



Possibilities of Resistance in Popular Culture: A Case Study of Sweet & Rough with Müge Anlı

Popüler Kültürde Direniş Olanakları: Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Özlem YILDIZ¹ 

ABSTRACT: Popular culture has long been a subject of contention in its implications for resistance and consent. The purpose of this paper is to discover if it offers possibilities of resistance through an analysis of Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert, a reality show featuring cases of missing people and homicides. Working in collaboration with the police, the show aims to solve the cases of its guests who apply to the program as a last resort, after trying conventional channels. It is therefore put forward that the program gives popular classes a chance to be heard in the public sphere from which they are excluded. Drawing on Stuart Hall's theories on popular culture and Michel de Certeau's concepts of tactics and strategies, the findings of the study indicate that reality TV emerges as a possible arena of resistance, but which also includes an element of consent. A two-level methodological approach is adopted, comprising hermeneutic analysis and critical discourse analysis. Episodes of the show from December 2013 to January 2014 have been watched with extensive notetaking, and two episodes have been chosen as cases for the analysis. The small sample size can be counted as one of the limitations of the study, however a smaller sample has been found more suitable for an in-depth discourse analysis.

Key Words: *Cultural Studies, Popular Culture, Reality Shows, Sweet & Rough with Müge Anlı.*

¹ Assist. Prof. Dr., İstanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University, Faculty of Communication, Department of New Media and Communication

e-mail: ozlem.yildiz@yeniuyuzyil.edu.tr ORCID: 0000-0002-5396-5012

Atf/Citation: Yıldız, Ö. (2025). Possibilities of Resistance in Popular Culture: A Case Study of Sweet & Rough with Müge Anlı. Intermedia International e-Journal, 12(22) 368-388. doi: 10.56133/intermedia.1615388.



Öz: Popüler kültür uzun zamandan beri barındırabileceği direniş imkânları ve olası rıza işlevi bakımında tartışma konusu olmuştur. Bu çalışmanın amacı, popüler kültürün direniş olanakları sunup sunmadığını, çeşitli cinayet ve kayıp vakalarının işlendiği Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert programı üzerinden bir analizle değerlendirmektir. Program, resmi kanalları denedikten sonra son çare olarak şova başvuranların cinayet ve kayıp vakalarını çözmek için, emniyetle iş birliği yapmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, programın popüler sınıflara, dışlandıkları kamusal alanda seslerini duyurma şansı verdiği ortaya konmuştur. Çalışmanın bulguları sonucunda, Stuart Hall'un popüler kültürle ilgili teorileri ve Michel de Certeau'nun taktikler ve stratejiler konusundaki kavramlarından yararlanılarak, reality showların olası bir direniş alanı olarak ortaya çıktığı, ancak aynı zamanda bir onay unsurunu da içerdiğini görülmüştür. Çalışmada yorumlama analizi ve eleştirel söylem analizi olmak üzere iki aşamalı bir metodoloji kullanılmıştır. Aralık 2013 ve Ocak 2014 arasındaki bölümler ayrıntılı şekilde not tutularak izlenmiş ve bu aralıktaki iki bölüm incelenmek üzere örnek vakalar olarak seçilmiştir. Örneklerin küçük olması çalışmanın sınırlılıkları arasında sayılabilecek de olsa, derinlemesine söylem analizi için küçük bir örneklem daha uygun bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültürel Çalışmalar, Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert, Popüler Kültür, Reality Showlar.

INTRODUCTION

Reality shows in Turkey comprise a good chunk of day-time television, spanning from their heyday in the beginning of 2000s to their present status with a diverse spectatorship for each subgenre. One of these subgenres is what is called as women's programs, hosted by well-known figures such as Müge Anlı, the subject of this paper, or Esra Erol. These figures have become household personas through the charisma of their hosts, giving their names to the programs they are hosting. Reality television has also been a hot topic of discussion with moral concerns as well as subject to attacks from various positions, for instance, the subgenre of marriage shows was banned in Turkey in 2017 with the argument that they were inimical to Turkish familial values. Today, a similar concern is raised for the crime-based reality programs such as *Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert* (translated as *Sweet & Rough with Müge Anlı*, hereafter referred to as *Sweet & Rough*), showing the stakes of the implications of popular culture for its supposed consequences on the society.

In fact, popular culture has long been a subject of contention, especially with the rise of mass media during the post-war economic boom, taking its analysis to the forefront of scholarly concern. Though discussion on the subject can be traced back to do 19th century, following the societal changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution; it is after the foundation of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies and the then work of especially Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall that it became a legitimate object of scholarly pursuit (Walton, 2008). Its main problematic sits on the dynamic between society and culture, following earlier treatments of its "low" forms as a debasement (Arnold, 2006), or as a product of capitalist industry securing capitalism's hold on the society (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002). Many scholars of the cultural studies on the other hand focused on the cultural practices of especially the working classes, elaborating on their implications for identity, representation, and resistance; and later race, gender, cultural hegemony, and subcultures (Walton, 2008).

Stuart Hall (2006) defines popular culture as an arena of struggle between power and opposition. This definition in fact, shows the one-sidedness of the two opposing views on popular culture: the two positions adopted by different scholars, namely the first, the position of the Frankfurt School that capitalism produces standardized cultural goods to manipulate the masses; and the second, the position put forward by John Fiske (1989), who states that ‘the people’ are not passive ‘cultural dupes,’ ascribing power to the consumers of cultural products in their capacity to resist through acquiring their own meanings and pleasures from these latter. These scholarly approaches and theoretical framework will inform the problematic of this study, which is to understand whether popular culture can be a site of resistance for popular classes in the example of the reality show *Sweet & Rough*.

