

## **Bercestte Gülçin Özdemir**

*Faculty of Communication, Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3742-2739>

## **The Feminist Digital Movement That Started With #SusmaBitsin**

**Abstract:** In 2018, an incident of sexual harassment on the set of a TV series in Turkey became one of the events that played an important role in the development of digital activism in the media with the hashtag #SusmaBitsin (#SpeakSoItEnds). A female actress who stated that she had been sexually assaulted and insulted by a male actor on the set of the TV series *Yaşamayanlar* (Alphan Eşeli, 2018) filed a lawsuit against the male actor for “sexual assault” and “public insult”. The fact that a female actress courageously shared the incident of sexual harassment in the public sphere and said that she stands behind the case by filing a lawsuit caused quite a stir in the media in Turkey. There have been many reports on the issue in both traditional and social media. The struggle of the female actress by risking the difficulties she may experience in the public sphere has been effective in raising feminist consciousness not only for female actors but also for women working in the public sphere, in general. This study questions the male-dominated perspective on the female body in the public sphere of social media movements in the digital public sphere from a feminist perspective with the approaches of feminist theorists and with a focus on Turkey. The feminist movement that started with the hashtag #SusmaBitsin (#SpeakSoItEnds) about sexual harassment on the sets in Turkey and the discourses that these posts reveal are presented as a case study on the issues underlying the study.

**Keywords:** Feminism; #MeToo; #SusmaBitsin; female body; public space.

### **Introduction**

Since the transition of humanity from matriarchal to patriarchal societies, women have been subordinate in public and private spheres. Even in the 21st century, this masculine domination continues to manifest itself. Man is a changing and developing creature. However, despite all the changes the world has undergone, one of the unchanging realities is the oppression and masculine domination over women. In this study, the presentation of a harassment case, which is the subject of a public debate in the public sphere, is analyzed from a feminist perspective by associating it with the body. This analysis is formed within the framework of the philosophical trajectory of Simone de Beauvoir’s sentence in *The Second Sex* (1949): “The body serves

as the instrument through which humans grasp the world, thereby influencing their perception of it. This notion has prompted extensive research into the data, as it is believed to hold the key to comprehending the essence of womanhood.”<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of human connection with the world is rooted in the relationship with the body. Therefore, it becomes imperative to interpret the role of women in the public sphere through the medium of the body. Čičigaj reminds us again that de Beauvoir emphasizes that what is considered universally valuable depends on us and in this context, the material conditions for ethical life can be secured.<sup>2</sup> Ensuring the sustainability of an ethical life is realized through women’s solidarity.

The manifestations of masculine domination exhibited in the context of television shows and cinematic productions have undergone a diversification process over the course of time. Within this social structure, women are subject to various forms of abuse, including mobbing, sexual harassment, violence, and manipulation. These practices persist, underscoring the need for effective remedies and interventions to address and prevent such violations. It has been documented that a number of situations were reported in which female actors had been subjected to harassment or mobbing, resulting in their subsequent exclusion from the on-set participation. Furthermore, there were instances where female actors were threatened by male producers over the course of their careers. These experiences are indicative of the challenges faced by women in the media industry. Sets, the brightest area of public spaces, have shown that they are not as bright as the camera lights illuminate them. The #MeToo movement initiated by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 is an important turning point for feminist theories and feminist consciousness in this context. The #MeToo movement, which constitutes one of the most significant impetuses of the fourth wave of feminist mobilizations worldwide, has initiated feminist mobilizations not only in Hollywood and Europe but also in numerous other regions globally. With harassment cases coming to the agenda worldwide, organizations that oppose masculine domination have gained momentum. In 2017, the #MeToo movement experienced a notable strengthening due to the revelation that prominent Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein had perpetrated acts of harassment against numerous female actors, which ultimately led to his conviction. The #MeToo movement, which provided women with courage to share their experiences, led to the formation of the Time’s Up movement and the emergence of a novel form of organizing aimed at combating sexual harassment. The integration of social media metrics into data collection facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals engage with news content on these platforms.<sup>3</sup> This discourse points to the significant diffusion of the impact of digital activism.

At the 2018 *Cannes Film Festival*, Cate Blanchett delivered a speech on the red carpet, addressing the inequitable treatment of female stars in comparison to their

<sup>1</sup> Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Vintage Books, 2010), 66.

