

## Powerful Women, Men in Power: An Analysis of Kösem Sultan and Lady Macbeth

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**Abstract:** There has been an intricate relationship and interconnectedness between gender and power/authority throughout human culture and history. From the male rulers of kingdoms to the male leaders of nations, the power dynamic has been structured around male participation, with various forms of power in the hands of men. Two powerful fictional female characters created in Turkish and English literature, A. Turan Oflazoğlu's Kösem Sultan and William Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, will be analysed in this study to reflect the distribution of power by gender. These two strong female characters at the centre of this study, are remarkable for their intelligence, ambition and lust for power. Since the qualities associated with incompleteness and fragility are ascribed to women, they have only indirectly come to power because they are not men. By considering the practices that are effective in social and political life such as the sultanate system and the great chain of being in the fictional periods in which the plays are set, the link between the concept of power and gender will be revealed. The relationship between power and gender will also be evaluated in the context of Simone de Beauvoir's ideas on male domination and Michel Foucault's ideas on power, as they have a significant impact on the perception of power and gender in today's societies. Therefore, this study will highlight the relationship of power dynamics with gender issues through the analysis of the plays *Kösem Sultan* and *Macbeth* by referring to the ideas of Foucault and Beauvoir.

**Keywords:** Kösem Sultan, Lady Macbeth, Power-Gender Relation, A. Turan Oflazoğlu, William Shakespeare

### 1. Introduction

The word 'power' refers to a profound concept that is difficult to define and delimit and can be interpreted differently in different contexts. Power encompasses the relationships and connections between individuals, groups, societies, or institutions, their sanctions on or influence over each other, and their mutual responsibilities. It is possible to find different definitions of power, as its dictionary meaning indicates, the breadth of this word is noteworthy. "a) ability to control people and events, b) the amount of political control a person or group has in a country, c) strength, d) an official or legal right to do something e) a person, organization, or country that has control over others, etc." (Cambridge Dictionary). Moreover, how power is used, against whom it is used, under what circumstances it is used, and the diversity of social, economic, political, historical, or cultural reasons that influence the use of power make this concept much more complex. The historical balance of power reveals not only the complexity of the phenomenon of power but also its intimate relationship with gender roles, which are shaped within the framework of a discourse dominated by men. Discourses have been produced on the basis that men are stronger, more logical, and superior compared to women, and the chance for women to make such a claim has been minimized by creating the perception that being a man is a necessity to have power/authority. The plays selected for this study, *Kösem Sultan* (1980) by A. Turan Oflazoğlu and *Macbeth* (1606) by William Shakespeare, are very meaningful as they exemplify the male-centred structure of the distribution of power within the male-dominated discourse. These two plays depict the processes of women's access to power and their struggle for power in a male-dominated order. For this reason, the characters of Kösem Sultan and Lady Macbeth are specifically chosen to reflect the place of strong women in power dynamics.

When discussing the phenomenon of power, Michel Foucault examines this phenomenon from a very broad perspective and refers to a process that continues in the interaction of people with each other.

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Power is not only about rules or laws in society and the state structure; it involves a more comprehensive and complex sovereignty and domination (Foucault, 1980). As Amy Allen points out, "It is important to note that Foucault's work on power contains both action-theoretical and constitutive strands" (Allen, 2022, p. 6). In this regard, he examines power both in the context of individuals and their actions and in the context of the systematic actions of groups, societies, or institutions within the social order. Foucault asserts the existence of classifications in social norms and control systems. These classifications deliberately generate phenomena that are always in opposition to each other and form a hierarchy. He says, "In so far as power relations are an unequal and relatively stable relation of forces, it's clear that this implies an above and a below, a difference of potentials" (Foucault, 1980, p. 201). These statements underline the different power potentials in the power relationship. It is emphasised that power refers to the domination of two unequal potentials over each other, and these potentials should not be considered as fixed but as dynamic structures. Therefore, with Foucault's perspective on power, it can be argued that in the modern period, where gender roles and potentials are redefined in the context of changing conditions and roles, the traditional power balances established between men and women do not remain constant. The fluidity of power is an issue in power relations.

Foucault states that the concept of power is quite purposeful and interactive, this is why it is possible to see different types of the concept of power from the smallest network of relationships in society to state systems. Although power is an abstract concept, it is also measurable. The use of power affects both the holder of power and those who are subjected to it. The degree of this interaction process is closely related to the measurability of power. Foucault utters that "the characteristic feature of power is that some men can more or less entirely determine other men's conduct - but never exhaustively or coercively" (Foucault, 1999, p. 151). Power carries with it the ability to intervene in others' actions, and this involves a reciprocal relationship-forced or voluntary. So, to Foucault, power exists everywhere and wherever power is present there is the possibility of resistance. This network of relations, which develops in the context of power, takes on a more complex structure in modern times, when meaning is blurred, and relations become more sophisticated. That creates a slippery slope for the concept of power, and this concept has taken on a more shifting structure. Similarly, as feminist and socialist theorist Simone de Beauvoir, who criticizes and problematizes the secondary position of women in society, emphasizes the importance of women's visibility in society, it is possible to say that there have been changes in favour of women in the context of the concept of power within feminist discourse.

