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SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE, CULTURE AND REALITY TV COMPETITIONS

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Abstract

Presentation of violence on screen is an important social problem. Violence is subject to the lots of television programs such as news, films, serials, competitions and even cartoons in verbal and nonverbal ways so often. Symbolic violence which might be described as the gentle form of violence is also frequent on screen. One of the television genres which symbolic violence has been seen frequently is Reality TV shows and its subgenre cooking-themed competitions. Cooking-themed competitions are one of the popular formats of Reality TV competitions worldwide. In these competitions symbolic violence which has been permeated in daily life is visible. In this study aiming to demonstrate the symbolic violence on TV in the case of cooking-themed competitions, *Come Dine with Me (UK)* which is the origin of the genre and Turkish version *We are at Dinner (Yemekteyiz)* were compared. In the study, signs of the symbolic violence were analyzed in two steps. First, it was evaluated if there was difference in general formation of the programs. Secondly, personal and cultural differences on presentation of symbolic violence between the countries were analyzed.

Keywords:Symbolic violence;Culture;Media;Reality TV;Cooking-themed competitions.

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1. Introduction

Violence which is subject to the lots of television programs such as news, films, serials and even cartoons, has been also shown in Reality TV shows like cooking-themed competitions verbal and nonverbal ways so often. Physical violence is presented as bad and unacceptable generally but symbolic violence is hard to understand and distinguish. According to Pierre Bourdieu symbolic violence is "the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" [1]. Symbolic violence is the unnoticed domination and has been practiced by dominant social classes. For example, in male-dominated societies cooking is accepted as a female responsibility. Television transforms the symbolic violence into a theatrical spectacle. Reality TV shows which mixes up sensation and dramatization, real life and fantasy, tears and laugh, rivalry and enthusiasm are interesting examples among the television programs. Cooking-themed competitions are typical samples of the shows which symbolic violence is visible. In cooking-themed competitions expressions of humiliation, insult and taunt, stereotyping are the signs of symbolic violence.

1.1. Culture and Symbolic Violence

Bourdieu [2] defines symbolic violence as "violence wielded with tacit complicity between its victims and its agents, insofar as both remain unconscious of submitting to or wielding it" and he claims that culture plays a critical role as maintenance of the power relations and also contributes to the systematic reproduction of symbolic violence. It is difficult to understand and describe how symbolic violence which is the gentle, invisible, unrecognized form of violence operates in everyday face-to-face interactions. It is related to various modes of social and cultural dominations such as gender, class, race, and etc.

Bourdieu and Wacquant [3] accept that gender is the result of a social classification in fact and describe gender domination as the paradigmatic form of symbolic violence. "Gender is used to distinguish the male and female members of the human species but with emphasis on social, rather than biological factors" [4]. Gender stereotypes are mostly psychological traits. According to Topper [5] symbolic violence clearly lacks the intentional and instrumental quality of brute violence, and works not directly on bodies but through them. Culture may affect the gender roles

and stereotypes. Generally cooking, cleaning, laundering, and caring for children are the works supposed to be undertaken by women.

Class difference is another theme in cultural characteristics. For Bourdieu, the aesthetic sensibility that orients actors' everyday choices in matters of food, clothing, sports, art, and music serves as a vehicle through which they symbolize their social similarity with and their social difference from one another [6]. Barthes [7] writes "It [food] is a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behavior." Menu, foods serve and table manner express and convey the cultural difference and class issues. In fact "we use food to speak to each other, ranging from display of food in our supermarket trolley to posting pictures of beautifully presented food on Instagram" [8].

Symbolic violence is the unnoticed (partly unconscious) domination that people maintain in everyday living and it is also consumed through the production of text and meaning in the conversation, advertisement, film, novels and other cultural products [9] and also via mass media.

1.2. Symbolic Violence in Media

Representation of violence in the media is one of the top issues of the communication studies. According to the Cultivation Theory of Gerbner and et al. [10] based on violence and sexuality programs are continuously produced in the media. Because these issues are based on images not dialogue and these images are understandable easily all over the world. Gerbner and Gross [11] accept television as tool for legitimation of social order and some stereotypes.