<sup>2</sup> Katja Čičigaj, “Beyond Sovereignty and Particularism: for a Truly Universalist Feminism,” *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies* 14 (2017): 103.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Poell and José van Dijck, “Social Media and Journalistic Independence,” in *Media Independence: Working With Freedom or Working For Free?*, ed. James Bennett and Niki Strange (Routledge, 2014), 188.

male counterparts. In this speech, which was attended by actresses such as Kristen Stewart and Salma Hayek, gender inequality in the film industry was emphasized on behalf of women working in this field: “We are 82 women representing the number of female directors who have climbed these stairs since the first edition of the *Cannes Film Festival* in 1946. In the same period, 1,688 male directors have climbed these very same stairs,” the two-time Oscar winner said.<sup>4</sup> (see image #1). Women who have experienced material and moral injustices have expressed significant challenges in their attempts to produce works in the cinema, particularly in comparison to their male counterparts. These women have also reported being subjected to various forms of harassment. A concrete example of various types of harassment against women in the media after the 2018 Cannes protest is presented to the audience in the film *Bombshell* (Jay Roach, 2019). The film’s representation of women as objects of desire can be seen as meaningful at this point. The portrayal of harassment experienced by women in public spaces, even within conventional Hollywood narratives, reflects a subtle yet significant shift in the representation of women from a feminist perspective. This shift not only highlights gendered power dynamics in popular media but also resonates with broader theoretical frameworks concerning marginalization. As Gayatri Spivak argues in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), women in colonized contexts face profound difficulties in accessing their collective memory due to the pervasive influence of imperialism. Spivak identifies them as doubly oppressed: subjected both to gender-based discrimination and to structural forces that effectively silence their voices. The depiction of such struggles in mainstream media, therefore, can be read as an instance of increasing awareness of these intersecting forms of oppression, signaling a move toward more nuanced and socially conscious representations of women. In this film narrative, women are ironically the announcers and public speakers, but they are the ones who hesitate to speak out even when issues related to their private sphere come up in the public sphere. This is because the shadow of power, which is also spatialized in the space they live in, looms everywhere.<sup>5</sup> The female characters, therefore, can be read as emblematic of actresses who, in real life, write feminist manifestos on the steps of Cannes – performing acts of visibility and resistance within a space that is simultaneously enabling and constraining.

From the inception of cinema to the present day, the portrayal of women as objects of desire has remained pervasive across all areas of the media. The male-dominated gaze in film has persisted, reinforced by harassment and the marginalization of women on set. In response, many women working in television and cinema have begun to challenge these practices and to question their positions within the media by organizing meetings and collective actions. In this context, digital activism has emerged as a significant tool for raising awareness and fostering change.

The male-dominated codes of social order must be challenged through a

<sup>4</sup> “Cannes 2018: Female Stars Protest on Red Carpet for Equal Rights,” *BBC News*, May 12, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-44095914>.

<sup>5</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, *Madun Konuşabilir mi?* trans. Dilek Hattatoğlu, Emre Koyuncu, Gökçen Ertuğrul (Dipnot Publication, 2016), 65.

transformation in the ways women are perceived in public spaces. Public spaces are inherently political arenas where language, social indicators, cultural politics, sexual identities, body politics, feminist discourses, and activist mobilizations converge to create the conditions for collective engagement and assembly. Hannah Arendt's definition of the public sphere as the space where "everything can be seen and heard by everyone and has the widest possible publicity" can be understood in this context.<sup>6</sup> In the digital age, when debates in the public sphere unfold on social media platforms, the critical questioning that began in the global village continues in diverse forms, with women organizing and coming together across various fields. Women's online movements have become important for the visibility of digital feminism.<sup>7</sup> The development of digital activism not only facilitates the emergence and growth of feminist organizations but also has the potential to accelerate and render women's mobilizations more visible. Awareness-raising activities present stories to a diverse audience in online environment. When posts on X are shared with the #MeToo hashtag, they bring out common feelings such as relief and protection.<sup>8</sup> These common feelings facilitate collective action. Hashtag feminism is an opportunity for those who are not seen in the mainstream media discourse to gain discursive power.<sup>9</sup> In the interviews that they conducted for their study, Greta Olson and Elisabeth Lechner reported that digital platforms provide spaces for feminist mobilization and community building. They also noted that these spaces are constrained by capitalism and visibility policies.<sup>10</sup> Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalyn Keller found that solidarity among women often evolves into feminist consciousness among participants in hashtag campaigns, leading them to recognize sexual violence not as an individual problem but as a structural issue. They further observe that the perception of discussing feminist issues on X as being easier than engaging in such discussions in offline contexts underscores the significance of digital platforms in fostering both individual and collective feminist awareness, as well as in locating and sustaining support for feminist perspectives.<sup>11</sup> However, digital feminism also confronts several challenges. Examples of harassment experienced by women in digital spaces include hate speech, non-consensual sharing of sexual photos, stalking, doxxing, name calling and insults,

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Arendt, *İnsanlık Durumu*, trans. Bahadır Sina Şener (İletişim Publication, 2018), 92.

<sup>7</sup> Müge Öztunç, "Digital Activism in Turkey: Istanbul Convention as A Symbol of Women's Movement," *The Turkish Online Journal of Design Art and Communication* 13, no. 2 (2023): 411.

