

## Women's View of Humor: Gülse Birsel's 'Jet Society' TV Series

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### Abstract

The act of laughing, which is thought to be related with the body rather than the mind and identified with rudeness, has been attributed to outcast segments of society, such as women, children, slaves, or the common-people, while humor requiring supremacy of the mind is believed to be associated with the ruling elite class of society, and mostly with men. There is a judgment that humor can only be produced by men and that women do not understand humor and that they lack a creative sense of humor and perception, and it has become established that women can only be the laughing party, though not always. Crawford and Gressley (1991) also criticize numerous experimental studies in which women are called an inadequate group with neither the ability to create humor nor the sense of humor necessary to appreciate it. Furthermore, it has been observed that humor is constructed with a masculine language (Sanders, 2019, p. 211), and that humor is structured in a way that strengthens negative stereotypes about women and other disadvantaged groups (Lovaglia et al, 2008). However, humor offers an important area of freedom to question the dominant structures, to shake them, and to show resistance to the power/dominant elements. Many philosophers from Bergson to Bakhtin emphasize the relationship with power as a field of resistance while defining the field of laughter and humor. The most important references to humor, from a feminist perspective, are related to the nature of humor that challenges dominant ideological discourses. This paper focuses on Gülse Birsel as a sitcom writer in terms of the changing woman-humor relationship alongside social change in Turkey. When we scrutinize women over a wide time frame from a cartoonist in the comic magazines of the late 1980s to today's female stand up comics who create critical humor, it can be asserted that Gülse Birsel's sitcoms may represent a significant turning point in Turkey concerning women's relationship with humor. We can assert that Gülse Birsel's television sitcom may represent a significant turning point in Turkey concerning women's relationship with humor. Birsel critically discusses the stereotypes and positions of men and women, as well as the sitcom series, where the critical approach to class distinction and a rich-poor dichotomy becomes apparent. Within this context, we can say that although Gülse Birsel's humor is a part of popular culture, she produces a critical discourse which has a strong influence in terms of reaching a wide range of audiences. Although Gülse Birsel's humor benefits from stereotypes, which are shaken by Crawford (1991), it can be said that it has a structure that weakens negative associations and provides an environment conducive to evaluating gender stereotypes in an egalitarian and fair manner outside the restrictive context of gender stereotypes. Within this context, the narrative structure in the 'Jet Society' TV series will be examined using a method of critical discourse analysis through the generic characteristics and type of the sitcom.

**Keywords:** Women, Humor, Power, Sitcom, Gülse Birsel

### Introduction

*"It is a very serious thing to be a funny woman"*  
*Frances Miriam Berry Withcher (1814-1852)*

Historically, humor has been associated with the ruling elite class and men, as in many fields. The judgment that humor can only be produced by men, that women do not understand humor, that they lack a creative sense of humor, and that they can only be the laughing party, but not always, has been an established impression in many different cultures for a long time. Women have been excluded from the comedy field and, until recently, they have been kept away from different areas of humor, such as cartoons. In fact, according to Kotthoff (2006, p.5), "Authors such as Schopenhauer, Bergson, and Freud reinforced the exclusion of women from the comic arena." Crawford and Gressley (1991) also criticize numerous experimental studies in which women are described as an inadequate group neither having the ability to create humor nor having the sense of humor necessary to appreciate it. Additionally, it has been observed that humor is constructed with a masculine language (Sanders, 2019, p.211) and that humor is structured in a way that reinforces negative stereotypes about women and other disadvantaged groups (Lovaglia et al, 2008). However, humor offers an important area of freedom to question the dominant structures, to shake them, and to show resistance to the power/dominant one.

Being able to make people laugh through humor requires good communication skills and a practical understanding and evaluation of emotional and intellectual processes. This shows that humor is a product of intelligence used proficiently. Within this context, humor makes it easier to be loved by individuals and even by the masses, to be accepted faster in society and to be preferred in any environment. Humor also has a power that threatens authority to the extent that it facilitates a social acceptance of the person and brings the person to the forefront. Such a power, which loosens, destroys, and reshapes the rules of the established order and gives authority to individuals. Therefore, humor has been constrained by organizers throughout history. When we look at history, together with the patriarchal cultural order, situations such as aggression, violence, and war were associated with the male gender, and women were considered to be associated with passive domestic work. In this direction, humor, which includes meanings such as intelligence, aggression, and power, has carried the traces of a gendered approach throughout history and has been shaped within this framework. The masculine understanding that tries to keep women away from the field of humor and, therefore, from power has further made them the subject of humor, and the judgment that women do not understand humor, which is related to intelligence and mentality, has become established. However, just as humor can transform meaning, it is capable of dissolving and distributing culturally determined patterns with the same power. In this respect, humor is one of the most important tools that will enable women, who resist the patriarchal cultural order, to accelerate social transformation. Humor, which has been shaped over gender identities in the historical process, has the power to be used to demolish the negative relationships between genders and their stereotypes, as Crawford expresses (1991).

As an important conveyor of popular culture, the sitcom is an area where different social segments and discourses are represented, perhaps more than in other television productions. Within this context, sitcoms are texts that, by their nature, allow dissident and critical discourse to be seen and to follow up the struggle being waged through such discourse. Although it is domestic in this context, it can be asserted that sitcoms have been transformed into a field where women produce their opposing discourses within the historical development of sitcoms.

