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Domestic Rivalries as Daytime Spectacle: An Analysis of In-Law Cooking Competitions**

Ev İçi Rekabetin Gündüz Kuşağında Gösterileşmesi: Gelin-Kaynana Yemek Yarışmaları Üzerine Bir İnceleme

Abstract

Daytime television in Turkey has long been dominated by reality shows focused on intra-familial relations. One particular trend is the rise of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law cooking competition shows. These formats, with their domestic aesthetics, transform the typically private dynamics of family life into a televised spectacle. By reframing the in-law dynamics as an entertainment format, the formats expose the tensions and contradictions between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law but also simultaneously reinforce patriarchal narratives that are aligned with the broader neoconservative family policies of contemporary Turkey. By analyzing two popular case studies, *Gelinim Mutfakta* (*My Daughter-in-Law is in the Kitchen*, Kanal D, 2018-) and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* (*At the Table with Zuhal Topal*, FOX, 2018-2021), this article examines how the in-law relationships are framed as a site for both domestic rivalry and power struggle in this format. Drawing on discourse analysis and Foucauldian theories of power, the study explores how these shows reconstruct domestic power dynamics and demonstrate how television can both reflect and transform traditional gender roles within the context of Turkish culture.

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Öz

Türkiye’de gündüz kuşağı televizyonu uzun süredir, aile içi ilişkilere odaklanan realite formatlarının egemenliğindedir. Bu programların arasında, gelin-kaynana yemek yarışması formatları özellikle öne çıkar. Bir ev estetiğiyle kurgulanan bu formatlar, aile yaşamının özel dinamiklerini televizyon ekranlarına taşır. Gelin-kaynana ilişkisinin bir eğlence formatına dönüştüğü bu programlarda, bir yandan gelin-kaynana ilişkisinin içerdiği gerilim ve çelişkiler görünür kılırken diğer yandan Türkiye’deki muhafazakar aile politikalarıyla örtüşen bir biçimde ataerkil anlatılar pekiştirilir. Bu makale *Gelinim Mutfakta* (Kanal D, 2018-) ve *Zuhal Topal’la Sofrada* (FOX, 2018-2021) programlarını birer vaka çalışması olarak ele alarak, bahsedilen televizyon formatında gelin-kaynana ilişkisinin nasıl bir rekabet ve güç müzakeresi çerçevesinde yansıtıldığını incelemektedir. Söylem analizi ve Foucault’nun iktidar kuramından yararlanan çalışma, bu formatların ev içi iktidar ilişkilerini nasıl yeniden yapılandırıldığını ve televizyonun geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini nasıl yansıtıp, dönüştürdüğünü göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Keywords

Daytime Television, Gender, Family, Power, Discourse

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Introduction

Daytime television in Turkey is currently dominated by reality formats that center on intra-familial relationships. A particularly striking example of this trend is the rise of cooking competition shows featuring mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. This article examines two popular Turkish daytime cooking competitions, *Gelinim Mutfakta* (*My Daughter-in-Law is in the Kitchen*, Kanal D, 2018-) and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* (*At the Table with Zuhal Topal*, FOX, 2018-2021), which depict mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law competing in teams against other contestants. However, an uneven power dynamic exists within each team: mothers-in-law act as judges who collectively make the final decision about which daughter-in-law cooks the best and wins the weekly prize.

Gelinim Mutfakta and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* are structured around the in-law relationships, which have a stereotypically conflictual nature. (Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2017). Despite being inspired by global formats, these shows offer a compelling viewing experience for Turkish audiences by reinforcing familiar cultural dynamics regarding the relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. However, by highlighting the hierarchical and conservative characteristics of these relations, they consolidate the governmental policies of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) that position family as the moral backbone of society and promote neoconservative 'family values' as a cultural defense against the secular backdrop of the Turkish culture.