<sup>8</sup> Jessamy Gleeson and Breanan Turner, "Online Feminist Activism as Performative Consciousness-Raising: A #MeToo Case Study," in *#MeToo and the Politics of Social Change*, ed. Bianca Fileborn and Rachel Loney-Howes (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019), 64.

<sup>9</sup> Gina Masullo Chen, Paromita Pain and Briana Barner, "Hashtag Feminism: Activism or Slacktivism?" in *Feminist Approaches to Media Theory and Research*, ed. Dustin Harp, Jaime Loke ve Ingrid Bachmann (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018), 212.

<sup>10</sup> Greta Olson and Elisabeth Lechner, "#Feminist – Naming Controversies and Celebrating Points of Connection and Joy in Current Feminisms," *European Journal of English Studies* 26 (2022): 2. Olson and Lechner, "#Feminist – Naming Controversies," 314.

<sup>11</sup> Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose and Jessalynn Keller, "#MeToo and The Promise and Pitfalls of Challenging Rape Culture Through Digital Feminist Activism," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 25 (2018): 240.

impersonation, and public shaming.<sup>12</sup> Despite the distinct characteristics of rape in physical and digital spaces, cyber-perpetration can be experienced as genuinely intrusive, violent, unethical, and controlling, much like rape in physical space. Although physical rape and cyber sexual violence may not always directly impact the body, they inflict significant harm on the self associated with that body.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, there are also cases where victims are blamed in the virtual spaces. For this reason, it is recommended that communities be created where comments are monitored and online security can be ensured.<sup>14</sup> In re-examining cyber feminism, it is pointed out that the internet economy reproduces oppressive workplace hierarchies that are deeply rooted in the global political economy.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, constructive critiques of digital feminism underscore key strategies for advancing the women's movement in the online sphere through hashtag activism. In a report authored by writers, activists, and educators engaged in the digital feminist arena, online feminism is acknowledged for its role in motivating political engagement but is critiqued for insufficiently connecting to broader organizational efforts. The report emphasizes the need to address challenges such as developing media strategies, fundraising, managing organizational finances, navigating conflict, criticism, and disappointment, and providing peer support.<sup>16</sup> If a universal organisational structure is established in digital feminism and consensus is reached on a joint decision-making mechanism, these negative aspects will also disappear.

### **Feminist uprising in digital public space: #SusmaBitsin**

From the historical concept of the topos to the present day, spaces shared collectively on Earth have been characterized as public spaces. Social space, as a domain shaped by social and political forces, functions as an instrument of control and domination.<sup>17</sup> Within social space, prevailing ideologies reinforce the male-dominated power structures of the public sphere. Mental space, in contrast, emerges as the domain of philosophers and mathematicians, further deepening the divisions between mental, physical, and social realms.<sup>18</sup> The interrelationship among these spaces both reinforces and transforms an individual's relationship with the social order and cultural context in which they exist. In this regard, social media platforms can be understood as analogous to mental spaces, serving both to reflect and mediate these

<sup>12</sup> Jane Im et al., "Women's Perspectives on Harm and Justice after Online Harassment," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 6 (2022): 355:3.

<sup>13</sup> Martha McCaughey and Jill Cermelle, "Violations of Sexual and Information Privacy," *Violence Against Women* 28, no. 15–16 (2022): 3965.

<sup>14</sup> Emily Wright et al., "Victim Blaming," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2025): 21.

<sup>15</sup> Jessie Daniels, "Rethinking Cyberfeminism(s)," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 37 no. 1/2 (2009): 118.

<sup>16</sup> Courtney E. Martin and Vanessa Valenti, "#FemFuture: Online Revolution," *Barnard Center for Research on Women*, 8 (2012): 24.

<sup>17</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Mekânın Üretimi*, trans. Işık Ergüden, (Sel Publication, 2024), 56.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

abstract, intellectual domains. However, the masculine rules and patriarchal perspective underlying these spaces emphasize male dominance in public spaces. Therefore, it can be said that the issues of equal and fair wage distribution and equal opportunity in the public sphere still serve the masculine order. In the *Declaration of Sentiments* published in Seneca Falls (1848), it was reminded that women were kept away from gainful work and it was underlined that they could not receive equal wages with men in return for the work they did and that women were therefore forced to live a life of dependence.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Sheila Rowbotham, over fifty years ago, addressed the exploitation of women's domestic labor, the underpayment of women working in the public sphere compared to men, and the grueling conditions faced by working-class women, who were compelled to work excessively long hours for low wages and without social protections.<sup>20</sup> However, the fact that the wages of male actors on sets are higher than the wages of female actors is still a matter of debate, even though years have passed since the discussions commenced. This is because, in the social spaces described by Henri Lefebvre, the rules regulated by the patriarchal perspective apply. On the other hand, according to Arendt, the public sphere is conceived as a space possessing a quality that transcends the temporal limitations of mortal existence.<sup>21</sup> Public spaces, which are not only planned for the living, build a world where a common spatial language for humanity is developed and which includes all sexual identity characterizations. A world where Arendt's theoretical explanation can be applied in practice in everyday life is not being built today. One of the most important forces that will ensure the existence of this world is the creation and sustainability of public spaces where discussions, inquiries, and activist discourse take place in a concrete manner, such as in the digital public sphere. Some scholars have argued that hashtag feminism is a powerful practice in the politics of visibility, an activism that can change the way we represent, interpret and react.<sup>22</sup> As the visibility of hashtag activism grows, Arendt's conception of the public sphere is increasingly taking concrete form within the digital public sphere.