This article will focus on women writer and actor Gülse Bırsel within the framework of differentiated women-humor relationships parallel to social change in Turkey. When we scrutinize women within a lengthy time frame, as a cartoonist in the comic magazines of the late 1980s to today's women standup comics who create critical humor, it can be asserted that Gülse Bırsel's sitcoms may represent a significant turning point in Turkey regarding women's relationships with humor. The sitcoms Gülse Bırsel, who has reached a wide audience since 2004, wrote and acted in on TV (*European Side, Fake World, and Jet Society*) witness social change in Turkey and also become a catalyst for social change with the humor she creates. In this study, within the framework of the relationship between women and humor, Gülse Bırsel's sitcom series 'Jet Society' will be analyzed and, as a female writer, the arena opened by Bırsel in the field of popular culture will be expressed and the critical discourse she has produced, even though it is a part of popular culture, will be revealed.

In the study, based on the critical discourse analysis method of the theorist Van Dijk (2001), who reveals the connection between the concept of discourse with ideology, the scenario, plot, and characters of the 'Jet Society' series will be analyzed. The discourse analysis model of Van Dijk, which is handled in the context of macro and microstructure, is based on the interaction of a group of academicians at the University of Amsterdam in the early 1990s. The theory and method that Dijk brought forward, together with Kress, vanLeeuwen, Fairclough, and Wodak with their differences, did not progress through a single pattern. Discourse analysis is an analytical technique that develops with different disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and linguistics, and which benefits from the theoretical perspectives of these different disciplines. Discourse analysis is the study of language in its simplest form. However, as Dijk states, discourse analysis not only deals with the formal (phonological or syntactic) aspect of language use, but rather turns the focus of attention on social events created by language users who communicate in social and cultural contexts (cited in Çelik & Ekşi, 2008, p.105). Critical discourse analysis focuses on social problems, because social structure and culture are established through discourse (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 273-280). Power relationships are part of discourse and discourse proceeds ideologically. According to Pradeep (2019, p.1248), "*Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a more specific type of qualitative textual analysis, precisely to investigate the hidden dimensions of ideology, power relations existing in social practice and power discourse in the narrative text*". Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is both a theory and a method (Fairclough, 2001, p.121). In the 'Jet Society' series, the focus will be on the analysis of characters and dialogues in the macrostructure, theme, plot, and social background, and the analysis of characters and dialogues in the microstructure, and making sound/music with visual arrangement. While the macro and microstructure of the 'Jet Society' series are analyzed from this perspective in these mobile applications, the latent power of humor in deciphering social defects, and the creative potential that makes defects visible, will be revealed. Female characters have a special place in the humor created by Gülse Bırsel. Emphasis will be placed on female characters that reveal the dynamic of social change in female characters. The scenes and dialogues were selected within the scope of non-probabilistic sampling in line with the structure of this study and were analyzed as to what extent they met our argument.

## Humor and Women

From ancient times until today humor is an area on which many philosophers have produced ideas. Humor is often associated with the demonic (Baudelaire, 1997, p.15), especially due to its distorting nature. Since the causes of laughter play an important role in losing control, such an understanding was established in the Middle Ages. Humor, along with the dissolution it brings with it, reveals a relief that can disrupt cultural patterns and rules. Eagleton also mentions that the construction of social reality is a strenuous task that requires constant effort and says that there is a darker sarcastic subtext beneath this rational reality (2019, p.26). Sanders (2019) talks about the lightness that laughter creates in people. In this case lightness has the power to take people far from reality. Humor gives people the chance to escape from the established order, as well as to change this order. Bahktin says that laughter can never be used by violence and authority (2001, p.110). This situation brings the triumph of laughter over fear. Together with this victory, a person can have a different perspective on life, even for a short time. It can add new meaning to life in a free space away from the pressure of authority and rules. This is the power that empowers individuals to change and transform the world, and which has affected the progress of the approach to laughter and prohibition thereof throughout history. A new understanding that reshapes ideas, changes meaning, and explains people to people from another perspective, prevails in this field. This is the point where the clash of humor with authority starts. Wherever humor exists, every individual is free to create a personal semantic world and make his own laws. Features such as freedom, sovereignty, and the superiority of reason provided by humor have also caused it to experience a break that corresponds to a class distinction in the historical process. Sanders reports that this distinction is visible, especially with the Renaissance (2019, p.275). While the act of laughter which is related to impulses rather than reason and evokes rudeness is attributed to outcast individuals in society, such as women, children, slaves, or of low degrees, humor, which requires the supremacy of reason, is associated with a ruling elite class. In line with this context, the cultural understanding that keeps women out of society has determined the direction in which humor will be shaped by putting humor to the use of an elite class consisting of men. For this reason, humor, which brings intelligence to the forefront and is built with a masculine language depending on gender stereotypes, is an important area of resistance for women to break down the stereotypes in the field of gender.