## **2. Power and Gender Relations, and Historical References**

Feminist readings of Foucauldian power relations have been interested in the idea that the power relationship is changeable. Also, the power that naturally brings resistance is another important basis for showing women's power. In the power system, women have been placed in subordinate positions within the state system by laws, rules imposed by the cultural system, or invisible but strongly felt pressures. As stated by Academic Gamze Şentürk Tatar, "From the traditional male perspective, women have been posited as submissive, delicate, and graceful creatures/figures. They are reduced to the body and condemned to the secondary status. The gender roles assigned to men and women by the patriarchal order have been transferred from generation to generation through language" (2022, pp. 151-152). The concept of power, developed in the duality of the sovereign and the dominated, has also developed a discourse in the context of the opposition between men and women, and in the patriarchal order, the sovereign is seen as male. Foucault's concept of disciplinary power is another reference for feminist reading. Analogies are made between the methods of surveillance and adaptation used in the processes of normalization and punishment in prisons, factories, mental hospitals, or schools, and the female identity repressed by the patriarchal system. Foucault underlines that "-by a whole range of degrees of normality indicating membership of a homogeneous social body but also playing a part in classification, hierarchization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialists and to render the differences useful by fitting them to another" (1977,

p. 184). Women are relegated to subservient positions within the state system by law, by cultural rules, and by invisible but strongly felt constraints. For this reason, Foucault's ideas of the changeability of power relations and resistance to power are fundamental premises for the demonstration of women's power. That gives an important way out for women's stance against power. Simone de Beauvoir, one of the pioneers of feminism, who opposed the marginalization and humiliation deemed worthy for women, underlined the difference between biological sex and gender, and strongly emphasized in her book *The Second Sex* (1949) the changeability of social roles that are man-made.

This world has always belonged to males, and none of the reasons given for this has ever seemed sufficient. By reviewing prehistoric and ethnographic data in the light of existentialist philosophy, we can understand how the hierarchy of the sexes came to be. We have already posited that when two human categories find themselves face-to-face, each one wants to impose its sovereignty on the other; if both hold to this claim equally, a reciprocal relationship is created, either hostile or friendly, but always tense. If one of the two has an advantage over the other, that one prevails and works to maintain the relationship by oppression. It is thus understandable that man might have had the will to dominate woman: but what advantage enabled him to accomplish this will? (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 71).

Beauvoir attributes the emergence of the distinction between men and women to the desire to preserve the privileged position of the men who invented this distinction. Giving the example of Amazonian women, she states that women also took part in bloody battles, when necessary, fought against wild animals, and fought all kinds of struggles to survive (p. 71). Then, somehow, they were pushed into subordinate and inferior positions by men. In a sense, as Foucault's words "an above and a below" (1980, p. 201) for the creation of power dynamics have been constructed. She says, "Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being" (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 5). As Beauvoir states, Aristotle's idea that being a woman is a natural imperfection, or St. Thomas' idea that women are the incomplete form of men. It can be seen as an explanation of why women have come to be seen in a subordinate position and subjected to humiliation. "They wanted to create a feminine domain-a rule of life, of immanence--only to lock woman in it" (p. 74). Women are literally trapped within the male discourse developed through networks of gender roles.

Gender serves as a prime example of how ideology operates within society. Behaviours categorized as feminine or masculine often seem 'natural' and innate, appearing to be an inherent and unchangeable extension of an individual's biological sex. However, this perception overlooks the fact that these gendered behaviours are heavily influenced by societal norms, expectations, and cultural constructs rather than being solely determined by biology. (Tatar, 2024, p. 122)

As a result of policies developed based on the privilege of being a man, masculinity and having power become complementary elements. Especially when it comes to addressing people, having a say over them, and having the power to manage them, it is clear that women, who are already humiliated by being claimed to be flawed, will not be given the opportunity. Those who have been included in the system have been able to do so through male identity. Foucault, giving examples, especially from the Western feudal structure, mentions the existence of a law-oriented power in Western societies, and this power is maintained through "the linear genealogical successions" (1980, p. 201). The first people who deserve power within the system are "the male legitimate heirs", but upon their death, female heirs can indirectly access power because "an heiress obliged to procure a husband capable of taking charge of the inheritance and the functions of head of a family" (p. 202). The implementation of a similar idea in the British royal structure can be observed. Given that about eight women came to power, the way these women achieved the power was either through the continuation of their queenship after the death of

their husbands, or through the mandatory transfer of power to a daughter since the king had no male children. For instance, Queen Elizabeth, one of the most important rulers of England, was able to ascend to the throne because the king had no sons. Queen Mary II, as an exception, asked for the same rights as her husband in the government and requested to be a partner in the government. However, within the general system, the priority of ruling has always been given to the male:

Traditional histories have customarily privileged the position of the male ruler while discounting the role of the female ruler. Dynastic studies emphasize the male line while often ignoring the mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters that allow the continuation of the dynasty. Queens, when they are mentioned in dynastic lines, tend to be portrayed as temporary and even unfortunate blips in the long line of male rulers. They are most often seen as little more than conduits maintaining custody of the throne only in order to pass it as quickly as possible to the next male ruler (Holderby, 2004, p. 599).