In Turkey, the once-silent cries of women have begun to resonate more widely through academic articles on various websites, independent writers' discussions on sexual harassment, podcasts addressing masculine violence on film sets, YouTube conversations about the necessity of fair and equal pay policies, and public testimonies from individuals sharing their experiences of harassment. This digital awakening, initially propelled by hashtags, has evolved into tangible, in-person gatherings, demonstrations, and marches. Such activist mobilizations echo the libertarian feminist spirit of 1968. Reflecting on this trend, the feminist online platform Çatlak Zemin documented the history of feminism in Turkey between 2010 and 2020 through tweets,

<sup>19</sup> Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Teori*, trans. Aksu Bora, Meltem Ağduk Gevrek, Fevziye Sayılan (İletişim Publication, 2009), 23.

<sup>20</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Kadının Gizlenmiş Tarihi*, trans. Nilgün Şarman (Payel Publication, 2011), 98.

<sup>21</sup> Arendt, *İnsanlık Durumu*, 81.

<sup>22</sup> Rosemary Clark-Parsons, "I See You, I Believe You, I Stand You': #MeToo and The Performance of Networked Feminist Visibility," *Feminist Media Studies* 21, no. 3 (2021): 364.



photos, and videos, and highlighted the significant growth of digital activism in the country. Prominent feminist hashtags during this period include: #BenimBedenim-BenimKararım, #BacaklarınıTopla, #YerimiİşgalEtme, #DirenKahkaha, #HandeKadereSesVer, #TecavüzMeşrulaştırılamaz, #ŞuleÇetİçinAdalet, #KadınlarBirlikteGüçlü, #Ölmekİstemiyorum.<sup>23</sup> Following the murder of Özgecan Aslan, individuals began sharing their personal experiences and witness accounts of harassment and sexual violence using the #sendeanlat hashtag. Concurrently, initiatives were launched to enhance legal protections for women, exemplified by the #ÖzgecanYasası campaign.<sup>24</sup> This collective action has accelerated women's engagement against gender-based violence within the digital public sphere. Consequently, the number of harassment scandals that were exposed and publicly discussed in the media has increased. Within the framework of the #SusmaBitsin movement, tweets shared from the movement's official account not only revealed instances of harassment and mobbing against women in the media but also facilitated women's collective organization and mobilization. These movements illustrate how women have operationalized the mental spaces described by Lefebvre, while simultaneously enacting Arendt's conception of public spaces as arenas of equality between men and women. Therefore, the pursuit of gender equality across mental, physical, and social spaces is gaining momentum through digital feminist activism. These developments not only reinforce digital feminism but also support broader women's movements in digital public spaces, fostering their constructive use. Continuous visibility is further maintained through ongoing social media activity. Updates concerning continuing harassment cases within the legal field were periodically disseminated through the #SusmaBitsin account, thereby maintaining their public visibility. "New year, new meeting! Our call to all women working in the cinema/TV industry! A call has been made to women working in the field via Twitter."<sup>25</sup> "As long as you try to normalize violence with flowery words and emotional narratives, and attempt to portray men as 'victims', you will find the real owners of those stories standing before you – us."<sup>26</sup> Some of Turkey's most famous female actresses have made statements drawing attention to the concept of sexual violence, which were made visible through posters. "The behavior of the victim of sexual violence cannot be used as an excuse for sexual violence. Sexual violence is the crime of the perpetrator. Creating excuses is victim blaming and feeds into the idea that 'some people deserve sexual violence' instead of no one deserves sexual violence. #öyledeğilböyle."<sup>27</sup> "Sexual violence is not related to what the survivor wore, their profession,

<sup>23</sup> Delta Meriç Candemir, "Hashtag Feminizmi," *Feminist Bellek*, April 2, 2021, <https://feministbellek.org/hashtag-feminizmi/>.

<sup>24</sup> Alikılıç Özlem and Şule Baş, "Dijital Feminizm: Hashtag'in Cinsiyeti," *Fe Dergi* 11 (2019): 1.