The approach to address the creation of an unequal order, based on male dominance from a feminist perspective, is extremely important in highlighting the gender-based power struggle concealed behind several definitions taken for granted in society. This gender-based struggle has been emotionally and intellectually shaped over two divisions of labor; while the world of dreams and emotions is left to women, rational and scientific thinking remained under the control of men. When considered from this point of view, it is no coincidence that the blue color of the seas, which constitute three-quarters of the earth's surface, symbolizes men, and the pink color of dreams symbolizes women (Atay, 2019, p.23). While this division has its direct effect of keeping women away from education and science, it has indirectly penetrated all social fabric. From this point of view, it is possible to see the reflection of a hierarchical gender relationship, directly or indirectly, at every stage of human relations within the patriarchal cultural order.

Throughout history, both men and women have been excluded from the social sphere due to a number of reasons, including their class, religion, and race. However, it can be seen that no male has been excluded solely because of his gender (Berkay, 2003, p.21). Cemal Bali Akal states that the need to preserve superiority over the reproductive gender also creates a strong fear of women, which turns into half-open, half-hidden misogyny (1994, p.13). Practices, such as the witch hunts that took place between 1450 and 1750 that tried to bring the female body, labor, and reproductive abilities under state control (Federici, 2012, p.243) can be considered as an extension of this misogyny. We see that the female/male relationship is an undisputed political power relationship, such as between the manager and the managed, when we consider the issue in line with the historical struggle. In the patriarchal cultural structuring, starting with the transition to plough farming, men became the owners of both the fields and women (Atay, 2019, p.36). Being female, which is a biological condition, undergoes a social transformation like being a woman in this social order, and women are taught to be passive through education and supervision (Akal, 1994, p.95). In this respect, when we look at studies in the field of humor, we can understand the reasons why women participate less in humor than men, and sociologists find the reason for this situation not in women's understanding of humor, but in the masculine understanding that shapes women with a more passive role compared to men (Sanders, 2019, p.37). Women, on the other hand, were not only excluded from this field, but even their conversations with their fellows in private indoor areas were found to be dangerous. Since the mid-1500s, it was said that men should keep their wives at home, and torture devices were even invented for women who came together for conversation during this period (Öğüt, 2020, p.84).

Based on all this historical background, it would not be wrong to say that female humor has been a personal struggle for survival. Within this context, female humor is also considered as a psychological strategy in managing anger, disappointment, and suppressed emotions (Walker, 1988). When we look at the situation of women in Turkey, we see that many steps offering opportunities for women, from the public domain to the workplace, have been taken with the proclamation of the Republic. However, as Serpil Sancar states (2014, p.112), during this period, women could not

become ruling citizens in equal position and status with the founding men, who were seen as the carriers of the national culture. The 1990s became the years when 'the forgotten' were rediscovered, both at home and throughout the world. The multiculturalism discussions that emerged in America in the latter part of the 1980s led to the formation and institutionalization of many fields, such as women's and gender studies, as well as LGBT studies (Soysal, 2017, p.215). These developments in studies concerning women took effect in Turkey from the 1990s and struggles regarding women's equal rights with men have gained momentum, with women's issues becoming more prominent in the public sphere. The inequalities that women have experienced for many years, made women loudly express this issue by the 1990s. This struggle naturally manifested itself in the field of humor, which had been dominated by men for years. The comedy series 'Sıdıka', which started broadcasting in 1997 and which was directed by Mahinur Ergun and performed by leading actresses Hasibe Eren and Füsün Demirel, is quite different from previous women-oriented productions in terms of drawing attention to women's unequal living conditions in a humorous way. After the 1990s, the number of women cartoonists increased with the women's movements, and women's problems were highlighted in humorous fashion. Feyhan Güver, who began drawing in the magazine Limon in 1993, made a name for herself playing the character of Bayır Gülü (Wild Rose), which focused on the problems facing women living in rural areas (Seven, 2016, p.24). In 2011, *Bayan Yanı* cartoon magazine, prepared with contributions of many female writers and illustrators, including those of the LeMan Magazine community, was published as a special March issue. However, as a result of positive reaction, it became a regular monthly publication (Boz, 2014, p.119). Female cartoonists, such as Ramize Erer, Feyhan Güver, İpek Özgül, Gülay Batur, Andaç Gürsoy, Aslı Perker, Nurgül Kaan, Melda Okur, Duygu Sarı, Raziyeİçoğlu, and Meral Onat contributed to *Bayan Yanı*, from its beginning in 2011. Even today, the magazine continues to be published by female illustrators. Since the 1990s, male stand-up comedians have played a dominant role. However, it is striking that in recent years, stand-up shows led by female comedians have gradually increased. For example, in December 2015, 'Çok da Fifi Hatunlar (I Don't Give a Fuck Babes)', a collective group formed by six female comedienne, carries the distinction of being the first all-women stand-up comic group not only in Turkey, but worldwide.

### Sitcom

Since the second half of 1980, with Turkey's articulation of a liberal economy, private television broadcasting began as a result of developments in the advertising and media industries. During this period, different program formats, including sitcoms, were imported into Turkey for private viewing. It can be suggested that the 'sitcom' in Turkey, with its imported format, can be considered to have been developed as a 'hybrid' (Özsoy, 2006, p.154) during the inclusion of these import formats into Turkey in the mid-1990s. In this sense, it is unique and differs from Western sitcom examples. One of the main differences here is the duration, and others are the cultural elements and jokes. The first examples of adaptations in the 1990s are the series 'Dadı'<sup>1</sup>, 'Sweet Life'<sup>2</sup>, and 'Belalı Baldız'<sup>3</sup>, which preserve the American format (Akyürek, 2009, p.25). The first original script-based sitcom example is 'Gülşen Abi' (Akyürek, 2009, p.27).