Bourdieu used term of "symbolic violence" first in "La Distinction" (in English Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste) [12]. Symbolic violence is an "invisible and polite" form of the violence in Bourdieu's conceptual world [13]. Jenkins [14] argues that according to Bourdieu, dominant social classes (such as the bourgeoisie, masculinity, a dominant ethnic identity, a dominant religious discourse) implement symbolic violence to maintain their dominant positions. In fact, it is not necessary verbal violence or abuse for symbolic violence. Yet it might be more powerful and effective than brutal violence in some cases. Symbolic

violence has been practiced and repeated in everyday life by people in different ways. Some narratives which do not contain physical or moral attack might apply symbolic violence for example saying that cleaning naturally has been done better by women [15].

Symbolic violence is widespread in today's society and it has frequently seen in television programs. It has seen different types of violence such as physical, psychological, verbal, sexual or economic violence in news, dramas, movies, cartoons, reality shows and other programs. In fact while discussing the relationship of violence and media, focal point is which representation has been shown as a fault and which one has not. Another important point is that form of the violence representation. Generally brutal violence has been presented bad and unacceptable but gentle ways of violence, in other words symbolic violence, may not be recognized.

One of the most important dynamics of the symbolic violence is television because television transforms symbolic violence to a theatrical show. There are several mechanism of symbolic violence exercised in the television. Bourdieu [2] writes "The selection principle that we see on television screen frequently is search for the sensational and the spectatular. Television calls for dramatization, in both senses of the term: it puts an event on stage, puts it in images. In doing so, it exaggerates the importance of that event, its seriousness, and its dramatic, even tragic character." In modern societes all of us are the audience and consumer of this theatrical violence. Competitions have an impoartant role in the representation of practical transformation of symbolic violence. In particular Reality TV shows combine rivalry, tears, excitement, curiosity and pleasure in a soap opera format and represent to the audience. Cooking-themed competitions are the programs which interesting samples of symbolic violence have been seen among Reality TV shows. These competitions have been shot in the houses of the participants instead of a studio and this allows the participants to feel freer to exhibit their personalities. Thus marks of the symbolic violence which has been permeated to our daily lives can be seen easier in their own places.

1.3. Reality TV and Cooking-themed Competitions

Cooking-themed competitions may have been accepted as the sample of factual entertainment and Reality TV genre. Reality TV is a television program category about real people and it is

located in border territories, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama [16]. It is a popular sample of factual entertainment and there are lots of Reality TV programs about everything like healtcare, fashion, cooking, home, dating, marriage, crime and etc. They represent the broader generic term, which then encompasses a range of subcategories like action, adventure, comedy, dating, marriage, talent, quiz, game, cooking, fashion, sports and lifestyle [17].

The origins of Reality TV have been found the crossroad of entertainment, tabloidization and documentary. Especially since 1980s entertainment and tabloidization increased in media productions. Tabloidization may have been defined as putting forward the entertaining contents and as Turner [18] points out the term was used in journalism especially news context, then it started to include all television formats. Reality TV shows are attractive for the producers because they are tried and tested and they can be easily adapted to the local cultures. Gitlin [19] states that reality shows that the main function is entertaining are being watched by viewers to see themselves (or similar) on the screen. He also states that there are three factors to be preferred by the producers:

- They do not require a text writer.
- They are not so costly.
- They can revive various subjects superficially.

Reality TV shows are popular in a lot of countries. For example *Survivor* was number one in prime time ratings in USA. Another example *Big Brother* was the most popular program of its channel [16]. One of the popular examples of Reality TV shows are cooking-themed shows and comptetions. Popular cooking TV shows have been a staple of television for years. At the beginning of this genre programs were shot in the studio environment and professional chefs gave recipes. In this kind of shows, presenter of the program is a professional chef and while chatting with the guests (usually a celebrity) makes food. Examples of this format are *Cooking Live, Paula's Home Cooking, Baking with Julia, Barefoot Contessa*. In another example, the jury gives points to the competitors who cook in the studio such as *Master Chef, Iron Chef, Chopped*.

And in the another format participants cook in their own houses and all of the participants give points each others. The most known example of the format is *Come Dine with Me*.