<sup>25</sup> Susma Bitsin (@SusmaBitsin), "Our call to all women working in the cinema/TV industry!" Twitter (now X), December 30, 2018, <https://x.com/SusmaBitsin/status/1079380706151809024>.

<sup>26</sup> Susma Bitsin (@SusmaBitsin), "You cannot romanticize the murder of women," Twitter (now X), December 19, 2023, <https://x.com/SusmaBitsin/status/1737139575623966802>.

<sup>27</sup> Susma Bitsin (@SusmaBitsin), "There is no excuse for sexual violence," Twitter (now X), November 20, 2019, <https://x.com/SusmaBitsin/status/1197144395381907456>.

gender identity, and/or sexual orientation. These are beliefs that imply that the survivor ‘deserved’ the sexual violence, that they were deficient or made poor decisions. Sexual violence is the perpetrator’s crime. #öyledeğilböyle.”<sup>28</sup> “Sexual violence is not a joke! Using sexist, sexual violence-normalizing, and condoning expressions under the guise of jokes is a threat of sexual violence. Sexist jokes, profanity, and discriminatory expressions fuel violence. Change begins with language. #öyledeğilböyle.”<sup>29</sup> “Sexual violence within marriage is a crime and is punishable by law. Regardless of the nature of the relationship between individuals, whether they are married, dating, or cohabiting, consent is required in every relationship. Any act without consent constitutes sexual violence. #öyledeğilböyle.”<sup>30</sup>

It was observed that users generally refrained from commenting on tweets shared via the #SusmaBitsin account. Nevertheless, posts that included calls for collective action received substantial visibility. For instance, a tweet regarding the case of a prominent female singer who was physically assaulted by a well-known male actor was viewed 207,600 times, retweeted 635 times, and received 1,700 likes. “Who will clear the perpetrator?”<sup>31</sup> This post received the highest level of engagement on the #SusmaBitsin account primarily because a case of violence brought two nationally prominent figures into the spotlight.

Gizem Bayıksel, a participant in the #SusmaBitsin movement, provides an account of the movement’s evolution and related processes in Turkey, while also highlighting the forms of solidarity among women within the sphere of digital activism:

We published the #That’sHarassment videos made in the US with Turkish subtitles. These are videos that describe very well how women are subjected to harassment in work environments, even if it is not necessarily harassment or rape. The subtitled versions are now available on #SusmaBitsin’s Instagram and Facebook accounts. In collaboration with the *Istanbul Film Festival*, we also screened these videos before the films in the *Flowers Don’t Want It* section. We want to make our own videos in the future.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Susma Bitsin (@SusmaBitsin), “Sexual violence is the perpetrator’s crime,” Twitter (now X), November 21, 2019, <https://x.com/SusmaBitsin/status/1197464954548490241>.

<sup>29</sup> Susma Bitsin (@SusmaBitsin), “There is no joking about rape threats,” Twitter (now X), November 22, 2019, <https://x.com/SusmaBitsin/status/1197783101218414592>.

<sup>30</sup> Susma Bitsin (@SusmaBitsin), “If there is no mutual consent, there is violence,” Twitter (now X), November 23, 2019, <https://x.com/SusmaBitsin/status/1198140410092281858>.

<sup>31</sup> Susma Bitsin (@SusmaBitsin), “Who will clear the perpetrator?” Twitter (now X), January 5, 2025, <https://x.com/susmabitsin/status/1875893390975640046?s=46>.

<sup>32</sup> Gizem Bayıksel, “Stop Shutting Up We Demand Non-Masculinized Sets,” *Altyazı Fasikül*, July 5, 2019, <https://fasikul.altyazi.net/seyir-defteri/susma-bitsinin-sesi/>.