A sitcom is a combination of the words 'situation' and 'comedy'. The roots of the sitcom go back to the concept of 'farce' or rough comedy, popular in the eighteenth-century (Çelenk, 2013, p.87). However, the sitcom, which started its journey as a radio program format, has become one of the most popular comedy forms on television. The popularity of this type as a television format is due to the series 'I Love Lucy', which was first broadcast in the United States in 1951 and which focuses on the struggles of soldiers returning from the Second World War (Davies & Smith, 1998).

The sitcom, which emerged through an adaptation of the repeatable structures of these forms, and which was influenced by the vaudeville, musical, and sketches that preceded it, was formed by the transformation of the old forms (Nieale & Krutnik, 1994, p.227).

Sitcoms began to be filmed in front of live studio audiences and almost became identified with the applause effects used to maintain the same result in the following years (Mintz, 1983). Sitcoms, which are studio productions that take place in a single or a small number of venues, take their subjects from everyday life. The continuity of people and venue is essential in sitcoms consisting of twenty-four to thirty-minute episodes (Çelenk, 2013, p.86). Sitcoms focus on simple, everyday relationships in the daily life of the middle class in particular. With its structure that blesses the daily tenor, the sitcom turns the events that ordinary people encounter every day into a 'subject' (Çelenk, 2013, p.90). This magnifies and exaggerates the events and, as a result, all that people do in daily life becomes more visible. One of the most important elements in the sitcom is its dialogue. Dialogue creates comedy through the actions of the sitcom characters. The greatest source of the sitcom's attraction is its characters. This is because the audience establishes a relationship with the sitcom through the characters they mostly watch and adopt. For this reason, the characters in sitcoms are static in order allow the audience to establish a connection with them (Çelenk, 2013, p.94). Taflinger (1996) divides sitcoms into three categories; 1) Action-Based Situation Comedies (ActCom), 2) Character-Based

<sup>1</sup> Adaptation of Nanny

<sup>2</sup> Adaptation of The Jeffersons

<sup>3</sup> Adaptation of Hope and Faith



Situation Comedies (DomCom), and 3) Thought-Based Situation Comedies (Dramedy). According to Mintz, its subtypes are diversified. ‘Jet Society’ stands closer to character-based situation comedy (DomCom) amongst these categories.

A number of negative opinions have arisen due to the appeal of the sitcom format to the audience through its stability and repeatability. For example, Grote defines the sitcom format as static, because the nature of the events that continue with a new event every week does not change. Therefore, according to Grote, the sitcom is a type that resists all changes (Feuer, 2018, p.266-268). Contrary to these opinions of Grote, David Marc tries to reveal the destructive potential of sitcoms (Feuer, 2018, p.272). Marc sees a structure like a sitcom without any static nature as an opportunity to present the author’s expression, both ideologically and personally.

Meanwhile, Douglas Kellner (cited in Mutlu, 1991) mentions that comedy has two opposing features that are liberating and reconciling aspects. According to Kellner (cited in Mutlu, 1991), with its liberating aspect, comedy and specifically sitcom, has the potential to upset dominant cultural and social forms and to undermine their dignity. On the other hand, with its reconciling aspect, it teases the deviations from the ruling rules and values and teaches how to waiver from desires for the sake of order. Although Kellner (cited in Mutlu, 1991) suggests that the dominant form of sitcoms is usually reconciling, the sitcoms created by women producers and the Turkish sitcom example written by Gülse Bırsel, have the potential to shake the supremacy of dominant power.

### **Gülse Bırsel as a Sitcom Author**

Bırsel, who stepped into the media sector as a columnist, undertook the copywriting and presentation of the program ‘g.a.g’, which included funny advertising content. She was a scriptwriter and actor for the sitcoms ‘Avrupa Yakası’ (European Side) (2004-2009), ‘Yalan Dünya’ (Fake Life) (2012-201), and ‘Jet Sosyete’ (Jet Society) (2018-2020). She also wrote the books ‘Gayet Ciddiyim’ (I am very serious), ‘Hala Ciddiyim’ (I am still serious), ‘Yolculuk Nereye Hemşerim’ (Where are you going my fellow citizen?), ‘Velev ki Ciddiyim’ (Albeit I am Serious), ‘Yazlık’ (Summer Resort) and ‘Memleketi Ben Kurtaracağım’ (I’ll Save the Country).

When she wrote the screenplay of ‘In the Family’ in 2017, this comedy exceeded 1.5 million viewers within the first ten days after it came out to and is ranked seventh amongst the most-watched movies of all time in Turkey<sup>4</sup>. When we look at Gülse Bırsel’s sitcoms, we see that they are produced in a general structure and formulas specific to the format. She is also an important name in terms of showing that it is possible to discuss cultural and social issues through sitcoms, which are products of popular culture that confirm the thoughts of David Marc (Feuer, 2018). Beyond political humor, Bırsel has opened the door to the possibilities of humor showing the norms of current culture to the audience, and that makes them question these again.