Come Dine with Me televised first in January 2005 on Channel 4 in the UK. It is still going on with 40th series [20]. According to the original format it is a competition involved members of the public as contestant who are cooking different things for points or prizes. There is no a jury panel. Five (later four) amateur chefs prepare a dinner party in the competition. Each participant gives points to the host/hostess and at the end of the five (later four) dinner parties competitor who has the highest score wins the money prize. Each week (4-5 episodes) was in another city like London, Essex, Bristol, Glasgow, Edinburg, Manchester, and etc. Program format has been produced with different names in many countries such as Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malaysia, Norway, Poland, Russia, Spain, South Africa, Turkey and USA. It still continues in some of the countries. In UK there were other shows in same format like *House Guest* and *May the Best House Win*.

We are at Dinner (Yemekteyiz) is example of the cooking-themed competitions in Turkey. Then three shows were aired on TV as "Let's Go to Us for Dinner (Yemege Bizdeyiz)", "Neighbor Neighbor (Komsu Komsu)" and "Taste Like Love (Tadinda Ask Var)" but the most loved and viewed one was We're at Dinner. We are at Dinner was aired on two different channels between from October 2008 to April 2015 on prime time after the evening news in Turkey. This show takes you to the private houses of a set of contestants throughout the country each week.

Both *Come Dine with Me* and *We're at Dinner* have format characteristics of Reality TV. Participants are ordinary people, there is no a scenario that determines the course of the events. It is possible to said that cooking which is an important daily and cultural production way has been transformed into a rivalry and competition through these programs. Today, they are successful with regard to both commercially and ratings. These shows aim at creating emotional reactions. Reesink [21] points out that these shows transfer privacy, rivalry, human relationship and sensibility of private sphere to the television screen. For example in 9th series of *Come Dine with Me* one of the contestants that his sister had cancer and that, if he won the competitition, he

would be donating the prize to the hospital where his sister had been treating. Similar examples might be seen in Turkish version.

These competitions are also platform for seeing examples of symbolic violence. In almost every part of the programs can be found on the example of symbolic violence. For all that it might be said that some of the arguments look like fictional scenes to improve the ratings. In fact human dignity has been ignored continuously for rating.

2. Method

Analysis of this study aiming to point the representation of symbolic violence of the media on the example of cooking-themed competitions consists of two parts. Initially general formation and characteristic features of the program were evaluated and then signs of the symbolic violence in the dialogues between the contestants were analyzed. Also similarities and differences between the countries and cultures have been examined. At first step examined basic rhetorical strategies are [22]:

- 1. *Sensationalization:* The sensational style is provided by both the selected words and various trick shots. For example, the teaser is one of the main tools. Images are sometimes assembled accelerated and projected on the screen in writing some words and sentences.
- 2. Frequent use of emotions: It is provided by using of events that can lead to emotional connotation.
- 3. *Personalization*: The events in the private sphere is to emphasize that due to personal qualities. For example, greed, drag people to disasters such as feeling of jealousy.

In second part, signs of the symbolic violence in the expressions of the contestants were analyzed. In fact there were examples of them nearly in every episode but specific and highlights expressions were choosen. The expressions of the symbolic violence were examined in two dimensions as Personal Characteristics and Cultural Characteristics in both of the competitions. Here are the examined factors:

- Personal Characteristics (gender, age, race, religion, language, education, and etc.)
- Cultural Characteristics (class, use of place, presentation, table manners, and etc.)

3. Results and Analysis

3.1. General Formation

Come Dine with Me and We are at Dinner have characteristics of the Reality TV genre. Contestants are not celebrities (except a few special episodes) and participate with their real names. All of the parts of the program have been shot in the houses. In every episode, there are three main parts as preparation of the meal, presentation of the meal and marking part. In both of them there is a sarcastic voice-over during proceedings. The same theme music is being used in both of them. It might be mentioned that there is a generic part before broadcasting. In generic part, short videos from the episodes have been aired. These videos are generally images of the participants while cooking or arguiging. Scenes of debates, crying and squalls are shared in trailers on the purpose of increasing the attention of the audience. Holmes and Jermyn [23] emphasize that program-makers of Big Brother do not describe it as a reality game show but as a 'real-life soap.' Soap operas have a wearing and sickening continuity with their tearful and melodramatic structure [24]. In the soap operas private problems of the people have been emphasized consistently. Berman [25] writes "first rule of the soap opera is nobody suffer silently, every problem should has been talked in front of the public." Contestants are as if a drama actor or actress.