The idea/rule that the man should be in power was also very influential in the Ottoman Empire. In the Ottoman Empire, the structure was based on the laws of Sharia and Turkish morality, and the Ottoman dynastic family did not have a structure that was separate from the rest of society. "There were two main institutions that dominated the Ottoman Empire, the first was the state and the second was the institution of religion. (...) These two institutions were united and represented at the top, in the person of the sultan"<sup>1</sup> (Cihan & Doğan, 2022, p. 44). In the sultanate system, sovereignty in this form of government is passed from father to son. Accordingly, the owner of the throne is the Sultan and his family. The person who occupies the throne maintains his existence as the sole ruler of the country. According to Fuad Köprülü "the first Ottoman rulers were men of great administrative and military ability and as individuals, they played a major role in the establishment of the state" (1991, p. XIV). The hegemony of men could be seen at every level of society. Although it is known that women had some rights, it did not mean that women could be sovereign. There were very influential female figures in the Ottoman Empire who were effective and had a word in state administration. That is why 'Women's sultanate' is called to the period when the mother, wife or daughter of the sultan was in power. The names Mihrimah Sultan, Hürrem Sultan, Kösem Sultan, Turhan Sultan and Safiye Sultan were the powerful ladies of the Ottoman Empire. Such powerful female figures were highly prominent in the Ottoman Empire, but they were never in a position to make a claim for themselves as the sole rightful heir to the throne.

### 3. Analysis of Two Influential Characters: Kösem Sultan and Lady Macbeth

Kösem Sultan and Lady Macbeth, as two of the fictional characters that best reflect the representation of women trying to be strong in a male-dominated system in their period, are presented in the works *Kösem Sultan* by A. Turan Oflazoğlu and *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare. In 1980, the play *Kösem Sultan* was written as the 3rd play of the power trilogy. The first play of this trilogy, *Murat IV*, was written in 1970, and the second play, *Deli İbrahim*, in 1967. As Oflazoğlu states in the preface of the play, the character of Kösem Sultan is created as a character who intensifies the fires of sedition, increases the turmoil, and is the epitome of destruction (Oflazoğlu, 2002, p. 6). Considering her place and importance in the Ottoman dynasty, Kösem Sultan stands out as an intelligent and successful woman. In the play alongside her success, her over-ambitious nature can be easily seen since she had her son İbrahim drowned and wanted to poison her grandson Mehmet for power.

Considering the real history, Özlem Kumrular presents important information about the period in which Kösem Sultan lived, using sources written in different languages in Türkiye and abroad. At the beginning of her work, she describes Kösem Sultan as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> The Turkish references and the extracts from the Turkish play 'Kösem Sultan' used in the article are translated by the author.

A powerful woman who lived in the Ottoman Empire for half a century and engraved her name in glittering letters in one era: Serious and persistent, a power broker, clever, patient, finding all the ways to power at any cost, knowing very well when to wait and when to act, knowing that all doors can be opened by acting wisely rather than capriciously. Although it is not often emphasized that she was the epitome of beauty, she was a woman whose beauty has gone down in history as much as her intelligence and cunning (Kumrular, 2015, p. 13).

Kösem Sultan, who did not interfere in the political affairs of the state during the reign of her husband Sultan Ahmet I, played an active role in the administration of the state as the sultan's mother by acting as 'regent' for her son Murad IV, who ascended the throne at the age of 11 after the death of her husband, for the first time in Ottoman history. She continued to be active in the state administration as a regent during the reign of her son İbrahim, who suffered from a mental disorder. "Kösem, disliked by male historians, took the final decision and responsibility amid political issues as a widowed courtier in the empire's most complicated, dark and murderous 40 years" (Sakaoğlu, 2015, p. 1). Kösem Sultan tried to maintain order by selecting statesmen who would serve the state and herself in this period when the country was going through difficult times and at the same time some complexities were created due to the fact that she was a female regent. As Kumrular states:

The Ottoman Empire managed to survive in a period when bloody games were played, when the palace resembled a Mexican soap opera of intrigues, well-digging, and wars for power, minimizing the problems of the state, which seemed very distant in a complicated period, but the possibility of the collapse was rumoured, and ensuring that various difficulties were overcome (2015, p. 14).