### **‘Jet Society’ Analysis and Results**

It is claimed that Gülse Bırsel focuses on common social issues in this series and that she especially handles current issues with critical humor. Based on the view that confrontation between social classes, movement up the social ladder and class change are social issues, Bırsel revolves around these. The study analyzes four episodes, including the plot, characters, and dialogues in micro and macro structures that highlight social issues, current events, and male-female relations.

‘Jet Society’ is a Turkish sitcom written by Gülse Bırsel. The director of the series, which is produced by BKM, is Hakan Algül. The first season was broadcast on Star TV in 2018, the second on TV8, and the third season continued on Puhu TV and Star TV. The final and fifty-ninth episode of the series was broadcast on May 6, 2020.

**Plot:** Cengiz Özpamuk, the owner of a textile company, dismisses his son Ozan from the general director position of the company, therefore Yaşar Yüksel, who works at a lower level in the company, gains an unexpected opportunity. Yaşar, who is promoted to the position of general manager in the company, moves with his family from a slum where they live in Ayazağa to their villas in Jetset Konakları, in the housing estate of his boss. The series of events that begin with their settlement in his boss’ villa turn into a class change adventure for the Yüksel family as a spatial phenomenon as well as a social phenomenon. While Yaşar tries to prove himself in the field of textile and design, about which he has no idea, his wife and daughter try to be included in the routines of the high society they find themselves in. Members of the Yüksel family live together, with mother Safiye, father Yaşar, their daughter Yıldız, Safiye’s brother Gündüz and her sister Melike. Family members living in the villa change in certain episodes. The Özpamuk family, representing a rich family, consists of stepmother Gizem Özpamuk, father Cengiz Özpamuk, Cengiz’s mother Zahide, and also Ozan Özpamuk, son of Cengiz from his former marriage. One of Cengiz’s business partners, İlayda Çıkrıkçıoğlu, together with her sister Alara, live in another villa on the same housing estate. Other characters in the textile company are public

<sup>4</sup> boxofficeturkiye.com

relations specialist Pelin, designer Tonguç (Tony), and tea-maker Talip, who initially works closely with Yaşar. Talip, son of Şennur, who is a neighbour of Safiye from the same neighborhood, aspires to marry Yaşar's daughter Yıldız in the subsequent episodes.

**Venues:** The main venues in the series are the homes of the Özpamukçu, Çıkıkcıoğlu, and Yaşar families in the Jetset housing estate villas, the house of the former neighbor Şennur from the shantytown, and the offices of the Özpamuk textile company. Sometimes the setting in the series is the garden of the Jetset villas housing estate and a shopping mall and café/bar in the district, which serve as a meeting place for the gym or as a meeting place for characters who do not have direct connection to the storyline. In addition, the series framework expands with other venues, such as the neighborhood restaurant opened by the entrepreneur Talip who is Şennur's son, and the taxi stand in the shantytown. Due to an interruption of the TV series, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the actors created their own spaces and places to take selfies, allowing the series to meet the audience without a break, as well as it being an attempt at a creative approach to the sitcom narrative and venues.

**Characters and Dialogues:** One of the most striking examples in the series is the character Gizem. Gizem played by Gülse Birsnel, is noteworthy for her modern and urban appearance, as well as her speaking style that betrays her social class. As Meredith expresses, humor plays a vital role in exalting women from the 'cute stupid' they were cast as and glorifies them into admirable intelligence. (cited in Eagleton, 2019, p.95). Although Gülse Birsnel creates an appearance within the stereotype of 'cute-stupid' mentioned by Meredith with her representation of women as a writer and actress, she also presents this woman as basically intelligent, unable to lie, and blunt. Gizem Özpamuk, played by Gülse Birsnel, is an old model; her age, fashionable dresses, her style, and her position within the community and so on contain all the features of the superficial woman stereotype that gives importance to appearance. However, what is interesting is that behind the superficial appearance of Gizem, she has a view and perspective on social and current fundamental issues. This dual situation creates humor from the conflict between 'cute-stupid' and 'smart'. This is because the character of Gizem is also presented as a person with high self-awareness. It is as if the stereotype created by Gülse Birsnel speaks with the writer Gülse Birsnel. This dual situation of the Gizem character is revealed by the dialogues on stage in episode six of the series in the first season. This scene that we are going to exemplify also has aspects that discuss class discrimination and gender inequality, which are the two basic issues with which Birsnel deals. The character Gizem Özpamuk has done excessive shopping with the credit card given to her by her husband Cengiz. In this scene her husband takes Gizem's credit card back.

**Cengiz:** From now on I'll keep this credit card. I won't give you cash either, I've taken the car with the driver I've allocated for you.

**Gizem:** How come?

**Cengiz:** From now on, I will give you a monthly minimum wage.

**Gizem:** What, a military wage? For example, a military wage like a general salary or a regular soldier's salary?

**Cengiz:** 1600 liras.

**Gizem:** What am I going to do with that much money?

**Cengiz:** Everything. Clothing, cosmetics, kitchen expenses, transportation, and from now on, you will spend this amount on all of your expenses.