"Family values" have become a discursive trademark of the AKP government and a crucial tool for reframing the family as a viable care system, thereby reducing the government's responsibility for social welfare (Cindoglu & Unal, 2016; Kocamaner, 2018; Yazıcı, 2012; Yılmaz, 2015). The declaration of 2025 as the "Year of the Family" (Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Family, n.d.) further amplified the visibility of the AKP's family-centered policies. An examination of the public service announcement for the Year of the Family reveals that the family is defined as the core unit of society in which citizens learn central values such as love, sharing, and self-sacrifice (Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı, 2025). The new policies introduced this year include maternity benefits and financial incentives for early marriages. In addition, the requirement for workplaces to provide childcare has been loosened, and severance pay is legally guaranteed for women who voluntarily leave their jobs after marriage (Güneş-Ayata & Doğançün, 2017: 9).

These policies discourage women's economic independence and reinforce their roles as caregivers. The AKP's discursive strategies and biopolitical practices promote patriarchal values, rendering women's bodies and sexualities into sites of political contestation. As a reflection of the AKP's broader neoconservative agenda, which includes the marginalization of LGBTQ identities and the negotiation of abortion rights (Acar & Altınok, 2013, p.20), newly initiated governmental policies are promoted as a way to preserve traditional family values. Within this context, intergenerational living arrangements are encouraged over nuclear house-

holds, both as a form of social care and as a means of transmitting traditional values to younger generations (Kocamaner, 2018, p.37). Media, especially daytime television, play a crucial role in normalizing these neoconservative family policies by celebrating familial relations and domestic life.

Within this ideological framework, gendered hierarchies in the household are not only reinforced but also portrayed as natural and even desirable in daytime television. In particular, the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law serves as a symbolic arena for the reproduction of conventional family values and stands out as a symbolically charged cultural site. Several studies have been conducted to investigate the connection between different formats of daytime television and gender politics in Turkey. For instance, a popular local daytime format, known as ‘marriage shows’, which served as a matchmaking platform for people of all ages seeking love and marriage on television, was examined for its role in redefining marriage as a care-based alliance, with care remaining a gendered responsibility (Algan, 2010). Using the concept of patriarchal bargaining, the marriage shows were analyzed as formats that reinforce patriarchal ideology and traditional gender roles (Kaya, 2013). In her ethnographic study of a marriage show, Aknerdem (2019) interprets the ideological positioning of these shows and their promotion of marriage as a care-based economic alliance as a close alignment with the AKP’s approach to family as a societal institution. In other studies, different daytime formats are conceptualized as instruments of normalizing gender norms in line with the AKP’s vision of the ‘New Turkey’ (Eslen-Ziya, 2018) or demonstrations of neoliberal and neoconservative values that construct symbolic hierarchies among women, particularly through performances of domestic consumption (Sayan Cengiz, 2020).

Despite this growing body of literature, in-law cooking competitions remain a relatively underexplored daytime format. This article seeks to address this gap by analyzing *Gelinim Mutfakta* and *Zuhal Topal’la Sofrada*, situating them within Turkey’s broader neoconservative family politics. Drawing on the conceptualization of the family as a site of power, this study explores how familial hierarchies and domestic authority are performed and negotiated in these formats. In doing so, it adds a new perspective to discussions on gender and television.

Reality Television and Gender Performance

Television texts offer a productive site for examining how gender is reproduced through representational strategies in media texts. Following Butler’s (1990) concept of gender as performance, television can be seen not only as a site of representation but also as a platform where gender is actively constructed, contested, and regulated. How gender is performed, which performances are made visible, and what ideologies are reinforced by this visibility become central questions in the analysis of television. Daytime television, in particular, plays a crucial role in exposing these strategies, as its programming is specifically tailored to a predominantly female audience.

In her pioneering work on daytime television, Lynn Spigel (1992) demonstrates how early programming on American broadcast channels mimicked the supposedly domestic workflow through segments on gardening, cooking, and other household duties. Daytime variety shows, which consistently depicted women engaged in domestic chores, also served as commercial platforms to advertise home appliances and other products targeted at female consumers. In addition to being the primary target audience for daytime television, women received greater visibility during this time slot in comparison to their representation on primetime. However, feminist scholars have also criticized this visibility, arguing that portrayals of women often reflected patriarchal ideals of femininity (Cassidy, 2005; Goldstein, 2014; Lopate, 1976). Although female representation in daytime television showed more diversity than expected, it was criticized for idealizing domestic life and overlooking the isolation of women confined to the private sphere (Lopate, 1976). Nevertheless, daytime television became a platform where women's issues were discussed, and cultural ideas of womanhood were negotiated. This created an ambiguous space characterized by the coexistence of "subversive, feminist content" and "more traditional, conservative appeals to 'womanhood'" (Kay, 2014, p.91).