In particular, the questions that this study aims to answer are how the show functions to accommodate popular classes’ concerns and problems, what tactics may be used by popular classes to leverage their agendas through the show, and whether this accommodation can be considered as an effective way of resisting power discourse. The study fills a gap within the field of cultural studies in Turkey by focusing on reality shows’ possible adoptions by popular classes rather than addressing these shows only in terms of their effects as media products; and implicates its broader relationship to its factual consequences in real life. The scope of the study comprises the reality show *Sweet & Rough*’s episodes from December 2013 to January 2014. Two episodes among them are analyzed as the study’s sample, one aired on December 28, 2013, and the other on January 2, 2014. One of the limitations of the study can be its adoption of this small sample size, due to the use of discourse analysis as methodology, which however might be more suitable for an in-depth analysis.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Reality Shows

Reality shows have risen due to the financial difficulties the U.S. faced at the 1980s in broadcasting, to curtail the costs of hiring professionals like scriptwriters and actors at a time of labor unrest and a restructuring of the television sector in the country (Raphael, 2009); imported shortly throughout the world. Kavka, (2012) who defined reality television as “unscripted shows with non-professional actors being observed by cameras in preconfigured environments” (p. 5), divided the development of the genre via three stages: The first is the era of crime and mystery reality shows roughly between 1989-1999, shut with camcorders recording real life situations, the second one spans the period between 1990-2005 and is designed as gamedocs in simulated environments like *Big Brother*, and the third begins from 2002 -till at least 2012 at the time of Kavka’s (2012) writing. In this latter period, reality shows emerged as a new breeding ground for turning ordinary people into celebrities, heralding the rise of the dynamics of fame in social media. I adopted elsewhere this threefold periodization by Kavka to Türkiye with an emphasis on this celebrity culture it promotes, which can also

be assessed as a precursor to the culture of online self-display. Today, reality television is a well-established genre of daytime television, and an important topic of inquiry among scholars.

One of these salient discussions on reality television addressed by Western scholars is the function of the genre as a tool of neoliberal governmentality (Couldry & Littler, 2008; Ouellette & Hay, 2008). Governmentality is defined by Rose (1996) as the relegation of the responsibility to the citizens for their own welfare after the demise of the welfare state under neoliberal economics. Among the reality television programs addressed by these scholars are life-intervention shows, where the participants are “reinvented” to meet the requirements of the neoliberal labor market. The literature on the Turkish reality shows on the other hand, focuses more on women’s programs of daytime television through the dynamics of the reproduction of traditional gender roles (Can & Gumus, 2024; Çavdar, 2019; Gedik, 2022; Güven & Kanık, 2016; Kaya, 2012; Yıldırım, 2018) through an emphasis on the moral or sociological implications of crime reality TV (Işık & Yaman, 2017; Tetik & Özgüven, 2021; Yılmaz & Tatoğlu, 2023), as well as through the framework of the media’s truth claims and impacts on the society via concepts such as Baudrillard’s simulation (Yumrukuz, 2016), tele-realism (Elitaş & Keskin, 2019), surveillance (Metem, 2021), and society of the spectacle (Kömür, 2024). However, reality television has not been addressed within the framework of cultural studies, in its implications for popular classes, which will be briefly covered in the following.

1.2. Theorizing Sweet & Rough

From Matthew Arnold (2006), who viewed the culture of the working classes as a force of anarchy to Leavisites treating it as corrupt cultural forms of industrial society (Walton, 2008), and finally to Adorno and Horkheimer’s (2002) assault for its being an industry pacifying the masses, it seems that the rise of popular culture, each in their respective historical contexts, have been considered suspect by many of its theorists. The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies opened a new space for theorizing culture, shifting the analysis away from production to consumption, pointing to its potential for resistance, among others, by Stuart Hall. The following study, analyzing a Turkish reality program, *Sweet & Rough*, draws on Hall’s understanding of popular culture as a site of struggle, complemented by the concepts of tactics and strategies as employed by Michel de Certeau (2002).

In his article, “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular,” Hall (2006) discusses the terms *popular* and *culture*, which evade simple definitions, and lays out the two poles on which scholarly work on the culture of working classes have been theorized thus far. According to Hall, there are two positions in these studies, one of which he calls the “heroic approach,” in its claim that working classes have a pure and authentic culture, whereas the other pole holds that popular culture is only manipulative and

debased. As he continues, the first position is blind to the manipulative aspects of commercial popular products, and the other is a “deeply unsocialist one” (p. 481). Hall (2006) criticizes this latter position for treating popular culture as the new opium of the people who in a state of false consciousness consume whatever is given them (pp. 481-482). However, according to him, popular culture is an arena of class struggle, where strategic positions are won and lost alternately (p. 483). This struggle, however, is not on equal terms but there exists nevertheless a hegemonic relationship with the dominant culture as people may also say “‘Yes’ to power” (p. 487). I argue that this dialectic relationship supposes that popular classes can find ways to circumvent the logic of the oppressive aspects of the system, without directly confronting it.

Following this line of thought, it can be said that *Sour & Bitter* opens a space for those who are excluded from the conventional justice system due to their lack of social, cultural, economic; but most importantly, corporeal capital. This “lack” of cultural capital has long been a trope related to rural to urban migration, especially to Istanbul, which became more and more pronounced in the 1990s, as Bali (2002) recounts in his study about the changing social dynamics at that period. According to the author, though rural to urban migration started in 1950, it was in this decade the migrants from the countryside, became to be scorned within a semiotic web of meanings, with its vocabulary constituted from different elements such as one's ways of grooming, expressing themselves, and manners. This important cleavage in Türkiye, seems to continue to inform the way state bureaucracy deals with popular classes, to be discussed as follows. *Sweet & Rough* provides a space where popular classes can be present in their own manners and culture and where also their pursuits are legitimate. Müge Anlı becomes an intermediary to access to the judiciary system and the police, in a country where relations of informal networks are still present.

