in these TV series?

-How do you relate the presence of these series on digital platforms to the struggle of the women's movement?

This approach allows us to assess the extent to which the representations and discourses in the series, analyzed from a feminist perspective, align with the viewpoints of the members of feminist organizations regarding the series. Furthermore, the study will explore the correlation between the recent surge in the feminist movement in Turkey and the media's role as a potent tool in the fight against femicide.

Findings and Discussions

(i) Gender roles in *Hükümsüz* and *Mezarlık*

In the series "*Hükümsüz*" and "*Mezarlık*," the majority of the main characters are female, and these series address the issue of femicides in society. In both series, "*Hükümsüz*" and "*Mezarlık*," the traditional sexist outlook is challenged through characters who defy the societal norms assigned to women. Instead of conforming to the passive victim roles often portrayed in traditional narratives, characters like Esmâ, Filiz, and Önem actively take charge in investigating and seeking justice for women who have been killed. For instance, Filiz, who embarks on the journey of studying law in her 30s to identify and prosecute her sister's killers, and Esmâ, who is determined to bring her father's killers to justice after human traffickers murdered him, serve as strong female role models within these series. Additionally, Önem, who leads the Superintendent Special Crimes Unit in the "*Mezarlık*" series, tenaciously pursues the perpetrators of crimes against women while upholding the law.

The series showed a strong female profile, according to the representatives of the women's organizations interviewed; however, they also pointed out that the women in the series were split into saviors and victims. The members assert that women who act in conformity with social norms and who are not morally judged by society are those who are portrayed as victims. The Mor Çatı member claimed that *Hükümsüz* is where this issue is most obvious. These series could not include representation for women like the slain trans woman Hande Kader⁵ or the sex worker. Therefore, despite efforts to change the way that gender is perceived, it is clear that the stories still reflect this.

Both series contrast traditional notions of femininity and masculinity, and this can be

5 Hande Kader, a 23-year-old transgender woman and well-known LGBT activist.

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seen in their respective discourses. Instead of being depicted in family life, the women in the series are women who go out into the public area and actually exist there. The most significant individuals in the life of the characters are their female companions, with whom they express solidarity, not their male partners, from whom they receive support. The friendships between Esmâ and Filiz, Önem and her daughter Sofia, and forensic medicine expert Feriha serve as the series' central pillars of female solidarity. The starring women are acutely conscious of the social pressure and discrimination they face on account of their gender.

In series, it is frequently stressed how gender inequality in society limits, subordinates and devalues the lives of women. The reactions of female characters to violence are also mirrored in the series, which portrays violence as a social phenomena brought on by this discrimination. When Serdar, one of the police officials, suggests that the murderer in one of the femicide incidents in *Mezarlık* might be a woman, Sofia reacts negatively to the patriarchal system by saying the following: "*Woman murdered woman. Case resolved. The patriarchal order has not been eliminated, in other words*".

The interviewers also claimed that the series highlighted the solidarity of women. The member from Kadın Savunması provided the following insight into his viewpoint on the matter: "*We see how women show solidarity with one another and how that sisterhood can be built, especially in the series *Hükümsüz*. These series also highlight the social exclusion and subordination of women, as well as the impact of their traditional feminine responsibilities in the home*". The Mor Çatı member likewise highlighted the same point: "The idea that women would comprehend one another was evident in both series, although it was more common in the *Hükümsüz*. In the television series where violence against women is depicted as a widespread social issue, women's solidarity makes it possible to bring the situation to a successful conclusion. For instance, the female police officer makes sure that a report is kept on the violence in the *Hükümsüz* series' police station scene whereas the male cop does nothing. Thus, the female police becomes a part of women's solidarity. Actually, the female police officer makes sure the wife who killed her husband receives better treatment. There is a similar scene in *Mezarlık*. For instance, when a woman is murdered, male police officers may speculate that a woman committed the crime, and the other female police officer—a hacker—may respond in like. These series demonstrate how, despite their efforts to stop femicide, men never absorb the problem and, whether deliberately or unconsciously, defend the perpetrators". Kadın İşçi participant claimed that the two series do not portray strong women as working at their jobs, caring for their children, or having happy marriages. According to the participant, being a strong woman means showing solidarity with other women, which is what the character Birce in *Mezarlık* or the women in *Hükümsüz* do.

The LGBTI+ community is not ignored in the series; it is represented by one of the key characters in *Mezarlık* and by a character who interacts with the main characters in *Hükümsüz*. Although her relationships and other personal details are not explicitly depicted, IT specialist Sofia stands out in the *Mezarlık* for both her feminist speech and with the image that she does not have a heterosexual identity.