Kösem Sultan's regency desire, which was effective during the period when the state was experiencing many difficult issues such as internal conflicts, military irregularities, and failures in foreign relations, was not limited to her own sons. Furthermore, after her grandson ascends the throne, she wants to continue her influence in the government as the Great Mother.

The fictional character of Kösem Sultan, written by Oflazoğlu, is depicted in the play as "monstrous for the sake of power" (Oflazoğlu, 2002, p. 6). The playwright Oflazoğlu uses the following words when talking about Kösem Sultan. "She is my Kösem Sultan. The Kösem Sultan of the Ottoman Empire is just a starting point for me. Kösem you see here is a character, Kösem, that reflects the inner world of Oflazoğlu from top to bottom; a drama person, a tragedy person, a play person" (Kösem Sultan, min: 8.00). When he is asked how much he adheres to the story, he answers "as much as the art of drama requires" (min: 11.30). Shakespeare takes a similar approach in his work *Macbeth*. Shakespeare arranges the characteristics of the characters as he wishes and also refers to important events of his time in his play *Macbeth*. He gives his own dramatic character to stories taken from various sources, "Shakespeare's main source was Holinshed. (...) There is nothing in Holinshed to suggest Lady Macbeth's invocation of the murdering ministers, her sleep-walking, or her death; but, as we have seen, the first of these was probably suggested by Seneca's *Medea*, (...)" (Muir, 2005, p. 215). However, to Kenneth Muir, Shakespeare's *Lady Macbeth* can be found in George Buchanan's *Return Scoticarum Historia* in which he depicts that Macbeth's mind "was daily excited by the importunities of his wife" (p. 210). As the theatre allowed, he created a story for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth that continues to resonate today.

The two female characters are described by the playwrights as strong, intelligent, and ambitious about what they want at the beginning of these plays. In the play *Kösem Sultan*, the first act begins in the 'arz odası' of the Topkapı Palace, the meeting place of the Sultans, members of the Divan-ı Hümayun and foreign statesmen. In the very first scene, Kösem Sultan's power and dominance over the statesmen is evident. When she comes in, "the Aghas welcome her almost doubled over" (Oflazoğlu, 2002, p. 11). The fact that the respect shown to Kösem Sultan in the palace is much higher than the respect shown to Turhan Sultan, the mother of Sultan Mehmet, the owner of the throne. This is proof of the power of the



sovereignty of Kösem Sultan, who has been struggling and serving for her country for years. Showing her power and authority, Kösem Sultan intervenes in the choice of 'lala', the tutor of the young prince, and convinces Sultan Mehmet to give the seal to Murat Agha. Although Kösem Sultan seems to be pleased that her grandson is on the throne, she is not able to accept this situation. In the presence of the palace officials, by hiding her true feelings, she expresses the following statements which support her grandson's reign: "As the first lady of the late Sultan Ahmet and the mother of the late Sultan Murat and Sultan Ibrahim, after serving the state, the way to the old palace is open to us, thank God. Thank God, we were blessed to see my grandson in his long state" (p. 12). There is a deep-rooted Ottoman sultanate and state tradition. According to this tradition, as now Turhan Sultan is the regent in the palace, Kösem Sultan should leave from the palace and move to the old palace. Kösem Sultan knows that she must act within the traditions of the Ottoman state structure. In this way, the two-headedness that might exist in the palace could be prevented.

The elders of the state know how important it is to be the ruler and the head of the state, so Bektas Agha says, "If the ship of the sultanate is left without a captain, it will soon be on the rocks, won't it, Aghas?" (p. 13). Sultan Mehmet is still a child, and his mother Turhan Sultan is young and inexperienced in state affairs. Although Aghas find this situation risky for the future of the state, Kösem Sultan says that "both of them will learn in time. Every job is important, Agha, no one is born a master. Every job can only be learned by doing it" (p. 14) and supports Turhan Sultan. Mustafa and Bektaş Aghas suggest that Kösem Sultan should stay in Topkapı Palace so that she can teach the young sultan and his young mother the lessons of the sultanate, saying that "burying years of state experience in the old palace would be a betrayal of the state" (p. 15). This proposal, which is accepted by everyone without objection, facilitates Kösem Sultan's ability to be effective in the reign. Kösem Sultan's stay in the palace and her desire to intervene in state affairs leads to a power struggle between her and Turhan Sultan. In this struggle, Turhan Sultan will fight against Kösem Sultan by using her own tactics. Turhan Sultan says, "It is not possible to defeat evil without learning its language and habits (...) I wear you against you" (p. 6). While Turhan Sultan's statements reveal Kösem Sultan's evil side, they also reveal her ambition and her hard-to-defeat fighting nature.