James Scott (1985) argues that the resistance of the subordinate classes against the dominant one need not always be through outright rebellion, which, indeed, is much less frequent. Accordingly, small acts of insubordination through poaching within the system such as “foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage” are much more effective in the long run, which he calls “the weapons of the weak” (Scott, 1985, p. xvi). Both Scott (1985) and de Certeau (2002) focus on the possibilities of micro instances of resistance, however, Scott's (1985) analyses frame the peasants' maneuvers he studies as more or less steady in the long durée, as an endemic part of the system. De Certeau (2002), however, is keener for the small instances he calls tactics, which are improvised, where a moment is seized with the emergence of an opportunity. Similarly, Herndl (1996), proposes that Michel de Certeau's concepts of strategy and tactics seam the macro level of resistance with its actualization at the micro level through the minutiae of tactics employed by ordinary people at the interstices of the quotidian life. The present study seams therefore the macro societal

level of “popular culture as a site of class struggle” with the micro level of “tactics as instances of resistance,” espousing respectively Hall’s (2006) theory of culture with the insights of Michel de Certeau (2002).

At the discursive level, the paper draws on de Certeau’s (2002) conceptualization of strategies and tactics, to explain this time the possibilities of resistance at the micro level of *Sweet & Rough’s* discursive space. According to de Certeau (2002), it is in their everyday practices that people evade or escape the coercive discursive regimes within which they operate. The strategies used by dominant powers and the tactics that emerge as the weapons of ordinary people are contrasted by the author. As de Certeau (2002) proposes, tactics are too momentary to become a discourse; they emerge when an opportunity is seized in the absence of power: “[the] order is tricked by an art” (p. 26). de Certeau (2002) puts forward that strategy tries to control, whereas tactics aim to evade or escape. To conclude, according to the author, resistance forms change constantly and may come from various positions, as he discusses how the resistance of agents aims to infiltrate positions into the dominant discourse through their tactics with their own tools (de Certeau, 2002). These concepts of tactics and strategies give us the possibility to understand how resistance is actualized at the minutiae of the quotidian life, the level at which resistance occurs, in the analysis of the reality show *Sweet & Rough*.

2. Methodology

The problematic of the present study sits at this main contention of the relationship between culture, and especially popular culture and society, to tackle what might be its uses and meanings for popular classes. The main question is whether popular culture in general and reality shows in particular can contain moments of resistance within their structure and reception. To this end, the Turkish reality show *Sweet & Rough* has been analyzed using a twofold methodological approach: a hermeneutic analysis through the notion of “corporeal capital” adapted from Bourdieu’s concepts by Skeggs, (2002) and discourse analysis adapted by Negm (2015) from the methodology of critical discourse analysis. This eclectic approach has been employed to treat both the macro level of the societal and the micro level of the discursive, addressing both levels as they can be best understood in their relationship with each other. The sample of the study consists of two episodes selected from among the ones between December 2013 and January 2014, being previously watched with extensive notetaking.

Saukko (2003) argues that cultural studies aim to address a three-dimensional interest; that of the lived experience, of discourses, and of social context, demanding a complex approach to methodology. According to the author, “Understanding lived experience demands a hermeneutic or phenomenological approach, Interest in discourses calls for a (post)structuralist analysis ... Analyzing the social and political

context, however, is always wedded to some form of realism.” Hence, the Saukko (2003) relates how these methodologies complement each other but are contradictory at times (Saukko, 2003, pp. 33-34). In the present study, to address this three-fold interest in cultural studies, an analysis has been conducted at two different levels: that of the societal level of the show within the political and social context it is situated and the intra-discursive level of the show, through an eclectic approach bringing together both levels that would be incomplete without the other. The analysis of the first level pertains to the level of the lived experience within its social and political context, which I make through a hermeneutic approach based on the work of the sociologist Bourdieu, and especially using the concept of corporeal capital as adapted from Bourdieu by Skeggs (2002). Corporeal capital means attractiveness for this latter, however it is defined, but I am using the term here in a rather different way, incorporating other elements of comporting, and presenting the body, as will be explained below. The unit of analysis here is the show itself, within the social and political context it occupies.

The second level of the intra-discursive is analyzed through critical discourse analysis (CDA), as revised by Negm (2015). According to Locke (2004), CDA aims to discover how dominant discourses play a role in sustaining power relations. Postulating that language is a social practice complicit in the maintenance of asymmetrical power relations, as can be observed in different dyads such as the convict and the judge or the student and the teacher, CDA stresses that language is not a neutral medium (Locke, 2004). However, as CDA's primary focus is on the discourse of the powerful, it remains short of explaining discursive instruments that can be employed by the subordinates, as argued by Mohamed Said Negm (2015). Negm (2015), in his article, *Resisting Power Discourse*; conducts a literary analysis of a conversation between two characters from Arthur Miller's famous play *The Death of Salesman*: an employee and his boss. Accordingly, discursive power swings from one speaker to the other, as agents play out their capacity for bargaining to implement their own agenda. However, this does not mean that discursive power is equally distributed between the interlocutors (Negm, 2015). This paper, at its analysis of the intra-discursive level, espouses CDA as revised by Negm (2015), focusing on the discursive strategies of popular classes in their asymmetrical relation to Müge Anlı, through tactics that are available to them. The study employs purposive sampling as a qualitative method, which:

refers to a group of non-probability sampling techniques in which units are selected because they have characteristics that [the researcher needs in his/her sample]. In other words, units are selected “on purpose” in purposive sampling [which] relies on the researcher's judgment when identifying and selecting the individuals, cases, or events that can provide the best information to

achieve the study's objectives [...] to find information-rich cases. (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

With these in mind, the episodes between December 2013 and January 2014 have been watched and the shows aired on December 27, 2013, and January 2, 2014, have been chosen with convenience sampling and analyzed through critical discourse analysis as adopted by Negm (2015); which provided the best information in terms of the research questions addressed in the study. The aim is to illustrate the tactics employed by the participants in the show and analyze Müge Anlı's own discourse in her position as an intermediary to state institutions.