Only the member of the Kadın İşçi stressed the importance of LGBTI+ representations in the series, saying, "*I think *Mezarlık* offers greater portrayals. Because I notice that there is a lesbian woman there as well as a strong female profile. Despite the deficiencies in lesbian representation, it feels good to know that it is there*".

Responsibility of the perpetrator and victimization of women in the representation

of male violence. Chastity and the relationship between men's and women's honor are addressed in the series in a questioning manner, and discussions on these topics are articulated pretty well. Women who follow social norms but are labeled "dishonorable" owing to the environment's influence and pressure and killed by their spouses and lovers are portrayed in *Hükümsüz*. Women who did not follow more conventional patterns, participated in economic and social life, and died as a result of pressure and abuse from their partners or lovers are represented in *Mezarlık*. The two conversations Esma and Önem had with murderers highlight the agency of men.

Male Killer: She would have burned in the afterlife anyway. May God forgive me. I burned her in this world. That's it. Whatever the punishment, I'll accept it. I saved my honor.

Esma: That's all, your honor? So who are you? So who are you? Does your honor depend on your wife, mother, or daughter? So who are you? Is your honor preserved by hurling a burned-alive woman out of a moving vehicle?

Similarly, Önem's dialogue with the male murderer is as follows:

Male Killer: We are men, of course the girl did not stop... I did not do anything to anyone that they did not deserve.

Önem: Do you decide who deserves what?

It is a sign of the dominance and segregation of men in society that the two female characters in the series ask men, "Who are you and how do you decide?". One of the character who is a lawyer, Filiz, states once more, "*As a woman, I can be killed at any time. The phrase 'In other words, everything can end for nothing in an instant' refers to women as the oppressed gender and alludes to the worst injustice (murder) they may experience as a result of their gender.*" Esma on the other hand, used the following remarks in court to illustrate the social distinction that is afforded to men: "*They were far craftier with the privilege that society gave them. They thought İnci deserved it if she went to that place at that particular moment. They were not alone, so they had reason to think. They grew up hearing this all the time, on the street, in the neighborhood, at home. Therefore, as stated in these words, masculine violence arises from unequal social relations between genders*".

Kadın Savunması member claims that regardless of their class or social standing, the men in the series exhibit true masculinity. States of "masculinity" are associated with power and violence in this context.

The fact that the women who experience violence in series are not just weak and illiterate women, in the opinion of Mor Çatı's member, shows that women from all societal groups are susceptible to violence. However, the series focuses on femicide, which is the most severe form of violence. In other words, the most socially unacceptable form of violence, that committed by men, is depicted in the series. Üniversiteli Kadın Kolektifi's member notes how unsettling it is that male aggression against women's bodies is publicly depicted in series. Presenting a burned woman openly and showing the woman with bruises may traumatize people. Because the stories of women burned to death are still remembered.

(ii) The Politics of Femicide and the State's Responsibility

Both series depict how femicides result from unequal gender relations and how the state's powerful institutions—from the judicial system to the police force—enable these unequal relations. The series has repeatedly stressed the state's incapacity to create regula-

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tions against violence, the reduction of male offenders' penalties in court cases for a variety of reasons, and the police force's disregard for women who report assault. The sentence made by the friend of one of the women killed in the *Mezarlık* series is a clear expression in this context: "Do you know how many women lost their lives after going to the police? It is safer for those women to remain anonymous". In *Hükümsüz*, Melek clearly expresses the state's lack of responsibility for violence against women in court: "Every time I was beaten, I went to the police station. I believed that, in the eyes of the state, I was a human person. However, it turned out that the state-issued marriage certificate was more valid than my injuries. I was sent from the police station with similar excuses each time. I would be patient. Creating a family wasn't simple... Everything that occurred within the family would remain private".

Women's organizations assert that series featuring femicides reflect the political attitude of femicide. Still, it appeared that this was insufficient. There have been criticisms that the series depiction of the problem of identifying and prosecuting the offenders does not reflect reality. A member of Mor Çatı stated, "We see in both the *Hükümsüz* and *Mezarlık* series how women cannot get a restraining order and cannot access any justice mechanisms when they go to the police before they are killed. However, we also see a very well-functioning judgment in *Hükümsüz*. Women are killed, but justice is also provided. All femicide instances receive the worst punishments. The perpetrators of all femicides face the worst punishments. For instance, the perpetrator who caused the abused child to be exposed to this is immediately found and receives the harshest punishment. In fact, we run into a lot of instances like not reporting suspicious deaths, not even looking into who killed a woman, making homicides appear to be suicides, not having enough proof to prove who the abusers are, etc. Although the culprits are frequently not brought to justice and punished, *Hükümsüz* gives the impression that the legal system is quite effective".