It is stated that digital activism, with the influence of the fourth wave, has increased anti-feminist rhetoric and misogyny.<sup>33</sup> Victim blaming, triggering trauma, on-line attacks, and cyberbullying are examples of hostility towards women that women encounter in digital activism. The issue of online violence against women is being carefully examined by the United Nations. It is recommended that international organizations take a leading role in preventing online violence against women and that this issue be given political priority in terms of preventing hate speech and harassment.<sup>34</sup> Despite the challenges women face in digital activism, women working on film and TV series sets, film critics, and many women working in civil society organizations continued to hold meetings to ensure the sustainability of this movement. In the *Susma Bitsin Online Psychiatry Panel* (January 2021), meetings were organized to discuss the processes and disclosures experienced by women who were sexually harassed in the cinema, television and theater sector.<sup>35</sup> The incident that prompted the emergence of the #SusmaBitsin hashtag involved a male actor who was alleged to have harassed a woman and was subsequently acquitted in February 2021. “Bringing together women from the cinema, television, and theater industries, #SusmaBitsin is organizing an online psychiatry panel to discuss how we can protect ourselves at work and in our personal lives, and how we can draw strength from one another.”<sup>36</sup> A call for solidarity was made via X with a tweet. However, this solidarity process, which started in 2018, has not lost momentum over the years and different forms of organization have emerged. On March 8, the *International Women’s Day*, Pera Museum participated in this solidarity by organizing a film screening program under the slogan *Strong Together* (2022).<sup>37</sup> At *Sinematek/Cinematheque*, a space dedicated to screening films from both the world and the Turkish cinema history as well as to hosting cinema-related panels, members of the #SusmaBitsin Platform – established to combat sexual harassment and discrimination on film sets – gathered with cinema enthusiasts to hold discussions under the hashtag “#WillWeRemainSilent? We Say No!” in 2022.<sup>38</sup> The most recent meeting of the #SusmaBitsin platform was called *We Come Together!* (2025) with the slogan “We come together to say #SusmaBitsin against harassment, sexual assault and mobbing in our workplaces and to listen to each other.”<sup>39</sup> (see image #2).

<sup>33</sup> Esra Gedik, “Dünyada ve Türkiye’de Dijital Feminizm İncelenmesi: Gençlerin Dijital Aktivizm Deneyimleri,” *Journal of Social and Cultural Studies* 5 (2020): 133.

<sup>34</sup> Kim Barker and Olga Jurazs, “Online Misogyny: A Challenge for Digital Feminism?” *Journal of International Affairs, Dynamics of Global Feminism* 72 (2019): 100.

<sup>35</sup> “Susma Bitsin Online Psychiatry Panel,” January 10, 2021, <https://www.istekadinlar.com/susma-bitsin-online-psikiyatri-paneli-10-ocakta>.

<sup>36</sup> Susma Bitsin (@SusmaBitsin), “Susma Bitsin is launching online panels!,” Twitter (now X), January 8, 2021, <https://x.com/SusmaBitsin/status/1347615612546265088>.

<sup>37</sup> “Strong Together,” *Pera Müzesi*, March 8, 2022, <https://www.peramuzesi.org.tr/basin-bultenleri/pera-film-8-mart%E2%80%99i-birlikte-guclu-programi-ile-kutluyor-/3650>.

“Will We Remain Silent? We Say No!,” *Sinematek*, April 4, 2022, <https://sinematek.kadikoy.bel.tr/etkinlikler/sinematek-gunleri-23-04-2022>.

<sup>39</sup> Susma Bitsin (@susmabitsin), “We are coming together!,” Instagram, March 5, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/susmabitsin/p/DG0osd2NgS9/>.

Feminist movements deconstruct the signifiers attributed to the female body, allowing for the transformation of gender codes in the public sphere as well as guiding the transformation of identity politics. Hashtag feminism constitutes a paradigm through which feminist theoretical frameworks are translated into practice. Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (1987), argues that the sex-gender system is a socio-cultural construction. The existence of phenomena such as identity, value, prestige, kinship position, status in the social hierarchy in the representation system shows that gender representations will be loaded with the meanings carried by these phenomena.<sup>40</sup> Transforming male-dominated norms in the public sphere facilitates the deconstruction of patriarchal structures by challenging the categories traditionally ascribed to women's bodies. In this process, the possibilities offered by the digital public sphere can be harnessed, enabling feminists to assume a more active role and thereby enhance their contributions to digital feminist activism.

### **Erasing the traces of masculine domination on the female body**

In the digital age, public spaces have largely shifted to social media platforms. In this context, the platform can be understood as a political concept in terms of speaking and being heard.<sup>41</sup> Women around the world who participate in movements such as #MeToo and #SusmaBitsin – and who organize themselves by drawing inspiration from these initiatives – mobilize against masculine violence and challenge male domination over their bodies. In patriarchal systems, the female body is often constructed as an object of desire, a commodity, or even a piece of meat; simultaneously, women are frequently rendered invisible in digital spaces where they attempt to speak out. This framing, in which both nature and the body are treated as objects of manipulation and observation, undermines the meaningful recognition of women's existence.<sup>42</sup> Observers positioned within the panoptic gaze often seek to silence women's voices. Nevertheless, women's acts and interventions in asserting their own existence constitute practices of resistance against masculine violence. As Monique Plaza argues, women function as signifiers through their entire existence and should be considered independently of culturally specific notions of femininity or prescribed categories of sexuality. Non-essentialist feminist theory facilitates an understanding of the female body in relation to women's holistic and spiritual development, rather than as a mere object defined by patriarchal frameworks. According to Mary Ann Doane, however, the dualism of soul and body needs to be reformulated and its relationality questioned. The body is not only the essence, it also explains the construction of

<sup>40</sup> Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction: Theories of Representation and Difference* (Indiana University Press, 1987), 5.