3. Findings

In the following discussion, I will first lay out the main structure and proceedings of *Sweet & Rough* and afterwards analyze it at the two levels of the macro and the micro as set out above. Then, I will discuss whether there are limits to popular forms of resistance, as can be observed in the case of *Sweet & Rough*.

3.1. *Sweet & Rough with Müge Anlı*

Sweet & Rough is a reality show aiming to solve a blend of cases of murder and missing people, through different tools such as interviewing the people involved on stage, using evidence like phone records obtained from the police, or bringing together family members who lost track of each other. The show has been on air for 17 years at the time of the writing, now, without interruption. As of the 28.06.2024 episode, it had found over 4,910 missing people, solved 230 murders, and delivered 28,400 wheelchairs to their owners (Anlı & Şirin, 2024), being one of the most watched daytime television programs throughout the years. It is also a long-lasting national phenomenon, and the cases it brings to stage may make national headlines. People may apply to Müge Anlı to ask her to find their missing, to demand her solve the suspected death of their relatives or to find their biological families if adopted. They then are hosted by Müge Anlı in *Sweet & Rough*, and a real-life thrill ensues at the studio. Applicants received as guests on the program are, mostly, if not only, from popular classes.

The show's narrative is eclectic, as several cases are addressed in each episode. There is no apparent order between these transitions, and a happy coming together of a family can be followed by a case of violent murder, this format keeping the viewership in front of the screen through the elements of thrill and of curiosity. The guests seated at the studio change at regular intervals as the airing continues, at appropriate times such as commercial breaks, when it is their turn for their cases to be addressed.

The episode, which aired on January 2, 2014, can be summarized as follows:

The first case is that of the missing of a 17-year-old boy who could not find a job in Istanbul because he is epileptic. It turns out that he migrated to İzmir to become a dishwasher without informing his family. His mother and grandmother thank Müge Anlı in the words “Allah Razı Olsun” (May god bless you) in tears.

Another missing case: The mother and grandmother of an 8-year-old boy are looking for him.

Missing case: A 41-year-old widowed woman whose children, a 24-year-old man and an 18-year-old woman comes to the studio with the hope of finding her. Several men who are thought to be related to the case are interviewed.

Return to the missing child.

Return to the missing mother.

The news is that the child is found dead in a water pool in a building site. Questions of abuse, no evidence yet. Some suggestions that dogs might have chased the child.

A discussion on why animals live in the city rather than appropriate shelters.

Return to the missing mother.

A dispute between the missing mother’s daughter and one of the guests.

Pictures of charity activities conducted by the show.

A 40-year-old man raised by German adoptive parents meets her biological mother.

The news that a 22-year-old man from a previous episode is found dead.

Return to the missing mother.

End of the show. (Anlı & Coşkun, 2014)

The most popular reality shows aired during daytime television in Türkiye have become synonymous with their hosts throughout the years, Anlı is not an exception. With a career of 17 years at the same program, Müge Anlı built a powerful persona of herself. The relationship of Müge Anlı with her spectatorship is therefore a peculiar one, which is strengthened by the fact that *Sweet & Rough* sits at the intersection of reality and its representation on television.

As defined by Horton and Wohl (Horton & Wohl, 1956), a para-social relationship is the emotional investment of the spectators with media personalities, establishing a one-sided rapport with them. In this vein, Müge Anlı becomes a home figure for its audience, this parasocial relationship being a key in the resolution of the cases brought into the show, through the involvement of real-life ordinary people. The program, as stated above, works in collaboration with the police and has devout viewership. As the airing continues, potential witnesses in front of the screen may call the studio, share what they know about the cases, talk about the whereabouts of those missing and so on, bringing the investigation of, for example, a suspected murder, on the national scale. Müge Anlı’s persona becomes therefore synonymous with a benevolent figure of authority, commanding respect and devotion, but at the

same time establishing an intimate rapport of affection, with those who need, apparently, her help.

I will focus on the cases of murder for a moment, to give an idea on how Müge Anlı conducts the show thanks to her extraordinary abilities of communication and charisma. Murder cases continue to be aired throughout several episodes, keeping the thrill going for the spectatorship who wait for the resolution of the real time detective story in front of their screen. In these cases, being the hallmark of the show, Müge Anlı performs the roles of the presenter, the moderator, and frequently the prosecutor. She conducts the conversations between the parties, among those involved, who may be the relatives, murder suspects, or witnesses in the case. Like a police officer, she asks questions to those involved to correct inconsistencies or to get more information. Quarrels between different camps and sometimes among the guests are frequent, raising tension and thrill, and it is not uncommon that the interviewees report contradictory statements in the span of a few minutes. Also tapes from the previous interviews conducted by reporters are presented in the show when appropriate, which frequently contain contradictory statements or chronological inconsistencies. *Sweet & Rough* is so effective that murder suspects present themselves in the studio to prove their innocence, even in the case of their being the culprit, because the contrary may mean accepting the charge. It is necessary therefore to come clean on the show, and many find themselves confessing their crimes in the studio to being collected by the police. A striking example of that is the case of Atalay Filiz, now convicted of the murder of three, then suspect, was brought to the agenda by Müge Anlı, resulting in almost a mobilization campaign throughout the country, Atalay being finally arrested by the police thanks to a witness, as his photos were constantly being shown during the airings (Aytuğ, 2016).