**Gizem:** How will that be?

**Cengiz:** As the wives of others do.

The fact that Gizem is not aware of what the minimum wage is and her confusion of the words 'minimum' with 'military' not only shows that her education level is low but also shows that Gizem is a 'new urban dweller' who is far from the section of society that has to live on the minimum wage. The issue that the economic level of society and the cultural level do not match, is once again emphasized in this scene. On the other hand, among the dialogues of Gizem complaint with the 'cute-stupid' character, there is a tone showing that she needs Cengiz's economic power, but she also rebels against it. In this respect, Gizem's understanding of the word 'minimum' as 'military' is also a latent expression of her rebellion.

In the same episode, Gizem's discovery of the city lines ferry and comparing it to a yacht also gives clues about Gizem's intelligence under her 'cute-stupid' appearance. By humorously expressing that the amount of money she has is sufficient for everything, instead of complaining about the limited money that her husband had given her, somehow reveals the living conditions of the low-income portion of society and criticizes those who do not understand these conditions like her husband.

**Gizem:** Cengiz look, did you know that? There is one card, you get that card, you get on whatever you want, you travel all over Istanbul. Its a legend! Did you know that?

**Cengiz:** Yes.

**Gizem:** Maybe. For example, you also get on a boat. You get on the boat, Cengiz. You travel by boat all over Istanbul for 3 liras to 5 liras, and this boat is ten times bigger than our boat.

**Cengiz:** It is a ferry, my dear, a ferry.

**Gizem:** It doesn't matter, as a result, you get on a very big boat, you travel and so on, for free. Very cheap. Not money. Very cheap. We have spent so much money for years in vain, really it's idiotic.

The situation that Gizem points out with the word 'idiotic' also expresses rebellion over Cengiz's economic control. In the fourteenth episode of the TV series, where media criticism is frequently made, Gizem participates in the 'I Eat My Bride' program. Here, she also gets points from competitors according to her costume. Before the competition, she agrees with her husband Cengiz to wear clothes made by the clothing company owned by her husband and, thereby, to advertise them. However, Gizem does not manage to do this, and she messes up. When the sweater she is wearing becomes sought after, she gives the name of a rival company and she says she bought it from there. In episode twenty-two, we see Gizem, who acts as an actress, in the shooting of the series. In this scene, Gizem must be knocked down by a slap given by the man in front of her. However, Gizem does not fall to the ground despite the director's warnings and gives an important message to women about violence saying, "*We will get all of you women accustomed to standing upright, one by one*". These scenes reveal the character Gizem's pure and intelligent contrasts, and use humor through these contrasts.

These contrasts can be revealed with the side-by-side representation of rich and poor, modern and traditional situations, as well as through the contrasts of the same character. Alenka Zupancic, in her book 'The Odd One In: On Comedy', states that the twin theme is one of the great themes of comedy (2007, p.88). Gülse Birsell almost combines the theme of 'twinness' in one character in a postmodern way by establishing the conflicting twins with the inner conflicts and contrasts of a single character. The mother figure character of the Yüksel family, Safiye Yüksel, embodies the characteristics of the class she represents with her accent, her clothing and her daily activities, and the neighborhood relations in the shantytown she previously lived in. However, on the other hand, she attracts attention since she is equipped with a postmodern hybrid, following social and technological innovations and adapting them to her own life. In the words of Orhan Tekelioğlu (2017, p.19), Safiye is a 'hybrid' character. Safiye, who constantly hounds her husband Yaşar Yüksel in his slum in Ayazağa to earn more money, tries to keep up with this high society life when they move to the Jetset villas. The friendship that starts with Gizem, the boss's wife, is a way for the character of Safiye to take a closer look at high society life. Safiye's admiration of and taking example from the character of Gizem, as well as her exaggerated praises in the face of her behavior, reveal the struggle of someone trying to be included in this high life. The friendship between the characters of Safiye and Gizem raises a class issue in this respect. On the other hand, the affectionate movements we see on both sides of the friendship between Gizem and Safiye show us how close these two characters are with their contradictions. While Gizem constantly talks about her modeling and searches for a way to get on the stage, Safiye struggles to take Gizem as an example and enter her circle. In episode six, Gizem takes Safiye to her hairdresser and gets her to have a new hairstyle. Upon this the character Safiye says, "God bless ... if I go to Hollywood with this hair right now, I will never look like a stranger". These words from Safiye explain that she is a hybrid character on the way from a shanty town to Hollywood. It can be said that Birsell, through the character of Safiye, mirrors the class defined as both 'rich' and 'poor', which emulates the higher class. This dialogue between the characters of Gizem and Safiye is also from one of the scenes exemplifying the blurring of class boundaries.

**Gizem:** Safiye I'll ask something, you are poor, aren't you?

**Safiye:** Sort of.

**Gizem:** Good. I mean actual factually poor?

**Safiye:** Thanks be to God.

**Gizem:** Safiye, teach me poverty. But I want to be very good at this. I have a lot of ambition ... Teach me, Safiye, how to run a household and take care of all my needs with a military wage.