Within the television flow, not only are programming schedules shaped by gender norms, but television genres also follow a gendered hierarchy. Reality television shows, which involve ordinary people as participants and rely on low-budget productions, are often dismissed by both critics and television scholars as trivial and degenerate (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004). This dismissal reflects an aesthetic hierarchy in which reality television is seen as "emotional" and "trivial," while factual formats are regarded as "objective" and "serious" (Holmes & Jermyn, 2004). The persistent dismissal of reality television, despite its popularity, serves to reinforce its feminized and subordinate status in the hierarchy of television aesthetics.

The extent to which reality television distorts reality is widely debated and frequently cited as an explanation for its perceived triviality. Reality television strategically blends fictional techniques, such as extensive editing, production sets, and conflict-driven narratives, with factual conventions like confessionals and surveillance footage. Participants' awareness of being filmed leads to the performance of "the self" (Corner, 2002) and reinforces the mediated reality of the genre. Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity is particularly relevant here, as participants' self-performances are central to understanding how gender is enacted and reiterated on reality television (Weber, 2014).

Gender performance is a significant aspect of daytime television programs in Turkey, which can be considered as localized versions of established reality television formats. In programs such as marriage shows and cooking competitions, gender is constantly performed to consolidate normative values of the traditional family. The portrayal of the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law becomes significant in enacting and reiterating these values through the contestants' self-performance. In Turkish culture, the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law is traditionally portrayed as inherently conflictual. Drawing on Foucault, Yakalı-Çamoğlu (2017) conceptualizes this relationship as a

site of power negotiation. She argues that a daughter-in-law's acceptance within her new family hinges on her ability to uphold social harmony. This harmony is influenced by factors such as beauty, social and economic capital, and romantic attachment, all of which are intimately linked to power (Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2017). Beyond overt forms of authority, such as decision-making and control, attributes like beauty, wealth, or being favored by the husband also function as sources of power within the family.

Although often portrayed as conflictual, the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is culturally idealized as one resembling a mother-daughter bond. Daughters-in-law are traditionally expected to address their mothers-in-law as “mother” and are deemed disrespectful if they refuse to do so. While the resemblance implies emotional closeness, it simultaneously reinforces parental authority and control. Given that the family can operate as a disciplinary institution (Taylor, 2012; Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2017), this resemblance ultimately positions the mother-in-law in a structurally superior role within familial hierarchies.

Reflecting this dynamic, popular representations often emphasize rivalry, portraying the mother-in-law as controlling and the daughter-in-law as striving for autonomy. Television texts, both scripted and unscripted, reinforce and dramatize this culturally embedded tension, turning the in-law relationship into a focal point of emotional conflict and power struggle. The contestants in the in-law cooking competitions reenact these culturally well-known representations in the shows, playing their part in consolidating the hierarchical and gendered aspects of this performative relationship. However, as an element of surprise, the shows occasionally become platforms of solidarity and empathy, as the contestants react to the very format of the shows, which thrive on tension and conflict in the name of entertainment.

Research Design

Daytime cooking competitions that feature mother-in-law and daughter-in-law pairs, *Gelinim Mutfakta* and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* are chosen as the case studies of this research based on their high viewership during their respective broadcast periods. A total of twelve episodes, six from each show, are closely examined. Additionally, the shows' official YouTube channels are used as supplementary sources, particularly for revisiting specific episodes and thematic segments. By following the inherent relationship between discourse, power, and family (Miller, 1990), the analysis focuses on how power dynamics and gender norms are reproduced through various format elements, including studio design, narrative structure, prize systems, and interactions between contestants and hosts.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) proves particularly effective in revealing how television formats naturalize particular identities and dominant ideologies under the disguise of entertainment. As Lorenzo-Dus and Garcés-Conejos (2013) argue, different subgenres of reality television serve distinct communicative purposes, realized through specific rhetorical strategies. Through this framework, this study identifies the discursive mechanisms of in-law

cooking competitions that normalize familial hierarchies within the structural logic of reality television.