3.2. Müge Anlı as the Middleman

As it seems, the conventional justice system has a differential treatment towards people from different social backgrounds in Türkiye, as only eloquence and proper corporeal capital can secure one's being taken seriously by the police, a line of crucial social cleavage in Türkiye. This sociological landscape of Türkiye will be addressed here through the concept of corporeal capital, itself derived from the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. Skeggs (2002), who introduced the concept, defines corporeal capital in terms of physical attractiveness of mainly women linking it to different ways girls learn how to groom themselves. I argue that corporeal capital is not the preserve of women, and may include the way the body is comported, speaks, looks, its eloquence, complexion and so on. As popular classes are frequently dismissed due to their manners, comportment, the way they use their body and speech or the way they dress, those lacking in corporeal capital receive unfavorable treatment while dealing with state bureaucracy. There is an instance in the show when this fact becomes apparent: An 18-year-old woman looking for her mother protests

the treatment she received from the police. Accordingly, the police mocked her for having binged on *Arka Sokaklar*, -a Turkish serial where the police effectively combat ordinary crime cases- and dispatched her. She states that she then decided to apply to the show (Anlı & Coşkun, 2013). Popular classes' relative lack of cultural, social, and financial capital compounds the problem of corporeal capital, such as not possessing the know-how of dealing with lawsuits, having low chance of hiring an efficient lawyer and so on. Thus, the position popular classes in the politico-judicial system is frequently that of exclusion, a problem which they may deal with, through applying to *Sweet & Rough*. Here the role of the middleman of Müge Anlı comes into place, to whom ordinary people apply to as an alternative to the Turkish justice system, presenting a point of access to state institutions.

A middleman is someone who acts as an intermediary between two people or organizations for conducting negotiations of any kind between the parties. In the Turkish context, I am using the term to designate the mobilization of one's connections to reach a favor, or help, from those in positions of power, which can be addressed from a sociological perspective: A middleman is a salient property of Turkish society, functioning as an access point to resources like getting a job or finding a good doctor. In fact, using a middleman is a common way to make one's work get done as informality blends with formal means which supposedly should function based on a neutral state bureaucracy. These two mechanisms coexist side by side and do not exclude each other.

This practice of using a middleman seems to have its roots in the Ottoman political life, which, before the centralization of the Empire, was based on a system of big houses as argued by the sociologist Nükhet Sirman (2012). Accordingly, the Ottoman society was organized through a configuration of bigger and smaller houses, the biggest one being the palace and the smaller ones formed as their appendages, a system which ensured its continuation through the recruitment of bright young men via marriages (Sirman, 2012). It can be inferred from here that the big houses provided a point of access to state resources for the populace, through links of patronage. With the Ottoman state's centralization efforts in 19th century and of the foundation of the Turkish Republic, these relations of patronage seem to have been targeted by state authorities to be replaced by meritocratic rule, however, the practice of using a middleman, to whom one is related through kinship or acquaintance, as an intermediary to access resources continues to this day.

Müge Anlı, as a benevolent authority figure, performs this function of the intermediary, for popular classes whose access to conventional channels is blocked. The fact that there are no personal connections but a medium which ideally is democratically open to all applicants functioning as a mechanism of problem solving, points to the difference between *Sweet & Rough* and conventional means. It is a

television show conferring public visibility to the problems of ordinary men and women, opening a space where their voices can be heard; and their ways of life and discourses can appear in the public sphere in a legitimate way. This quality of the show establishes a feeling of ease and security, a feeling of being at home for the guests. For example, one woman confessing the murder of a man by her boyfriend out of jealousy, states that she could not go to the police out of fear that something might happen to her children. She states that from now on, she will only live for them. The murder suspect is waiting in the garden of the studio unaware of the confession. The local police immediately comes and arrests both.

3.3. Fooling the wise

Now some examples will be presented to analyze the way popular classes express themselves in the public space of the reality show *Steet & Rough*, at the intra-discursive level of the study. The inquiry in this part of understanding how popular classes leverage different tactics to evade what might not be to their best interest.

The first example is from a suspected murder case of a man around his 70s, in the episode aired on December 27, 2013. According to the story, there are two women whom the man wanted to marry but the telephone records and testimonies from his acquaintances point to the possibility that he dropped the first option of marriage in favor of the second one, as this last woman in question was younger. The man is found dead in her apartment. The younger woman denies any prospect of marriage between the man and herself. The following is an excerpt from the live telephone conversation between Anlı and her:

Müge Anlı (With telephone records obtained from the police in her hand): How do you explain at least 15-20 phone conversations per day?

The woman: You make a summary execution of us. I have not committed murder here.

Müge Anlı: Why would we make summary execution? There is evidence and we ask about it. The man told everybody that he would marry you, he even found a hodja.²

...

Müge Anlı: So, these phone records, they don't belong to you?

² A religious official who can perform marriages in an unofficial capacity; although this practice is not formally recognized, it is believed to be necessary for devout Muslims.

The woman: I am uneducated. Didn't I say that I can't understand from dates, from documents?³⁴ (Anlı & Coşkun, 2013, translated by author)

At first impression one can find it somewhat irrational the way the woman on the other side of the phone line acts, as if unable to answer the questions of Anlı. In fact, this is the impression she wants to make. However, there is a different rationality at work here.