Kösem Sultan makes strategic decisions and takes firm steps forward. She personally appoints the officials at important levels of the state and takes them under her control. For example, she gives the Grand Vizier's seal to Murat Agha, not to Bektaş Agha, one of the people she trusts the most because she thinks that it would be risky for the state, which she sees is in an inevitable collapse. Strategically, it is more important for Bektaş Agha to remain at the head of the Janissary Corps and to rule over the soldiers. Turhan Sultan laments the bloodshed and lives lost for the sake of power and does not think that Kösem Sultan is useful for the state. She says, "The place is full of scraps of men/ but no full man. State/in the hands of a woman for years" (p. 20). To her, there are no real brave men in the palace, and most of them are under the command of Sultan Kösem who actually has the authority. By planning strategic marriages, Kösem Sultan tries to increase the number of statesmen under her control in the palace. She also knows what the public wants and how to manipulate them. To gain more followers among the people, she wants to be known for her charitable works, so she orders the people to be served with wedding associations for those who want to get married, schools, healing dormitories, soup kitchens, fountains, and baths.

Lady Macbeth, a Shakespearean character characterised by ambition and passion for power, is another important female figure in the power struggle. She is one of Shakespeare's most prominent female characters, inverting the female roles of her time. She is a character who will do anything to achieve her ambitions and desires, and she does not hesitate to resort to violence, stripped of feminine delicacy and sensuality. Lady Macbeth's ambition for power in the play is literally initiated by the letter her husband wrote to her. When Macbeth writes to her about the witches' prophecy, she realizes what he hopes for and immediately makes plans to take action for power. Lady Macbeth, who is even more

active and ruthless than her husband in the struggle for power in the beginning, has never been able to assert herself as the real power within the system. Lady Macbeth knows the nature of her husband “Yet do I fear thy nature;/ It is too full o’ th’ milk of human kindness/ To catch the nearest way” (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 29). In this case, she must step in to achieve the goal and help her husband achieve the status mentioned in the prophecy. The bravery of Macbeth in the war against the traitors makes this man be called the “Bellona’s bridegroom” (p. 9), and he is hesitant to kill King Duncan. So, she says, “That I may pour my spirits in thine ear/ And chastise with the valour of my tongue/ All that impedes thee from the golden round, /Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem /To have thee crowned withal” (p. 29). Lady Macbeth will find ways to persuade her husband with her words. And the most powerful weapon is to question his masculinity and ask him to behave in a manly manner and be strong. Even though Lady Macbeth seems to be braver than her husband and fearless for this task. Macbeth, as a man, must do what is necessary since being a man is associated with strength and courage.

Lady Macbeth knows that as a woman the only thing she can do within the system is to support her husband and do whatever it takes to get him to the position he wants. This approach is also in line with the role of women at the time; women were expected to be submissive to their husbands, to quietly do as they were told. In this play, we see a Lady Macbeth who supports her husband at all costs. She is also aware of the fact that having power in power struggles requires violence. For that reason, she appears before the audience as a female character who does not hesitate to use violence and get blood on her hands. She will be involved in this system created and managed by men by adopting men’s methods. For that reason, Lady Macbeth asks the holy spirits to take away her femininity. “Come, you spirits/ That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here/ And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full/ Of direst cruelty” (p. 30). The female body is considered fragile. Killing the king is not only an extremely bloody act, but it is also not an action that can be considered for a woman in power struggles. Even in the Great Chain of Being, which was influential in the Western world until around the 17th century, the status given to women always came after that given to men: the queen after the king, the duchess after the duke. Therefore, this status that should be achieved for Lady Macbeth will be achieved for her husband. Therefore, Lady Macbeth cannot tolerate her husband’s indecision. “When you durst do it, then you were a man;/ And to be more than what you were, you would/ Be so much more the man” (p. 42). She irreversibly manipulates her husband by questioning where his masculinity is. She even tries to persuade Macbeth by referring to the status of motherhood, which was considered the most sacred for a woman at that time. A mother image is depicted who would crush the head of a suckling child instead of breaking her promise to undertake such an important task. While Macbeth hesitates about what would happen if they failed, Lady Macbeth shares her insidious ideas with her husband, planning even after Duncan’s death. She will blame this murder on his two chamberlains.

**Lady Macbeth:** (...) his two chamberlains

Will I with wine and wassail so convince

That memory, the warder of the brain,

Shall be a fume and the receipt of reason

A limbeck only: when in swinish sleep

Their drenchèd natures lie as in a death,

What cannot you and I perform upon

The unguarded Duncan? What not put upon

His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt

Of our great quell? (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 45)

While Shakespeare portrays Lady Macbeth in a way that is far from the traditional female motif, in Lady Macbeth's rhetoric, she uses violent words to manipulate, to encourage her husband for the crown. Lady Macbeth does not present a portrait of a silent, submissive woman who does not go beyond the rules of her husband and society. On the contrary, there is a strong and ambitious character who wants to get rid of the fragile and restrictive characteristics attributed to women.