Three analytical units were identified for this study: the format design, the host, and the participants. Format analysis considered elements such as setting, competition rules, and episode flow. Host discourse was examined in relation to their personas and on-screen authority. Finally, participant interactions, particularly those between in-law pairs, were analyzed thematically, focusing on key categories such as discipline, authority, harmony and solidarity. The findings are contextualized within Turkey's broader political landscape. Representative examples are used to demonstrate how these discursive patterns operate in practice and to enhance the clarity and accessibility of the article's central argument.

In-Law Cooking Competitions and Intra-Familial Hierarchies

The dominance of in-law cooking competitions in daytime programming reflects not only the cultural centrality of this relationship but also a broader fascination with familial conflict. Capitalizing on this appeal, producers position the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law dynamic at the center of the format. Although in-law pairs compete as a team, they are assigned asymmetrical roles: daughters-in-law are responsible for cooking, while mothers-in-law evaluate the dishes. This division of labor implicitly reinforces a hierarchical structure and bears a striking resemblance to traditional practices within intergenerational households (Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2017). The mother-in-law's role as a judge grants her authority not only to assess the food but also to evaluate the daughter-in-law's behavior and domestic competence.

Despite sharing a similar premise, *Gelinim Mutfakta* and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* have different format structures. In *Gelinim Mutfakta*, four in-law pairs compete over the course of a week, with a new pair joining every Monday. Each day, the daughters-in-law are tasked with preparing a specific dish in the studio kitchen. While they cook, mothers-in-law wait in a separate room, chatting among themselves. At the end of the day, a blind tasting takes place, where each mother-in-law tries to identify her daughter-in-law's dish and give it the highest score. The host also participates in the tasting. The highest-scoring daughter-in-law of the day wins a gold coin. On Fridays, total weekly scores are revealed: the winning pair receives five gold bracelets, and the lowest-scoring pair is eliminated from the show.

Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada features five different in-law pairs each week. Each day, one pair hosts a dinner at home, welcoming the show's host and the other four mothers-in-law as guests. The daughter-in-law does the shopping and prepares a five-course meal. While the mother-in-law is not allowed to assist physically, she is expected to provide verbal guidance. During the dinner, the daughter-in-law serves the guests but does not join them at the table. At the end of the day, the host and the visiting mothers-in-law rate the meal. On Fridays, after the final dinner, the pair with the highest total score wins a cash prize.

Hierarchy between the mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law

Hierarchies between the in-laws are underlined in different ways in *Gelinim Mutfakta* and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*. In a way to reflect on the asymmetrical power dynamic between the in-laws, the studio of *Gelinim Mutfakta* is designed to include an 'observation room' where mothers-in-law watch their daughters-in-law as they cook without being seen. This panoptic setup reinforces the authority of the mothers-in-law through continuous surveillance (Foucault, 2009). In *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*, mothers-in-law are present during meal preparation, but are prohibited from physically assisting their daughters-in-law. However, they are expected to provide verbal instructions, and if the daughter-in-law fails to meet culinary expectations, the mother-in-law is held accountable for not having trained her properly. In both shows, the daughters-in-law are continually subjected to scrutiny through the disciplinary gaze of the mothers-in-law. The rules and expectations embedded in the competition serve to reproduce and legitimize patriarchal hierarchies within the family.