Müge Anlı asks straightforward questions. The woman skillfully evades these using different tactics. The first of course is not to respond to the questions and to find other means of not remaining silent. The other one is using emotional exclamations protesting that she is unjustly accused of murder. But perhaps the last tactic, to play the ignorant is the most effective one as she states that she is uneducated and cannot understand what Anlı says. This is one of the strategies of popular classes within the dominant culture to pursue their interests. This feature of Turkish social life is also ingrained in Turkish cinema, as found its best expression in the legendary actor Kemal Sunal's movies, as related by Tekelioğlu (2009). In the movie *Kapıcılar Kralı*, Kemal Sunal interprets the role of a janitor who migrated from the country to Istanbul to earn a living. He is presented as a shrewd and clever fellow, who outsmarts his middle class Istanbulite employers and heralds the victory ordinary people against the dominant culture (Tekelioğlu, 2009). In the above case of the conversation between Anlı and the women on the phone line, the woman most probably has something to hide, though she did not murder the man, which may possibly be a kind of obtaining some form of material advantage from him, a line of inquiry not pursued further in the show, as she skillfully manages to fulfill her aim.

Many of the conversations and interviews that happen in the show are full of evasive statements, contradictory enunciations, and chronological disorders making it difficult to understand what, where and when happened. Most of the time, what is said might also be contrary to the evidence or contrary to the statements of the guests themselves. There are frequent accusations of deception which are seldom evaded. For instance, in the case of the missing mother, the statements of almost all involved men's interviews fit this pattern. In fact, they all had a romantic relationship with her while they were married. But these seeming contradictions and inability to constitute

³*Turkish Transcript:* Müge Anlı: Bir günde en az 15-20 telefon görüşmesini nasıl izah ediyorsunuz

Kadın: Bizi yargısız infaz ediyorsunuz! Ben burda cinayet işlemedim!

Müge Anlı: Niye yargısız infaz yapılsın? Birtakım belgeler var bunu soruyoruz. Adam herkese sizinle evleneceğini söylemiş, hoca bile bulmuş. ...

Müge Anlı: Telefon listesinde yapılan telefon konuşmaları size ait değil mi?

Kadın: Ben cahil bi insanım ben tarih kitap bilmem demedim mi?

⁴ It is very difficult, maybe even impossible to convey the implications of the idiosyncrasies involved in this conversation. The woman in fact says in Turkish: "Ben tarih kitap bilmem demedim mi?" with implications of ignorance, lack of education and of low social position.

a coherent narrative disappear when the interviewees do not have any stake in the events. In the case of the dead-found man who wanted to get married, that has been related above, his brother speaks as follows:

Brother: We stopped seeing each other a while ago [...] I saw him with two women just 20 days before he died. The one was fat and blond. He was going to marry her.

Reporter: Did you ask him who are these women, how he met them?

Brother: I've heard this from a friend, and from some other people.

Reporter (Shows him a picture): This lady in the picture?

Brother: Yes. I saw them in Bayraklı, walking in Sevgi Street. He had everything, income, money. The last time he bought some furniture worth 20 billion.

Reporter: Well, you mean that he didn't have any infirmity.

Brother: He was not ill. He didn't have any sickness. (Anlı & Coşkun, 2013 translated by author)⁵⁶

3.3. "Yes" to Power

Up to now has been covered the ways resistance or recuperation is possible for popular classes through and within the show *Sweet & Rough*, relating the ways in which a justice system excluding popular classes may be infiltrated at the societal level, and Müge Anlı's questions evaded through an arsenal of different tactics at the intra-discursive level. But Hall (Hall, 2006) also reminds us that the people may say "Yes" to power, which shows that there is an element of consent in the field of popular culture's hegemonic forms. I now want to discuss how consent is implicated in both levels that have been analyzed, the first being how Müge Anlı frames her involvement with criminal cases as a help rather than within the language of justice as a right, and the second one at the intra-discursive level, being the role Müge Anlı takes upon herself as a watchdog of morals.

In a democratic system, justice should be a social right. It includes universal concepts such as presumption of fair treatment. But the popular classes presented in this show do not oppose this system, claiming their rights that they cannot obtain in the face of exclusion. Their resistance remains at the level of tactics, they do not

⁵ Kardeş: Görüşmüyorduk [...] Ölmeden 20 gün önce iki bayanla beraber gördüm. Şişman sarışın, onla imam nikâhıyla evlenecekti

Muhabir: Siz sordunuz mu bu kadınlar kimdir nerden buldu?

Kardeş: Arkadaşımdan duydum, bi kaç kişi daha konuştu

Muhabir: Bu fotoğraftaki bayan?

Kardeş: Bu bayandır... Bayraklı'da Sevgi yolunda yürürken gördüm. [İsim]'in her şeyi vardı maaşı parası 20 milyarlık eşya gene aldı.

Muhabir: Yani hiçbir hastalığı yoktu bunu demek istiyorsunuz değil mi?

Kardeş: [İsim] hasta değildi hiçbir hastalığı yoktu.

⁶ *Sweet & Rough* has also in-house reporters, who may help inquire about the murder cases outside the studio and record these conversations to be shown live on the show, this passage being one example.

oppose the system of control imposed on them. There is no conscious attempt at social change. At the instance where one of the guests protests the police who mocked her for binging on a crime show, her protest is not expressed in the language of rights. *Sweet & Rough* does not position itself in opposition to the justice system or as an alternative way. An excerpt from an interview with Müge Anlı, made in 28.12.2008 illustrates well this point:

Reporter: What is your relationship to the police?

Müge Anlı: The success here belongs to the police, to the Turkish police. We might only have reinforced confidence in them. I think that this program has revived the slogan “The Turkish police capture the criminals” in the minds of the people. Our help might be the following: people who abstain from going to the police to share information find it easier to call a television program. Denunciations are made more easily. This is what I think may be our help.