**Safiye:** Here is the distinguished professor in this field...

Alara, who dresses in black, speaks little, is asocial and psychologically problematic, but who is smart enough to advise her older sister Ilayda, is a character who is bored with the bourgeois lifestyle. For this reason, while looking for new excitement in life she is infatuated with Safiye's irresponsible and macho brother Gündüz whom she meets by chance. Although the words of blood and violence in the character Gündüz's troubled attitudes are diametrically opposite to his snoop Gothic attitude, Alara's love for Gündüz transforms both Gündüz and Alara over time. The character Alara enters a more authentic world, unlike the materialist environment she denies, thanks to Gündüz. In the sixth episode of the series, the character Gündüz takes Alara to the Talip Ocakbaşı, which is in the neighborhood, to eat sheep's head and heart. This event, which is a part of Gündüz's life rituals, is the practice of deepening the bourgeois life with a 'dangerous' experience for Alara. However, the really interesting thing is the rush of high society to this grill restaurant in the shanty town thanks to magazine press members watching Alara. The criticism of everyday life and social classes comes up once again.

The person whom the character Cengiz Özpamuk wants his son Ozan get married to is İlayda Çıkrıkçıoğlu. However, Ozan does not like İlayda, and the efforts of Cengiz to expand his wealth come to a full stop. The character İlayda, who is one of the prominent names of society life, with a father who owns a textile brand, actually studied pastry. İlayda, who does not work in the field in the specialty in which she received her education, manages her father's wealth. İlayda, who is regarded by the Özpamuk family as noble, rich and polite, grew up in a sterile environment and distant from people. With this attitude, she is shown to be repulsive and just like Gizem, who cares about her appearance and her position in society life more than anything else. The opposite characters of the sisters Alara and İlayda are also examples of Birsel's humor, based on the combination of different characters. In episode fourteen, Alara tries to use new concepts which she loves and has learned from the Yüksel family. She asks, "You're going to the toilet?" to her older sister when she gets up from the table, but her sister İlayda gets angry at this and responds, "*We don't talk like this, we say 'I'll powder my nose and come back.' Our environment requires this.*" This dialogue exemplifies the stereotype of a bourgeois woman falling in love with a macho man and her artificial glorification of a lifestyle that is not her own.

The character Melike, who lives with her sister Safiye and her brother-in-law Yaşar, differs from other exaggerated female characters with her natural attitude and beauty. Melike, who is portrayed as having graduated from an Agriculture Faculty in Eskişehir, is a very natural character who does not like to be idle and who is keen on working and producing. Additionally, a love that begins with Ozan, who lives off his father's money and does not like to work in the Jetset villas, gives rise to humor that emerges from the union of opposite characters, just like Alara and Gündüz. Teaching football to Ozan, who does not know how to play football in episode fourteen, is remarkable in terms of breaking stereotypes regarding gender roles.

One of the most colorful female characters of 'Jet Society' is Şennur. Şennur, who plays Talip's mother, participates in the series in the eighth episode where she is shown to be a pragmatic character who can be often found in daily life. Şennur is the type of woman who does not want to marry off her son, who is fond of her property, who is fond of gold and real estate, and who eats everything with the appearance of cutting down on food expenses. This female character is the antithesis of the 'elite' or 'snob' stereotype. Şennur's external appearance, speech, and attitudes combine her traditional female character with her entrepreneurship, which creates another 'hybrid' character. Şennur is another female version of Burhan Altıntop on the European Side when we consider her entrepreneurship, such as taxi stand business, high society fortune-telling, real estate, and so on. In the fourteenth episode, while Şennur tells us that she drives a taxi, she presents traditional speech and dress style, and she exhibits the contrasts of Western-Eastern, modern-traditional, and rich-poor with a multi-layered character structure.

The main issue that Gülse Birsel scrutinizes in her character is the local characteristic in the origin of her social elite class characters leaking from gaps in their 'elite' lives. Kumsal, who participates in the sixteenth episode of the series, balances the influence of İlayda Çıkrıkçıoğlu coming from a deep-rooted bourgeois family with the Black Sea nanny figure. Kumsal, portrayed as the former nanny of İlayda and Alara, is included in the life of the Çıkrıkçıoğlu family at their waterside residence. This character, who speaks with a Black Sea accent, wearing traditional scarfs on sportswear, represents the opposite of high society life. However, Kumsal also has authority over sisters. Kumsal, who falls in love with Talip, goes to the gym because she is jealous of Yıldız, and tries to attract Talip's attention with a pole dance, even though she is religious in nature. Şennur is also a fan of her because of the gold bracelets on her arm.

### Discussion

Gülse Birsel sitcoms generally include a sociological analysis that examines social change, starting in 1980 and then becoming visible in 2000 in Turkey, within the context of the characters. Gülse Birsel describes the contrasts between traditional and modern, new urban dwellers and the bourgeoisie in the aforementioned social change and the big difference in the context of lifestyles and new living spaces, described by Rıfat Bali, as 'the big difference as between night and day' (2002, p.18). As it's depicted in Rıfat Bali book "Tarz-ı Hayattan Life Style'e" (2002), on one side "there are business women, business men, communicators, advertisers, writers, magazine editors, and television producers"; "In the other corner of the picture, there are people with moustaches, sometimes with beards, with their white socks and their prayer beads in hand." The success of Gülse Birsel relies upon her narration portraying these two pictures or representations of Turkey that diametrically contrast with each other concerning their lifestyles, world-views, and approaches to social issues. She partially draws a panoramic view of Turkish people, while describing the establishment of a lifestyle in modern housing estates away from the city center with security services and lives far from the crowded city.