While the mother-in-law is positioned as the domestic authority, the daughter-in-law embodies normative femininity through her performance of traditionally gendered tasks such as cooking and hosting. She is valued for her domestic skills and obedience, traits that closely reflect the AKP government's patriarchal discourse, which defines women primarily as caregivers and homemakers (Cindoglu & Unal, 2016). In both shows, daughters-in-law are also responsible for cleaning the kitchen after completing their cooking tasks. In *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*, the daughter-in-law is expected not only to prepare the meal but also to host the dinner. During the event, mothers-in-law evaluate her politeness, cleanliness, hospitality, and cooking. The format prohibits the daughter-in-law from sitting at the table with the mothers-in-law, reinforcing her role as a subordinate and intensifying the hierarchy. Through these repetitive acts of cooking, cleaning, and serving, the daughter-in-law is expected to cheerfully perform the role of an ideal woman to win the grand prize.

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The hosts as the ultimate authority figures

Within the structure of *Gelinim Mutfakta* and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*, the hosts function as gatekeepers of patriarchal discourse, actively enforcing a traditional dynamic between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. In both shows, they serve as co-judges alongside the mothers-in-law, reinforcing their authority and positioning themselves with the mothers-in-law within the show's established hierarchy. This alignment becomes particularly evident during moments of conflict, as the hosts consistently reaffirm the authority of the mothers-in-law and implicitly expect the daughters-in-law to remain deferential to them. Their established public personas further legitimize their roles as arbiters within this televised familial structure.

Fatih Ürek, who hosted the first two seasons of *Gelinim Mutfakta*, is a well-known public figure. His flamboyant performance is often associated with a queer identity, yet he has

consistently refrained from publicly disclosing his sexual orientation. In several interviews, he has distanced himself from the gay community (Haber Türk, 2016; Kelebek, 2000), likely as a strategy to navigate the limited tolerance for queer visibility in Turkey's neoconservative media environment. He has publicly emphasized the importance of women's virginity and expressed opposition to women's liberation movements (Vatan, 2014). This form of patriarchal bargaining (Kandiyoti, 1988) has enabled his continued presence in Turkish television, particularly through his performance as a familiar, 'auntie-like' figure in daytime programming. This bargain is evident not only in his avoidance of overt queer affiliations but also in the way his carefully curated persona has evolved from exaggerated flamboyance to a more subdued, audience-friendly tone. Although his on-screen role in *Gelinim Mutfakta* marks a departure from his earlier image, it still retains camp aesthetics, characterized by makeup and brightly colored suits. This stylistic ambiguity, clashing with the patriarchal discourse he reinforces, results in a contradictory host presence: he is admitted into the feminized space of the show due to his lack of conventional masculinity, yet he still maintains hegemonic authority over the female contestants.

This ambiguity is evident in the show's structure, where he oscillates between performative flamboyance and disciplinary seriousness. At one moment, he is clapping, singing, and laughing with the contestants; the next, he stands behind a rostrum, his glasses perched low on the bridge of his nose, posing stern questions and passing judgement. He shifts seamlessly between formal and informal registers when addressing both contestants and viewers, yet he never relinquishes his authority. This authority is further amplified by the socio-economic disparity between him and the contestants, most of whom are working-class women from economically marginalized backgrounds.

A notable example of how this hierarchy is established in the show occurs in the episode aired on December 12, 2018. Ziyafet, a contestant characterized by her provincial accent and traditional clothing, expresses a preference for home-style Anatolian dishes over the dish of the day, a Mexican pastry. Fatih Ürek, mimicking her accent, mocks her culinary preference, characterizing it as outdated. Although framed as humorous, the moment reveals a symbolic boundary between urban modernity and rural traditionalism. Şerif Mardin (1973) conceptualizes this enduring structural divide as the "center-periphery" dynamic, wherein urban, secular, and modern values (the center) assert dominance over rural, conservative ones (the periphery). The host's urban background grants him symbolic power over Ziyafet, who embodies the rural periphery. Following this exchange, Ziyafet describes the pastry as insipid, using the old Turkish word *yavan*. The host turns to the other contestants and clarifies that she meant 'tasteless', as though translating her speech. This act reveals his assumption of a cultural and linguistic gap between Ziyafet and the others, who appear more aligned with urban modernity. In doing so, Fatih Ürek casts himself as a cultural mediator, capable of "translating" between the periphery and the center.

Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada is hosted by Zuhal Topal, a former actress who rose to prominence through marriage shows. She co-produces the program with her husband through their own company, which is described as a “family production company” on its official website (Dual Medya Prodüksiyon, n.d.). Her public image as a devoted mother in an idealized family structure further strengthens her authority on the show. Frequently assuming the role of a moral authority, she openly criticizes and corrects not only the daughters-in-law but also the mothers-in-law for behaviors deemed inappropriate. However, her warm and humorous demeanor allows her to convey deeply conservative ideals, often framed as benign humor. Besides, although the dinner table on *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* is framed as an all-female space, a male voiceover maintains a constant presence through his active engagement with the contestants. Known as “The Mixer”, the voiceover, recognizable by his deep tone, serves as an informal co-host. By referring to the mothers-in-law as ‘anneciğim / mommy’ and engaging with the contestants in a familial tone, he reinforces the show’s simulation of a domestic environment, complementing Zuhal Topal’s carefully cultivated public image and performance.

Formation of the setting as a domestic and competitive space

The domestication of space in both shows is achieved not merely through the hosts’ familial demeanor, but also through visual, spatial, and narrative strategies that simulate the dynamics of home. Whereas *Gelinim Mutfakta* constructs a stylized domestic setting within a studio, *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* is filmed in contestants’ actual homes, thereby blurring the boundaries between authenticity and spectacle. Each episode of *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* typically begins with the host and camera crew being welcomed at the door by the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law, positioning the audience itself as a guest entering this private sphere. Throughout the episode, the host, voiceover, and fellow contestants are treated as guests, reproducing the ambiance of an intimate family gathering. By turning the home into a televisual spectacle, the format invites the audience to observe, evaluate, and emotionally engage with the unfolding drama between the in-laws.

Gelinim Mutfakta creates the illusion of a domestic space by constructing a studio set with four kitchen stations, each resembling a home kitchen, decorated with family photos, personal items, and household appliances. This simulated environment stands in stark contrast to the sleek, professional kitchen of *MasterChef Türkiye* (TV8, 2018), one of the most prominent primetime shows on Turkish television. This spatial and aesthetic distinction illustrates the gendering of cooking shows: domestic cooking is discursively feminized and positioned as appropriate for daytime viewing, whereas primetime formats emphasize high-stakes professionalism and situate themselves within the masculine-coded realm of public performance (Oren, 2013). Through its domestic studio aesthetic, *Gelinim Mutfakta* deliberately aligns itself with the feminized space of daytime television, where domestic labor is both performed and rewarded.

Gelinim Mutfakta adds another layer of domestic symbolism through its prize system of gold bracelets and coins, which evokes the long-standing Turkish tradition of women's social gatherings known as "altın günü / the gold day". While the "gold day" is a traditional form of rotating savings and credit association based on female solidarity (Ekal, 2006, p.3), the show reconfigures this cultural practice into a gamified mechanism of competition. This emphasis on rivalry over solidarity in these formats stems from their inherently competitive structure. Although in-law pairs are nominally framed as teams, the hosts frequently encourage rivalry between them. This underscores how the culturally conflict-ridden relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law operates as the primary narrative engine of the shows. Hosts and producers routinely pose questions specifically designed to provoke tension between the in-laws. Such provocations often revolve around traditional family dynamics. Recurring debates, such as whether a daughter-in-law should call her mother-in-law 'mother', or who is entitled to the wedding gifts¹, are central to the narrative structure. During these segments, the in-laws are often seen defending each other against the hosts or other contestants. Even as the format pits them against each other, moments of harmony and mutual support still manage to emerge.

Shared experience as a form of resistance

The mutual experience of womanhood occasionally overrides conflict and opens up a space for empathy. In the December 10, 2018 episode of *Gelinim Mutfakta*, daughter-in-law Rümeysa decorates her kitchen station with a wedding photo that features only her birth family. When asked why her mother-in-law, Nezahat, is absent from the photo, she explains that she brought it for sentimental reasons. Nezahat is absent from the photo because her family lives in a distant city, and she misses them deeply. Her explanation is dismissed, and other contestants repeatedly criticize her for allegedly disrespecting her mother-in-law. However, when Rümeysa begins to cry out of longing for her family, the conversation shifts to the emotional toll of marrying into another household and the pain of leaving one's own, both socially and symbolically. In a surprising turn, Nezahat consoles her daughter-in-law and begins to cry with her, admitting that she, too, mourns the separation from her own family of origin. This shared vulnerability temporarily disrupts the expected hierarchical order, revealing how familial roles can give way to emotional solidarity even though they are normatively defined as hierarchical.