Reporter: İstanbul Security Director Celalettin Cerrah thanked you for the program.

Müge Anlı: I owe my thanks both to him and to public security director Mustafa Köse, and to all his friends. I am a person who deeply loves and respects state institutions. I am a person who loves the police and the soldiers (“Hanım Koş Çabuk Katil Bulundu,” 2008).

Müge Anlı, far from adopting a position of opposition, reproduces the state institutions through her discourse. She even makes it into a question of affection by using the language of emotions and stating that she loves the police and the soldiers. Considering the argument that reality programming stereotypes people and decontextualizes social problems (Aksop, 1998; Leone, Peek, & Bissell, 2006), the space opened to popular classes by *Sweet & Rough* can be considered a double-edged sword.

Another problematic aspect of the show, at the intra-discursive level, which should not be disregarded, is the fact that Müge Anlı can also function as a moral watchdog and speak from a deeply misogynistic position. She can say, for example, the following, about a sex worker who has been sexually assaulted: “The fact that a girl working as an escort is raped and cries is meaningless (translated by author),” which shows that she also can very well reproduce the dominant discourse in an outrageously sexist way, even if not frequently (Söylemezoğlu, n.d.).

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to answer the following question: Can popular culture be a site of resistance for popular classes in the example of reality shows, a question addressed through the context of *Sweet & Rough*. The findings showed that reality shows can accommodate popular classes’ concerns and problems whereas this accommodation

is curtailed by the show's adoption of the hegemonic position of power discourse, preserving the hierarchical relationships between them and the state institutions mediated by Müge Anlı. However, it has also been shown that popular classes still have different tactics in their arsenal, such as playing the ignorant, or sidetracking discussions once they have a stake in what happens on the show.

The first problem of the study on how the show functions to accommodate popular classes concerns and problems has been addressed using the concept of corporeal capital, through a sociological analysis, as adopted by Skeggs (2002) from Bourdieu through a hermeneutic approach. The discussion focused on the barriers of access for popular classes to state institutions for resolving their problems, emanating from their relative lack of corporeal capital, due to their ways of grooming and comporting the body. It has been argued that Müge Anlı and her show act as an intermediary between state institutions and the popular classes they host, showing that the culture of middleman in present Türkiye is still well alive.

The intra-discursive level of the study on the problem of what tactics may be used by popular classes to leverage their agendas through the show has been addressed by critical discourse analysis as adopted by Negm (2015), who adapted CDA for analyzing the discursive tools available to ordinary people in their hierarchical relationship to those in position of power. The theoretical framework adopted here has been that of Michel de Certeau's (2002) conception of tactics and strategies, the former being the weapons of ordinary people, a question also addressed by Scott (1985), who argues that resistance should not be only understood as outright rebellion but is endemic in ordinary people's quotidian life, which he calls "weapons of the weak," showing how Müge Anlı's participants juggle their presence in *Sweet & Rough* through their own arsenal of available tactics.

The last concern about whether this accommodation can be considered an effective way of resisting power discourse addressed in this paper has been whether the show's structure contains elements of consent and reproduces the hegemonic frame excluding popular classes from the judicial system. It has been found that popular classes still say "yes to power" as Müge Anlı frames her position as that of helping the police. Therefore, the question of social right to justice is not addressed, exacerbated by Anlı's sometimes condescending attitude and adoption of a sexist discourse. Therefore, it has been shown that the show still reproduces the hegemonic structure popular classes face in terms of their relationship to power.

To conclude, this study aimed to understand how ordinary people make use of a popular cultural form with its real-life consequences, situating them in their relevant social context of Turkish society. It therefore contributes to the academic field through offering a type of analysis different from that of reception studies as well as

those that focus on how reality shows function as a media item. The show's factual status in the Turkish society has been addressed, which may serve as an example for further studies from the Cultural Studies perspective. However, the study is confined to a small sample and can only be a point of entry for further studies to discuss real-life implications of reality shows for popular classes. This is one of the important limitations of the research in question. It is hoped that the analyses proposed here contribute to future studies from the perspective of Cultural Studies informed by a sociological approach.

KAYNAKÇA

Adorno, Theodor, W., & Horkheimer, M. (2002). *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Gunzelin Schmid, Ed.; Edmund Jephcott, Trans.). Stanford University Press.

Aksop, G. (1998). *Türkiye’de reality show’lar*. Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey.

Arnold, M. (2006). *Culture and Anarchy* (J. Garnett, Ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Aytuğ, Y. (2016, June 15). Yakalanma öyküsünde Müge Anlı etkisi. *Sabah, Günaydın*.

Bali, N. (2002). *Tarz-ı hayat’tan life style’a: Yeni seçkinler, yeni mekanlar, yeni yaşamlar*. Istanbul, Turkey: İletişim Yayınları.

Can, A., & Gumus, B. (2024). Toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin medyadaki sembolik şiddeti: Gelin evi örneği. *Kritik Dergi*, 6(1), 29–50. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.53281/kritik.1355291>

Çavdar, C. (2019). Gündüz kuşağı kadın programlarında toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliği ve kadın temsili. *Selçuk İletişim*, 12(1), 368–383.

Certeau, M. de. (2002). *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2nd ed.; S. F. Rendall, Trans.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Couldry, N., & Littler, J. (2008). The work of work: Reality TV and the negotiation of neoliberal labour in The Apprentice. In T. Austin & W. de Jong (Eds.), *Rethinking documentary: New perspectives and practices* (pp. 258–267). Open University Press.

Elitaş, T., & Keskin, S. (2019). Türkiye’de realite programlar ve telekimlikler: Medyatik toplumsallık incelemesi. *Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi (SUSBİD)*, 14, 411–434.