<sup>41</sup> Tarleton, Gillespie, "The Politics of 'Platforms,'" *New Media & Society* 12, no. 3 (2010): 6.

<sup>42</sup> Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, 1990), 126.

the essentialism of femininity.<sup>43</sup> Feminist practices developed against the patriarchy, which wants to prevent the development of this construction, remind the patriarchal order every time that the woman's body should be treated in accordance with the woman's own decision. In Turkey, feminist consciousness, which gained momentum with the #SusmaBitsin movement, continues to strengthen, playing a crucial role in challenging and transforming the categories historically attributed to women's bodies. On the other hand, the dominant discourses produced by neo-liberal policies are being implemented. Alison Phipps points to the strong coalition of neoliberal and neo-conservative frameworks when questioning the political sociology of women's bodies, with key debates such as sexual violence, gender and Islam, sex work and motherhood.<sup>44</sup> What is fundamentally at stake in neoliberal policies is a pronounced interventionism.<sup>45</sup> Political decisions regarding women under global neoliberal policies often exclude women's own perspectives. In Turkey, the influence of neoliberal paradigms is evident in decisions made on behalf of women, reflecting the fact that rules and laws intended to secure women's presence and rights in the public sphere have yet to be fully introduced or made accessible to the public.

Politics is not defined by the establishment of a distinct sphere apart from the processes of life's reproduction, but rather by a particular configuration of coexistence between the private and the public, one that simultaneously incorporates and excludes the body. Roupa states that it does not seem possible to maintain the rigid separation between the body and politics that Arendt adopts. For, "the public sphere does not emerge through an act of exclusion (the literal exclusion of the body and its processes from the political sphere), but through a double gesture of exclusion/inclusion that creates the impression of an irreconcilable opposition but conceals an underlying interdependence".<sup>46</sup> Decision-making mechanisms that act on behalf of women hinder the practical implementation of feminist body politics. Additionally, the absence of a feminist perspective in media representations of the body complicates the understanding of body politics. At this juncture, considering the close relationship between geography and the body, it becomes necessary to reconsider how ethnographic relations intersect with the body in the structuring of public spaces.<sup>47</sup> Perceptions of the body in public spaces are shaped by geographical and cultural contexts. In Turkey, as a predominantly Muslim country, a more conservative approach is evident in both the public representation of women's bodies and their display in everyday practices, compared to non-Muslim countries.

<sup>43</sup> Janet Walker, "Psychoanalysis and Feminist Film Theory: The Problem of Sexual Difference and Identity," in *Multiple Voices, in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch. (Minnesota Press, 1998), 82–92.

<sup>44</sup> Alison Phipps, *The Politics of the Body: Gender in a Neoliberal and Neoconservative Age* (Polity Press, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Ankica Čakardić, "Down the Neoliberal Path: The Rise of Free Choice Feminism," *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies* 14 (2017): 36.

<sup>46</sup> Vicky Roupa, "Bodies in Public Spaces: Questioning the Boundary Between the Public and the Private," *Critical Horizons* 23, no. 4 (2022): 354.

<sup>47</sup> Hester Parr, "Feeling, Reading, and Making Bodies in Space," *Geographical Review* 1/2 (2001): 158–67.

Therefore, in the sexual harassment case that became the focus of the #SusmaBitsin process, the female actor's ability to speak out should be seen as an important step for other women to speak out. However, in this masculine order where the body is identified, a woman's speaking out has not been visible in many areas of traditional media. In this context, Adrienne Rich's emphasis that the body constitutes subjectivity and bears the traces of the social and power relations in which it is constituted comes to the fore again.<sup>48</sup> Dislodging the signs of the male-dominated rules of the social order on the body is important in this respect. Geena Davis Institute's sentence "If they can see it, they can be it"<sup>49</sup> foresees a change in the perspective that takes into account the existence of women for female characters who will serve as role models for women in media representations. Only with change and transformation will the masculine mechanism labeling women begin to dissolve. In Frances McDormand's award speech in 2018 (Best Actress Oscar Winner, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*), she emphasized the importance of the inclusion rider while calling for more representation of women in films.<sup>50</sup> The public discourse of prominent actresses such as McDormand can catalyze transformative steps within the existing order. When well-known actresses at Cannes in 2018 spoke on behalf of women and highlighted issues of masculine violence, they contributed to challenging the patriarchal perspective in character representation. As a result, the conventions of classical narrative cinema no longer strictly adhere to traditional Hollywood codes. Even in films that use traditional narrative structures, the presence of strong women comes to the fore. In the TV series and movies that appear on svod platforms, titles with the theme of "strong female heroes" have started to be seen. Instead of savior Batmans and Supermen, *Wonder Women* have started to appear before the audience. The importance of the Alison Bechdel Test emerges at this point. According to this test, the presence of female characters in film narratives becomes important. Some film festivals have mandated that only films that pass this test can participate in the competition. It is only by putting such approaches into practice in the field of media that the masculine language in films and the scopophilic, voyeuristic gaze that serves the male gaze begin to break down.