The feeling of being trapped within the concept of womanhood can also be seen in the play *Kösem Sultan* in the way İstanbullular's (the people of Istanbul) speeches. They evaluate Kösem Sultan's every action depending on the presence or absence of men. All women's behaviour is associated with male patronage, their individuality is not taken into account at all. Their conversations and comments about Kösem Sultan and her actions are associated with the death of her husband and Kösem Sultan's being a woman without a man.

**I. İstanbullu:** A woman without a man is like a snake in winter, the affection she would give to a man she gives to property and gold jewellery.

**II. İstanbullu:** And like Kösem, she was widowed at a young age, but you have burned her fire, and the conversation turns into reign ambition and power madness.

**II. İstanbullu:** Even to the point of drowning her own son (Ofazoğlu, 2002, p. 20).

Her passion for power, showiness and gold is not seen in the context of her own character or aspirations, but as a reflection of the early loss of her husband, in this way, they can find excuses to justify a woman's desire for power. These men even state that this ambition carries her to such an extreme point that she kills her own son. While the people of Istanbul talk about the assassination of Sultan İbrahim and the blood spilt for power, the criticism of Kösem Sultan's motherhood and lust for power is repeated here. Even Turhan Sultan attributes Kösem Sultan's power to the lack of men. She says, "the state has been dying in the hands of a woman for years" (p. 20), to her, there are no real men in the palace, and most of them are under the command of Sultan Kösem who has the authority. As Turhan Sultan's statements suggest, the expectation is always for a male motif to exist as an authority figure or saviour. Although Kösem Sultan has a strong vision and skills in state administration, she remains at the centre of criticism because she is a woman. Despite her undeniable authority, there is some talk of the soldiers being reluctant to take orders from Kösem Sultan just because she is a woman. Among the janissary soldiers, they say, "Are we the servants of our Sultan or Kösem Sultan?" or "Should we take orders from a woman?" (p. 35). At a time when the country is chaotic and trying to reorganize, the words of the soldiers show how different it can be whether men or women are in authority. In addition to the content of decisions, whether they are made by men or women becomes important for their implementation.

Both Kösem Sultan and Lady Macbeth are highly skilful in taking firm steps towards their goal by hiding their true intentions. While Kösem Sultan plots to eliminate her daughter-in-law and grandson, Lady Macbeth plots to kill King Duncan with her husband. To avoid being noticed, they wear a metaphorical mask that conceals their intentions. While publicly Kösem Sultan says, "Thank God, we were blessed to see my grandson in his long state" (p. 12), here the reader and audience can hear her real inner voice:

**Kösem:** What do these fake/corrupt sultans know about command/ruling!

If I were born the daughter of a Greek priest

or a Turkmen dervish;

or a Serbian shepherd,

A Bedouin in the Arabian deserts

or among Georgians or Circassians,



or Spaniards or Italians. (...) I would certainly be a sultan,  
 certainly, because God prepared me to be a sultan  
 a long, long time ago (Ofazoğlu, 2002, p. 19).

Kösem Sultan's hidden and unrevealed thoughts are expressed in these statements. These expressions show Kösem Sultan's self-confidence, her feeling that those in power are inadequate, and her belief that she has a right to the throne. Although there are various claims about her origins, Kösem Sultan says that no matter what race or social group she comes from, she has been commissioned by God to be effective in the administration of the state. To her, "To command/rule is to establish a throne over mortals, to leave one's mark on the world!" (p. 19) and she believes that she has the competence to command. With these thoughts in her head, she plans to change the order in her favour; she praises her grandson's reign and shows the people her false satisfaction. Kösem Sultan and Turhan Sultan play mother and daughter roles to each other, but Kösem Sultan also notices the "cunning gleam in her eyes" (p. 32) while she is strategically submissive and calm. Similarly, Lady Macbeth wants to achieve her goal by being secretive. Lady Macbeth, as one of Shakespeare's characters representing his motto that appearances are deceiving, warns her husband to adopt a demeanour and facial expression that will not reveal their real plans. "Your face, my thane, is as a book where men/May read strange matters. To beguile the time, /Look like the time. Bear welcome in your eye, /Your hand, your tongue. Look like th' innocent flower, /But be the serpent under 't." (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 32). They play the role of good hosts when they welcome the king in their own place, but at night they show their bloody faces hiding behind this courtesy. And finally, they get power after the murder of the king. After the murder of the king, the bloody killings initiated with the encouragement of Lady Macbeth increase with Macbeth's ambition for power.