The following is the basis for Ekmek and Gül's member assertion that, despite the *Mezarlık* series' emphasis on the political nature of the deaths of women, the flow was disturbed by lauding the individual heroic actions of the police team: "Because the series does not directly state that the rottenness it highlights is a political rottenness. We already see references to 'the system is broken' in various sections of the series. As we can see, the violent offenders who were apprehended were found not guilty by the judicial system. An allusion to the nature of bureaucratic mechanisms is made by the atmosphere that is created and the location of the space in the organization building's basement. Although the main idea of the series is not that the murders of women are political, it must be said that it is one of the works that should be written down as an achievement of the women's struggle".

Stating that the political attitude is more obvious especially in *Mezarlık*, the Kadın İşçi member expressed her opinion as follows: "We can see that femicide is a political issue that has grown in scope inside fiction and has transitioned from being a personal to a social one".

According to the member of the *Üniversiteli Kadın Kolektifi*, although the series winks at the political formation, it does not go deeper into the issues. The interviewee expresses her opinion as follows: "The series depicts some actions taken by the state, but it also depicts these actions as being represented in the individually. I don't think these series show the root cause of violence and emphasize that femicides are political. At the end of the series, the perpetrator is caught and receives the heaviest punishment, but we know that there are actually many perpetrators out there. The series employs the strategy of a happy

ending, precisely like in fairy tales, so that the criminals get the punishment they deserve. Women cannot even get suspended in reality; in fact, this is mentioned in the series. To let the audience exhale in relief and prevent them from feeling the pessimism they experience in real life, the male culprits are, nonetheless, handed the punishments they deserve at the end of the episode”.

The majority of women’s organization members claim that although the femicides stories *Hükümsüz* and *Mezarlık* have political rhetoric, the primary narrative does not develop along this political line. It appears that the discourses of the women’s movement are effective in the series, despite the fact that it was not built with a feminist discourse. The interviewees does not find it realistic that the culprits would be apprehended by the legal system and face the worst punishments. However, presenting the representation in the form of severe punishments against male violence can be understood as a wish and shows that the series cannot deny the impact of the power of the women’s movement.

(iii) Practices to struggle male violence

The series includes, at least in part, techniques for struggling male violence. Even though the struggle is conducted through channels of justice and law, the influence of the women’s movement has not gone unnoticed. The activism of the women’s movement and the impact of social media on the trial are particularly evident in the *Hükümsüz* series. Banners and posters of No to Violence Against Women are included in the series, and Law No. 6284, the Istanbul Convention and women’s shelters are also mentioned. A Mor Çatı member adds that the series is crucial for demonstrating how to stop violence, bringing up the Istanbul Convention and Law No. 6284, which are key pieces of information for women, and emphasizing fundamental ideas that have a big impact on the lives of many women. The interviewee stresses that portraying the entire battle through the eyes of two women was a bad situation; however, the issue of mobilizing public opinion and winning support in the *Hükümsüz* series was crucial in terms of showcasing the force of the women’s movement. In the same way, tweets make on social media in the case of *Hükümsüz*, according to the Kadın İşçi member, can affect judges and prosecutors and alter the course of cases. A member of *Kadın Savunması* states that the fight against violence against women is given as an important message in the series, but the method of struggle is limited to the state mechanisms and legal methods of struggle. However, today the most effective method of combating violence is the action of women’s struggle.

Ekmek ve Gül member claims that she does not share the *Mezarlık* series’ concept of the struggle against femicide as follows: “*Taking a comprehensive approach to ending violence against women is important in my opinion. It should be addressed along with the fight for equality and a world free of violence led by women. Because of this, I can categorically state that the type of struggling depicted in the TV series, or what is presented to the viewer as a struggling, stays within the parameters of a market-based detective fiction*”.

In a similar vein, a member of the Üniversiteli Kadın Kolektifi said she wasn’t sure how much the series portrayed the struggles of the women’s movement: “*Unlike in the series, the struggle is being carried out by women’s solidarity and the women’s movement, not by attorneys*

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or the police. As we saw in the cases of the murdered women Şule Çet⁶ and Pınar Gültekin⁷, gains are made thanks to the women's movement being a follower. In other words, we can achieve success through the struggle of all women, not by anything done by a single person, group, state or someone from the justice system. The police department is linked to the judicial system when we examine it. Systematic violence is always described as male-state aggression. As a result, a particular state policy and a neoliberal patriarchal structure exist. Against this system, the entire struggle must be conducted. The murders, the termination of the Istanbul Convention, the failure to impose the necessary penalties, or even the failure to obtain a restraining order as mentioned in the series, show that women are isolated by the state. We are aware that the masculine state system is at play in this circumstance. Because of this, the issue of violence against women cannot be resolved by a group of law enforcement or judicial personnel acting in good conscience. If there is a gain in rights, it is not because of the police or the legal system's struggling, but rather because of the solidarity of women who oppose male aggression and never give up on one another. However, just as I cannot see this all-out struggle in the series, I also feel passive when I watch the violence there. In real life, I don't feel that way because I struggle with this".