Ercan, T., Coşkun, H., & Koç, K. (2013, December). *Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert [Sweet & Rough]*.

Ercan, T., Coşkun, H., & Koç, K. (2014, January). *Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert [Sweet & Rough]*.

Ercan, T., Şirin, A., & Koç, K. (2024, June). *Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert [Sweet & Rough]*. Retrieved from <https://www.atv.com.tr/muge-anli-ile-tatli-sert/3369-bolum/izle>

Fiske, J. (1989). *Understanding Popular Culture*. Unwin Hyman.

Gedik, B. Ç. (2022). *Toplumsal cinsiyet rejiminin medya aracılığıyla yeniden üretimi: Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert örneği (Master’s Thesis)*. Ankara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Antropoloji Anabilim Dalı, Sosyal Antropoloji Bilim Dalı.

Güven, E., & Kanık, İ. (2016). "Everybody should witness our happiness": Matrimonial shows on Turkish television channels. *Boğaziçi University Journal of Social Sciences*, 9(1), 102–117.

Hall, S. (2006). Notes on Deconstructing "the Popular" [1981]. In J. Storey (Ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader* (3rd ed., pp. 477–487). Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited.

Hanım koş çabuk katil bulundu. (2008, December 28). *Ensonhaber*.

Herndl, C. G. (1996). Tactics and the Quotidian: Resistance and Professional Discourse. *Journal of Advanced Composition*, 16(3), 455–470.

Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance. *Psychiatry*, 19(3), 215–229.

Işık, N., & Yaman, B. (2017). Crime and media: The world of "reality show" as a moral frame of reference. *Milli Folklor*, 113, 69.

Kavka, M. (2012). *Reality TV*. Edinburgh University Press.

Kaya, Ş. Ş. (2012). Sahibinden satılık korkular: Kadının korkutulan özne olarak inşasında medyanın rolü. *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(1), 191. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.21462/jss.2012.22>

Kömür, G. (2024). Dijitalleşen Realite Şovlara ve Gösteri Toplumuna Performatif Yaklaşım: RealiTuber ve RealiToker. *Yeni Medya Dergisi*, 16, 369–392. <https://doi.org/10.55609/yenimedya.1457449>

Leone, R., Peek, W. C., & Bissell, K. L. (2006). Reality Television and Third-Person Perception. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 50(2), 253–269. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem5002_5

Locke, T. (2004). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London, UK: Continuum.

Mete, A. I. (2021). *Surveillance culture and citizen participation in policing through television: A case study on Müge Anlı ile Tatlı Sert*.

Negm, M. S. (2015). Resisting Power in Discourse. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 192, 284–289. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.041>

Nikolopoulou, K. (2022, November 8). What is purposive sampling? Definition & examples.

Ouellette, L., & Hay, J. (2008). *Better living through reality TV: Television and postwelfare citizenship*. Blackwell Publishing.

Raphael, C. (2009). The political-economic origins of Reali-TV. In S. Murray & L. Ouellette (Eds.), *Reality TV: Remaking television culture* (pp. 123–140). New York University Press.

Rose, N. (1996). Governing “advanced” liberal democracies. In A. Barry, T. Osborne, & N. Rose (Eds.), *Foucault and political reason: Liberalism, neo-liberalism and rationalities of government* (pp. 37–64). The University of Chicago Press.

Saukko, P. (2003). *Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An Introduction to Classical and New Methodological Approaches*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Sirman, N. (2012). The Making of Familial Citizenship in Turkey. In F. Keyman & A. İçduygu (Eds.), *Challenges to Citizenship in a Globalizing World: European Questions and Turkish Experiences* (pp. 147–172). London, UK: Routledge.

Skeggs, B. (2002). *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (2nd ed.). London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Söylemezoğlu, Ş. Ş. K. (n.d.). Gerçekten toplumun çivisi çıktı.

Tekelioğlu, O. (2009, March). Orhan Tekelioğlu’nun Kaleminden İki “Kahraman”: Şaban ile Recep İvedik Arasında Ne Fark Var? *Radikal*.

Tetik, T., & Özgüven, D. (2021). Reality crime programs in Turkish television: The notorious case of Palu family on Müge Anlı. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications*, 7(2), 137–150.

Walton, D. (2008). *Introducing Cultural Studies: Learning Through Practice*. London, UK: SAGE Publications Limited.

Yıldırım, S. (2018). Kadının bedeni ve duyguları üzerinden sömürülmesi: Evlendirme programları örneği. *Avrasya Sosyal ve Ekonomi Araştırmaları Dergisi (ASEAD)*, 5(1), 1–11. Retrieved from <https://www.asead.com>

Yılmaz, Y., & Tatoğlu, M. F. (2023). Simulation of violence on television and real lives turned into show. Ankara International Congress on Scientific Research. *Ankara International Congress on Scientific Research-VIII*, 1064–1065. Ankara.

Yumrukuz, Ö. (2016). Jean Baudrillard’ın Simülasyon Kuramı Çerçevesinde Survivor Programı. *TRT Akademi*, 1(1), 85–111.

- ▶ **Etik kurul onayı:** Etik kurul onayına ihtiyaç bulunmamaktadır.
 - ▶ **Çıkar çatışması:** Çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.
 - ▶ **Finansal destek:** Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.
-

- ▶ **Ethics committee approval:** There is no need for ethics committee approval.
- ▶ **Conflict of interest:** There is no conflict of interest.
- ▶ **Grant support:** The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

Bu çalışma araştırma ve yayın etiğine uygun olarak gerçekleştirilmiştir.

This study was carried out in accordance with research and publication ethics.