Obtaining power through murder is also a method used in the play *Kösem Sultan*. After the reign of Sultan Ibrahim, the cunning ideas of Kösem Sultan also appear in her plans to kill the current sultan, her own grandson. On the one hand, she says to Sultan Mehmet, "I have no one in this world but you, / but the son of my son"; on the other hand, her inner voice explains her ruthless plan, "I have Şehzade Süleyman, Süleyman, / and see how I make him sit in your place!" (Ofazoğlu, 2002, p. 82). It is possible to find out that Kösem Sultan develops a process that includes many acts of violence, betrayal and death to gain and retain power even in Meleki's conversations with her lover Mehmet. When he tells Meleki that he wants to take revenge on Kösem Sultan for what she has done to her. This is because Kösem Sultan has thought of a strategic marriage for Meleki. But she punishes Meleki severely for defying her after Meleki confesses her love to Mehmet. Enduring her own pain, Meleki reminds him of strangled concubines, axemen, hundreds of murdered janissaries, thousands of spahis and people exploited in various ways, and her murdered son Ibrahim- the violent acts of Kösem Sultan.

**Meleki:** If you get the opportunity  
 avenge her (Kösem Sultan) on others,  
 Avenge the strangled concubines, zülüflü the axe-men;  
 avenge his own son, Sultan Ibrahim,  
 with hundreds of janissaries who perished in the last battle  
 who avenged thousands of spahis (soldiers),  
 avenge the people who have been exploited in various ways.  
 I will avenge myself (Ofazoğlu, 2002, p. 104).

Despite all these bloody events, Kösem Sultan justifies her fight by saying that first her son and then her grandson want to destroy her; because the rule is clear, if you want power “you will either die or be killed!” (p. 105). Kösem Sultan is aware of her ambition for power and knows that people watch her from afar with hatred or fear, but on the other hand, she thinks that the reason for this criticism is that people do not know themselves. Similar to Lady Macbeth, Kösem Sultan has nightmares, hallucinations, and self-talk. But this does not stop her from her power plans.

It is noteworthy that Sultan Kösem does not regret her mistakes or bloody acts throughout the play but justifies her behaviour. Unlike the character of Lady Macbeth, who is implied to have been driven to madness due to attempting acts that the sensitive and fragile female psychology cannot bear, there is a character of Kösem Sultan who equates herself with power and does not hesitate to fight for her ambition and power until the moment she is killed. With an accustomed action, washing her hands for hours, Lady Macbeth bears the burden of conscience as evidenced by these statements, “The thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now?/What, will these hands ne'er be clean?” (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 143). While Lady Macbeth's actions lead her to destruction, Kösem Sultan tries to come up with various arguments to justify her actions. Kösem Sultan excuses her actions against her son Ibrahim, whom she confesses that she had murdered in her nightmares, and in a sense tries to ease her conscience.

**Kösem Sultan:** There can be only one ruler in a country

(...) Either you were going to disappear, or I was.

Yes, you forced me to kill you.

Of course, of course, it's his turn, your son! (Oflazoglu, 2002, p. 121).

Lady Macbeth has nightmares that drive her to madness, while Kösem Sultan is not weakened by her nightmares, but becomes even more eager to become the sole power in the country. In the last scene, Kösem Sultan prepares poison to be added to her grandson Sultan Mehmet's iftar sherbet, but the person she assigns throws the bottle and escapes from the palace. Turhan Sultan and Sultan Mehmet are informed about the poison. Upon this situation, Sultan Mehmet dictates the following edict:

**Sultan Mehmet:** Grand Valide, Mahpeyker Kösem Sultan

with some mischief-makers is threatening the existence of the state and the nation.

Her existence and that of her accomplices will be abolished immediately (Oflazoglu, 2002, p. 128).

Kösem Sultan realizes that the poison plan is not working and prepares another plan to kill the sultan and his mother. She is very confident in herself and her Aghas who support her. With the pride and self-confidence of not having been defeated by anyone, she reveals both her desire to remain in power and what she has done to achieve it with the following words:

**Kösem Sultan:** You have trapped many people until today, Kösem,

but no one has ever been able to capture you.

What does it mean to covet my rule?

Even when he and his sons were born

I'm not in favour of sharing power.

Everything, even the Sultan's tomb, is to be killed.

I thought: I will bury him at the feet of his father,

Ibrahim (Oflazoglu, 2002, p. 129).

While she is rejoicing to herself, the supporters of Turhan Sultan enter, and Kösem Sultan is startled when she sees them in front of her. She starts to run away and throws her jewels and handfuls of gold at those who come after her. After a chase and struggle, Kösem Sultan is strangled by Meleki's lover Mehmet. By saying "the biggest head of the dragon of chaos has been crushed" (p. 130), Turhan Sultan heralds the new order that will be established in the palace. The establishment of a new order for society after the death of the tragic hero as a part of the tragedy tradition applies to both *Macbeth* and *Kösem Sultan*. In *Macbeth*, the murdered King's son will provide the new order, while in *Kösem Sultan*, the owner of the throne will continue to carry her rightful crown after being cleansed of his betrayers.