Come Dine with Me has been aired 60 minutes in primetime in total, its 5-10 minutes for presentation of the competitors, 15-20 minutes for shopping and preparation, 25-30 minutes for foods presentation and 10-15 minutes for comments and marking. We are at Dinner was aired 90 minutes in total, its 20-30 minutes for shopping and preparation, 30-40 minutes for foods presentation and 10-20 minutes for comments and marking.

Sholle [22] argues basic narrative characteristics as fragmantation, show effect, floating of the meaning, passive populism, stereotyping and exclusion. Especially in the parts of preparation and presentation of the meal some cultural stereotypes might be seen. First of all the main theme of the competition is cooking which is seen as a female work. In the dialogues of the contestants there are some cultural stereotypes like "women cook better" or "women can't drive well."

The dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural [26]. One of the subjects which this situation has seen frequently is gender stereotypes. Social role theory suggests that the roles of men and women in everyday life are a function of what society deems appropriate based on gendered stereotypes [27]. Contestants remark each others about cleanliness and hospitality. In this scenes cultural stereotypes have been emerged. In competition class differences are continuously emphasized and "deliberately bringing the hierarchy of classes together thereby revealing and also testing the limits and boundaries of each" [8].

There are examples of basic rhetorical strategies in both of the programs. Sensationalization has been provided by both writing style and chosen words as well as by various shooting tricks. For example, teaser and trailer are one of the basic tools. Argument scenes have been shared in trailers. In personalization, the life stories of the competitors have been included.

In both of the shows the most used rhetorical strategy is sensationalization. Sometimes one of the constestants is throwing a cup of cup to others, sometimes after an argument one of the contestants is crying. There are similar scenes in both examples. For example in *We are at Dinner*, in episode on February 04, 2009 three contestants had an argument. In episode dated 14 April 2010 after the argument two contestants left the house but a few minutes later one of them came back and scold two contestants who had stayed at home. Another argument had been lived in the episode on June 01, 2012. The male contestant screamed the female contestant by saying "Why did you give me 1 point?" In the episode on July 23, 2010 the hostess criticized one of the contestants for entering the house without removing her shoes. After the argument the hostess showed the contestants the door.

In *Come Dine with Me* In the final episode of the series dated January 04, 2014 the host who realized he had lost the competition and prize expelled other contestants and shouted at the winner "Take your money and get off my property." In another episode on January 07, 2016 one of the contestants reacted extremely badly after discovering he had received the lowest score. Arguments are also so frequent. For example in the episode on June 19, 2014 the host shouted "If you don't like it, chuck it in the bin!" when he realized one of the contestants did not like the

meal. In the episode on June 10, 2012 there was a big argument. The host shouted "I have tried my best with you, but you did not understand. You are so rude." The female contestant who did not like the meal left the house while crying. In *We are at Dinner* in various episodes such as on August 15, 2009 and April 04, 2010 and October 24, 2013 the host or hostess have been crying because of the hard criticism of the others.

Shortly it might be said that there is no any important difference between the programs and countries on the rhetorical strategies, prominent themes like arguments and humiliation.

3.2. Signs of the Symbolic Violence

Personal Characteristics

In both of the programs gender distribution of the competitors is about half. The age ranges change from 25 to 65 years.

Gender is the lead personal characteristic which signs of symbolic violence have seen more often. For example in *Come Dine with Me* it is possible to see inappropriate jokes especially about female body frequently like in the episode on July 14, 2014. In this episode a male contestant who saw a naked blonde female painting on the wall asked to the hostess "Who has bigger boobs?" Another episode on June 07, 2012 male contestant suggested an aesthetic breast surgery to female contestant if she won the prize. In *We are at Dinner*, in the episode on January 06, 2010 a male contestant harassed the female contestant with his words as "I am saying this because I like you" and at the end of the argument he spit her in the eye. Contestants apply symbolic violence not only to other sex but also the same sex themselves. Another humiliation reason is the clothing style. For example in one of the episode of *Come Dine with Me* a male contestant insulted other male contestant because of his shirt and said "Are you a transvestite? You look like it." Alike in one of the episode of *We are at Dinner* a male contestant made fun of the other male contestant because of his transparent sweater and nose ring.