Although women's organizations state that the struggle of the women's movement in the series is limited, the theme of struggling violence against women in the series is linked to the strengthening of the women's movement. The member of *Mor Çatı* expresses her opinion on this issue as follows: "It is challenging to recognize and emphasize the gains because of the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, some rights that women were unable to protect in spite of their numerous protests and outraged demonstrations, and the fact that women are most oppressed by the one-man regime's reactionary gloom. However, the tenacity of women who insist that 'femicide is political' and the women's movement, which consistently raises its voice to defend women's lives and rights, demonstrate that a series cannot be commercially successful and be regarded as effective without calling attention to these politics". The member of *Ekmek and Gül* explains the issue as follows after acknowledging that the series' scripts represented the political consciousness of the women's movement: "I think that the handling of femicides is done by pointing to social ties more in recent works than in the past. We are currently in a time when cliched narratives that accurately explain a single psychopath, murderer, etc. from the evil of a person are no longer considered as successful works. Because the women's movement has advanced social consciousness on a political level in this regard. Therefore, screenplays and productions that highlight the bureaucratic functioning that is a part of the spiral of violence that women, girls, and LGBTI people are in have started to surface in the media". Moreover, the *Kadın İşçi* member states that the feminist movement was effective in the construction of these series, but it is doubtful how much the series reflect the feminist perspective as follows: "Feminism has a color. This color is used in all litigation demonstration. Moreover, what comes to mind is 'our women' discourse that the reporter boy uses. There wouldn't be an our women discourse if a feminist director had created it and put it through a feminist filter. Women's protests would use purple flags and banners rather than orange. Both series are clearly inspired by popular feminism. The series does make a few feminist allusions, but not enough".

6 Şule Çet was sexually assaulted and killed by Çağatay Aksu in 2018. At first it was suggested that she committed suicide (Euronews, 2019).

7 Pınar Gültekin was killed by Cemal Metin Avcı in 2020 (Birgün, 2023).

5. Conclusion

Women's resilience in the face of male dominance and their relentless efforts to end violence against women are yielding more positive outcomes each day. The persistent struggle and gradual expansion of feminist women's organizations and platforms have led to numerous advancements. Initiatives such as Law No. 6284, the Istanbul Convention, the establishment of *ŞÖNİM*⁸, *Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı*, and *Kadın Dayanışma Vakfı* represent significant milestones and successes in the fight against gender-based violence. Despite challenges from political entities aiming to impede their progress, women continue their unwavering pursuit of equality. This ongoing struggle has a profound impact on the media, driving significant changes in how these issues are addressed.

The study examines the series *Hükümsüz* and *Mezarlık*, which highlight the solidarity among women in their fight against gender-based violence. Interviews with women's organizations reveal that while these series challenge patriarchal thinking, they do not inherently carry a feminist discourse. Representatives and members of these organizations argue that the series approaches femicides as political crimes, shedding light on the societal dimensions of violence. These shows emphasize the state's failure and insufficient efforts by state institutions and organizations in combating violence. Thus, the strengthening of the women's movement plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality and women's rights in society and reshaping media representations. However, interviewees also note that the series may not fully capture the feminist political stance of the women's movement.

Digital platforms, in particular, have witnessed a surge in productions addressing the patriarchal system, sexual liberation, and gender disparities. The reduced censorship on these platforms allows for a more diverse range of stories and a more liberal perspective. Consequently, the questioning of male dominance and resistance against such domination in these dramas aligns with the progress of the women's movement. While some studies indicate that the media still fails to produce works with solid feminist awareness, the proliferation of productions promoting feminism contributes to increased public awareness of women's rights. As feminist-awareness-raising works become more prevalent, so does the public's understanding of women's rights and the importance of feminist perspectives in media.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declare no conflict of interest.

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⁸ "Violence prevention and monitoring centers were established by Law No. 6284 under the name KOZA. As of the brochure's release date, *ŞÖNİMS* offer services in 81 provinces" (Mor Çatı, 2020).

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