The outcomes of women's solidarity, collective organizing, and the rise of feminist consciousness have necessitated a shift in the portrayal of stereotypical female characters in media representations. Acting together in the public sphere, taking action, and raising their voices have gradually dismantled male-dominated codes, fostering the emergence of new perspectives. The struggle of the victimized female actress in Turkey, who found support with #SusmaBitsin, has moved from the court to digital public spaces. This case, which was given meaning by the public as a public

<sup>48</sup> Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "Experience, Embodiment, and Epistemologies," *Hypatia* 2/21 (2006): 182.

<sup>49</sup> "About Geena Davis Institute," Geena Davis Institute, accessed March 8, 2025, <https://geenadavisinstitute.org/>.

<sup>50</sup> Jacob Stolworthy, "Inclusion Rider: Frances McDormand's Oscars 2018 Best Actress Speech Explained," *Independent*, March 5, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/inclusion-rider-what-is-frances-mcdormand-oscars-speech-2018-best-actress-a8239776.html>.

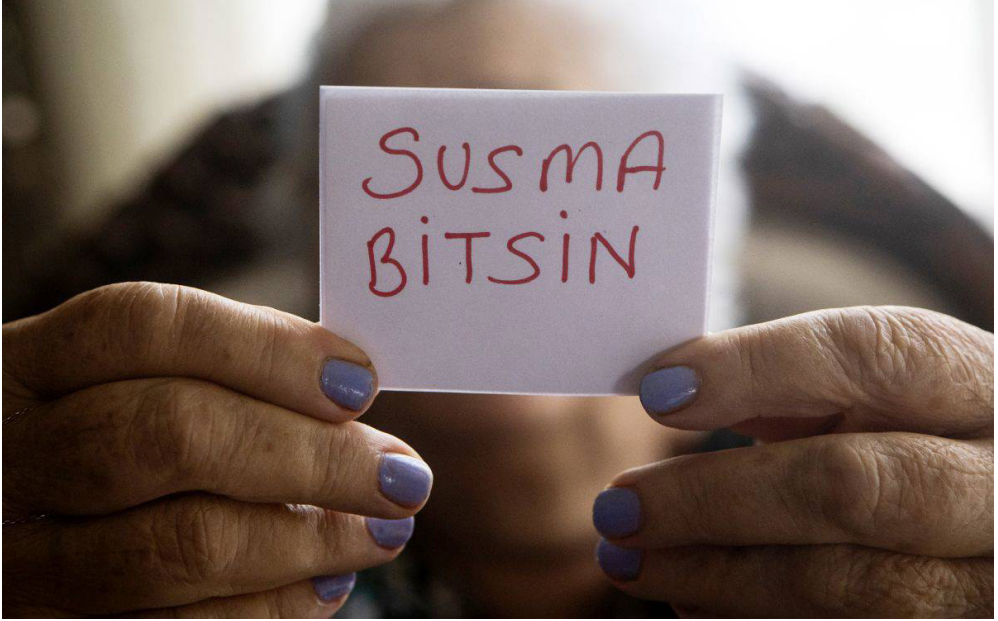
case, broke the phallogentric mechanism of the man who has the power to make decisions over the body of the woman who is seen as passive. Hartsock believes that in order to develop an alternative depiction of the world, both power relations need to be changed and subjectivities based on the experiences of the dominated and marginalized need to be developed. Noting that women are thought of as a set of negative qualities, Hartsock argues that women should be included in the historical, political and theoretical process.<sup>51</sup> In this context, the #SusmaBitsin platform constitutes one of the building blocks paving the way for the construction of an alternative world. Women's solidarity in Turkey, which started with the slogan #SusmaBitsin, continues to this day. Women who come together both through calls on social media and face-to-face meetings continue to discuss the harassment against them in public spaces and make plans on what to do. The most important achievements of the platform are the sexual harassment and mobbing cases won in favor of women. This makes the impact of the power of women's organizing visible in the public sphere.



**Image 1:** “We are 82 women representing the number of female directors who have climbed these stairs since the first edition of the Cannes Film Festival in 1946. In the same period, 1,688 male directors have climbed these very same stairs,” the two-time Oscar winner said

<sup>51</sup> Nancy Hartsock, “Postmodernism and Political Change: Issues for Feminist Theory,” *Cultural Critique, The Construction of Gender and Modes of Social Division II* 14 (1989): 32.





**Image 2:** “We come together to say #SusmaBitsin against harassment, sexual assault and mobbing in our workplaces and to listen to each other”

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