In both of the programs there are examples of sexist stereotypes. Female contestants remarked about male contestants like "The house/kitchen was very clean for a man" or "He knows table manner like a woman" frequently. In the episode of *Come Dine with Me* dated June 19, 2014

female contestant asked the host "Did you spread the dough of cake?" When he replied "Yes" she said "I have never thought that a man could do it." Also there are stereotypical comments about women such as "Presentation was not good and imaginative for a woman." In the episode of *We are at Dinner* dated October 14, 2008 one of the contestants did not like presentation of the hostess and said loudly "If my wife brought me such a plate at home, I would throw it to the wall." In another episode on April 8, 2015 female contestant said "There is a lot of dust on the table. I couldn't understand what kind of a housewife you are" and asked for another clean glass to hostess. So it might be said that the success of a woman is up to the cleanliness of her house. In the episode dated August 15, 2009 one of the female contestants asked to the host of the previous dinner party how he had cleaned the house. "I didn't. My wife cleaned easily. I was so tired of cooking." These kinds of dialogues strengthen the stereotypes about the responsibilities of the man and woman in the house.

Cultural Characteristics

At the cultural level, presentation and table manner related to class issues are the most visible topics of symbolic violence. In both of the programs alleged "aesthetic" and "cultural" discussions on table manner, presentation, hospitality, and etc. give clues about the class identification and cultural capital of the contestants. For example in *Come Dine with Me* in the episode on June 07, 2012 one of the contestants says "I am only a truck driver, I could not even read the menu." There are similar situations in *We are at Dinner*. For example in the episode on March 18, 2015 there is rice with saffron in the menu. One of the contestants said he has never heard about it. The hostess replied "read a little bit, if you know how to read of course." In the episode on April 04, 2010 house of the host was small and old and there was an argument on living in the city or country and he charged the others with despising him. In another episode, main course was duck. One of the guests scoffed at her by saying "You are a snob. Who can eat duck in this country?" The hostess replied "Now you will make me angry. Cast pearls before swine!"

There are arguments and signs of the symbolic violence about table manner in the programs. For example in *Come Dine with Me* in the episode on January 18, 2014 female contestant criticized the hostess and said "Is this a new tradition? Why is the fork on the right side?" And in *We are at*

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Dinner in the episode March 11, 2015 female contestant criticized another one by not knowing

the table manner and said "Why did you come with this dress? You should have worn more

suitable for dinner."

In both of the programs contestants insult each other frequently by the comments such as "What

a shame, it was so bad", "I ate only because I was hungry", "Didn't you find a better tablecloth?"

or "Don't you know anything about table manner?"

4. Conclusion

As a part of everyday life, violence emerges in all areas of the human interaction. One of these

areas is television narrative. Even if we are not aware of that symbolic violence is as common as

physical violence in television programs. The effects of physical violence have been frequently

discussed but effect of the symbolic violence is not a leading item on the agenda. However,

symbolic violence is invisible and hardly noticeable but permeated in daily life. Symbolic

violence becomes visible in lots of examples on television. One of this kind of programs are

Reality TV shows and its subgenre cooking-themed competitions.

Television narrative feeds by social stereotypes and social preconceptions have been repeated in

cooking-themed competitions like other programs. Contestants have been generally evaluated

according to their personalities or cultural identities not according to their cooking skills. In fact

no matter whom the guests are or where they are in both programs same moments have been

repeated in slightly different ways over and over again. Contestants' personalities are so similar.

Stereotypes have been come to the fore especially about gender, class and regional differences

such as The Black Sea and The Mediterranean or South East of Turkey in We are at Dinner or

The Scottish and The Irish in *Come Dine with Me*.

As the formats have been copied all over the world, it is not possible to say there will be change

at least in the near future. Without changing the world mass communication system, only the

names of the programs and contestants will change.

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