The series explains that class distinctions are not only spatial (domestic type, neighborhood), but also artificially produced through titles in business life. While it is criticized that the rise in business life does not necessarily follow the norms of merit, the adaptation problems in the new environment of the family produce comedy. It is understood that the Özpamuk family, which looks down on the Yaşar family, actually has no different views or expectations on



life, and that they care about their economic power and ‘being a name in community life’. In a sense, ‘Jet Society’ speaks to a world of its own that is known as the AB group (which is the children of middle-pole families working in plazas and business centers with the social and economic transformation after 1990). However, at the same time, it can be suggested that Gülse Birsel reflects the class defined as both ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ with male and female characters who emulate upward social mobility and handles it with a critical approach. However, it should be emphasized that such criticism, made using the language of humor, is neither didactic nor in a demeaning or judgmental manner. The series almost tries to reach everyone, not only to addressing a particular audience category, with its sincere narration reflecting the new upper-middle-class emerging after the 1990s during the adventure of modernization in Turkey, together with all the internal weaknesses. In this sense, the series brings together snobbish characters with elitist and superior attitudes, and the local, ‘regular’ and sincere characters, and produces humor through this unity. For example, the impossible love between the native, macho, but ‘regular’ young boy Gündüz, a member of the Yaşar family, and the western imitation of the Çıkrıkçıoğlu family, the socialite and gothic daughter Alara, reveals contradictions that are the source of humor.

The diversity of female characters in the ‘Jet Society’ series and their weight in the script are remarkable. The male characters, on the other hand, assume a partially complementary role and make the features of the female characters visible according to the general structure of the sitcom. The character Yaşar Yüksel, the father of the Yüksel family, emphasizes the personality of Safiye. Similarly, the textile manufacturer character Cengiz Özpamuk draws attention as a screenplay person who highlights the life and personality of Gizem Özpamuk, who creates a physical contrast with him. Even though the male and female characters are created as stereotypes, it shows that the patterns of gender are blurred, just as with the class differences. Within this context, a gender discourse is diminished by the other characters of the series, even by the character who produces the discourse.

A spatial gentrification phenomenon noticed in Gülse Birsel sitcoms, other than the characters, also continues in ‘Jet Society’. This is transformed into an important part of critical discourse by revealing the realization process of this within Turkey's socio-economic conditions and its urbanization strategy. With the new middle class after 1990, one of the most discussed issues has been the concept of gentrification, and the change of urban spaces in the lives of the new middle class. An important part of Gülse Birsel's critical humor, developed in the context of social classes, is naturally gentrified spaces or districts that change with their new guests. For example, Nişantaşı on the *European Side* is a place where the upper income group mainly lives as a part of the Western and modern lifestyle in the center of Istanbul. However, this place is transformed into a district where also the entrepreneurial character Burhan Altıntop, who hails from Anatolia, who is culturally trying to adapt to his new neighborhood, who is slippery, who thinks he is crushed and tries to crush others, lives and works. The sociological transformation in the *Yalan Dünya* (Fake World) is this time established through the Cihangir district, where the media, artists, and intellectual environment predominantly live. In ‘Jet Society’, the segments of society distant from each other, sharing the same district and urban space, are revealed by a humorous language, through the shanty house and neighborhood villas in housing estates with security services adjacent to each other in Ayağaza. In a sense, this explains the fact that class discrimination is not culturally-based, but economically-based, using the coexistence of two extreme worlds. While the culturally-based higher class is the old city dwellers or the townspeople, the economically-based upper class migrate to the city and are still making efforts to change their class, or they are the children of this generation that are now difficult to differentiate from each other. Therefore, the artificiality and irrelevance of the established hierarchies form the basis of the criticism. Gülse Birsel discusses the problems of the new urban population with humor and a degeneration that disregards urban law without being a party in practice between the traditional and the modern, or the old and the new urban dwellers.

### Conclusion

Historically, the patriarchal cultural order has directly or indirectly affected all practices related to social life. The field of humor, which has the power to create new meaning and which highlights intelligence, has also been shaped within this cultural structure and women have been kept away from the field of humor. Within this respect, as in examples throughout the world, in Turkey there are also few women who produce their own comedy materials and humor. Gülse Birsel is an extremely important name in a patriarchal social order in terms of reaching large audiences with the humor she produces in the field of a male-dominated popular culture. Birsel also creates an area of resistance by giving important social messages regarding gender inequality and class problems in an area where women remain in the background.

Although it seems mostly apolitical, the characters created by Gülse Birsel and the plots she builds make a political critique of everyday life using subtle humor and satire, while remaining free from current politics. With references to capitalism, neo-capitalism, the economy, the media, environmental problems, animal rights, class discrimination, violence against women, and anti-war themes, it makes you laugh/think about many issues and raises questions about these issues.

The sitcom format is especially based on events and relationships in the everyday lives of the middle class. Considering that most of human life consists of such moments, we see that sitcoms can also be an important critical tool that mirrors society. Birsel, who frequently includes stereotypes of men and women, rich and poor, also tries to show the contradictions more clearly by sharpening the traits of her characters. Birsel's approach to humor undoubtedly bears the awareness that we can understand each other better if we laugh at each other's weaknesses, mistakes, and flaws. As a female sitcom writer, Birsel reveals the liberating, but at the same time reconciling, aspects of humor.

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