In a similar vein, an episode of *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada* aired on May 22, 2020, depicts daughter-in-law, Leyla, being openly criticized and corrected by both the host and the voice-over for refusing to address her mother-in-law, Farrah, as 'mother'. Leyla defends her choice by explaining that she already has a mother. Farrah responds by defending her daughter-in-law, admitting that she had also struggled to address her father-in-law as 'father.' Once again, shared experience fosters empathy and solidarity between two women. However, the male

voiceover quickly interrupts this moment of solidarity, insisting that a mother-in-law cannot be equated with a father-in-law. This intervention reinforces the gendered nature of in-law relationships in Turkish culture, where emotional intimacy and hierarchical expectations are more intensely projected onto women.

Cohabitation is often portrayed as a source of conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, as it places two nuclear family units within the same household. Traditionally, the mother-in-law is positioned as the primary decision-maker and the authority figure in such living arrangements (Yakalı-Çamoğlu, 2017). In the December 12, 2018 episode of *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*, when an in-law pair living together is featured, both the host and the voiceover question the living arrangement, implicitly attempting to elicit tension. However, the in-laws report a harmonious relationship and express satisfaction with their domestic arrangement. The mother-in-law, Meryem, describes herself as the family's primary decision-maker, noting that even the salaries of her son and daughter-in-law are entrusted to her. During the shopping segment, when Sude appears alone, the male voiceover attempts to provoke her by asking whether her mother-in-law is challenging to live with. Sude responds calmly, stating that she has grown accustomed to her. When further pressed -" But your mother-in-law makes all the decisions!"- Sude replies that it is easier that way, as the burden of responsibility falls entirely on her mother-in-law. This exchange suggests that, under conditions of economic strain, the role of decision-maker in the household may serve less as a marker of authority and more as a form of domestic obligation.

Conclusion

This article has examined how the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is discursively constructed and negotiated in two Turkish daytime cooking competition shows, *Gelinim Mutfakta* and *Zuhal Topal'la Sofrada*. Drawing on critical discourse analysis, the study demonstrated that these formats reproduce traditional gender roles and reinforce familial hierarchies aligned with the neoconservative discourse of the AKP government. The in-law relationship, culturally embedded as a source of conflict, is rearticulated as a televisual spectacle, emphasizing rivalry and tension. By analyzing core elements, such as host authority, competitive structure, and domestic performance, the study revealed how these programs reframe the family as a care-based institution, positioning women primarily as caregivers within the AKP's gender ideology.

Although the formats are designed to reinforce a fixed hierarchy between the mothers-in-law and the daughters-in-law, participant interactions often reveal more fluid and negotiable power dynamics. While the entertainment value of these shows relies heavily on the presumption of the in-law conflict, individual narratives frequently give rise to moments of companionship and mutual understanding. Shared experiences of womanhood and economic precarity often act as catalysts for empathy and solidarity. These moments destabilize the rigid

power structures embedded in the formats and expose the shifting dynamics within in-law relationships. The resulting tension between format and participant agency generates an ambiguous narrative space where dominant ideologies are momentarily disrupted.

By focusing on the cooking competitions as a popular format of Turkish daytime television, this study contributes to broader media scholarship at the intersection of popular culture and gender politics. While daytime television is widely recognized as a vehicle for embedding neoconservative values under the guise of entertainment, this analysis suggests that it also, perhaps unintentionally, creates space for alternative representations of family life. In this way, familial hierarchies and gender roles are not only reinforced but also contested, reimagined, and subverted within the very televisual texts that seek to reproduce them.

- 1 Traditionally, wedding expenses are covered by the groom's family, and the wedding gifts are taken by the groom's side in exchange for those expenses.

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