When the deaths of the two strong female characters in these two plays are considered, it can be an attitude in Kösem Sultan that is very contrary to the expectations of the society, while Lady Macbeth's death can be evaluated concerning traditional female roles. Kösem Sultan does not give up her desire for power until her last breath and she is always in a struggle for this cause. She is not associated with the traditional submissive female role; it is her strong will that makes her portrayed as so influential and determined character in the Ottoman Empire. As Kumrular says, "Kösem not only existed in such a world for half a century, but also made her voice heard in the Ottoman palace as a wise stateswoman who made sure that she was treated with respect when she held power as a regent, that her word was listened to, and that she avoided adding fuel to the fire by showing humility when necessary" (2015, p. 13). However, Lady Macbeth's tragic end can be seen as an end written following the roles expected of women at the time. She does everything to bring her husband to power and make him king, but the delicate female feeling, drawn within the framework of traditional stereotypes attributed to women, cannot endure these bloody events. By imposing Lady Macbeth's nightmares and hallucinations that drive her to madness as a reflection of the vulnerability and fragility of female nature, the concepts of woman and authority are indirectly distanced from each other.

At the beginning of the play, the character of Lady Macbeth, who is strong, ambitious, and confident, shows signs of weakness and hallucinations that we can associate with her being a woman, parallel to traditional perceptions. Sharn L. Jansen says, "Women were incapable of effective rule, for nature... doth paint them forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish, and experience hath declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment" (2002, p. 1). Jansen looks back to history and reveals the shock effect of Mary Tudor's accession to the throne that is seen as the seat of God and now in the hands of "a monster in nature" (p. 1). The fact that femininity, which was associated with adjectives such as weakness and deficiency, was seen in some circles at the time as frightening and unnatural when associated with power. For this reason, even the character of Lady Macbeth, written some 50 years after Mary Tudor and shortly after the judgment of an important queen, Elizabeth I, portrayed female fragility. These famous pathetic quotes of her, "Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 143) shows her delusional state about the blood of the king on her hands. This disempowerment of a strong character like Lady Macbeth justifies the disregard of women in power within the male-dominated discourse. Or the fact that a woman like Kösem Sultan, who is strong, intelligent and has a desire to rule, cannot be the sole authority because of her gender and always has to prove her power around the male gender clearly shows the relationship between power and gender. With the representations of women presented in this way, an invisible border is drawn between power and women, and men, not women, are shown as rivals in the power struggle.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study presents an analysis of two important plays from Turkish and English literature in order to explore how the male and female genders will go through different processes in accessing power and whether it is possible for women to gain power. One of these plays is *Kösem Sultan* which is set in the 17th century and written by Oflazoğlu in the 20th century, the other one is *Macbeth* which is set in 11th

century Scotland and written by Shakespeare in the 17th century. These plays, written in different eras, share features that allow for common readings in many contexts, such as the presence of strong female characters and the struggle for authority from the perspective of women and power relations. In the analysis of the plays with a focus on the themes of power and women, especially considering the times in which the plays are set, it can be seen that men's and women's opportunities to dominate and have power are not comparable. Characteristics of the time in which the plays take place show that power is closely linked to manliness. In both plays, gender roles have an undeniable impact on the distribution of power dynamics. Both female characters Kösem Sultan and Lady Macbeth have many sufficient features to obtain power and dominance, except that they are not men. Since having power and authority is associated with being male, these two female characters can access power indirectly through men. Lady Macbeth has access to power through her husband and Kösem Sultan indirectly through her husband, children, and grandchildren.

In the considerations of gender power relations in the modern and postmodern periods, the pioneering ideas of gender equality and power, and regulations in social rules have been very crucial. As indicated in the theoretical part of this study; by using different interpretations of the phenomenon of power with certain phrases like 'changeability' or 'resistance', Foucault opens up new perspectives on power and authority. Beauvoir criticises the secondary position attributed to women and reveals the patriarchal order in power relations. Accompanied by these ideas, the visibility of such powerful characters as Kösem Sultan and Lady Macbeth is essential to question the man-made gender roles and power structures that are shaped around adjectives such as strong-weak, dominant-submissive, primary-secondary. About power, Steven Lukes emphasises that "how we think about power may serve to reproduce and reinforce power structures and relations, or alternatively it may challenge and subvert them. It may contribute to their continued functioning, or it may unmask their principles of operation, whose effectiveness is increased by their being hidden from view" (2005, p. 63). The man-made nature of power can be reshaped by human hands. Although there are narratives that prioritize male dominance in traditional discourse and old literary texts on the relationship between women and power, as in the two play examples, the potential to reproduce the relationship between power and gender in favour of women in contemporary societies is quite evident. Women who are strong, intelligent, and competent, but hidden in the shadows of patriarchal discourse or misogynistic thoughts, will become visible and empowered.

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