TRANSNATIONAL MARKETING JOURNAL

Transnational Consumers of Turkish Television Drama Series | Deniz Özalpman ±

Abstract

Since the mid-2000s, Turkish television drama series have been exported to many countries and attracted an unprecedented transnational audience. However, despite popularity, there is paucity of research focusing on the transnational understanding(s) of Turkish television drama audiences in different geographies. Through a reception analysis of three mostly cited television series among participants *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (*Magnificent Century*), *Aşk-ı Memnu* (*Forbidden Love*), *Kuzey Güney* (*North South*), this study aimed at offering an understanding beyond overly stated cultural/religious proximity explanations to ascertain traces and elements of empowerment that citizens feel coming through their act of consuming Turkish dramas. For that purpose, in-depth interviews were conducted with Iranian viewers of Turkish television series living in the Austrian capital Vienna. Interpretation of that collected qualitative material suggests re-thinking of the transnational audience's consumption practices that expand tourism and trade flows and other related businesses between the two countries.

Keywords: Transnational consumers; Turkish TV drama series; Iranian transnationals; drama tourism; soft power; cultural proximity; drama-tic image; touristified image.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to focus on Iranian viewers of Turkish TV dramas living abroad (in Vienna). This article provides significant information on the perceptions of Iranian viewers living in abroad, drawing similarities/differences with the local context of Iran. Whether positioned inside analytic/empiric approach or elaborated with interpretive/metric methods, flourishing academic interest on Turkish drama offer multifocal, inter-disciplinary and multi-positioned approaches. Simultaneously, the studies focusing on the transnationality of this medium are increased.

In this reception analysis of transnational Iranian viewers of Turkish TV drama series, I argue that the transnational flow of Turkish dramas in Iran is not primarily an outcome of cultural or religious affinities between the two countries, rather it is a by-product of economic and technologic factors that created a favourable environment for Turkish dramas' distribution (and production within the limits of global media

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market) replacing the South American (mostly Mexican) series in Iran. By analysing the perceptions of Iranian transnational Turkish TV drama viewers, this article makes a contribution to the study of transnational TV flows, transnational consumers' engagement with TV drama series that does not emanate from the West, touristified versus drama-tic image of the countries to finally reflect on the 'drama tourism' from a transnational perspective.

Modern Turkey, building on its imperial Ottoman heritage has multiple geopolitical identities with notes of "European" credentials, an exotic Asian and/or Black Sea region country, transit geography for oil supplies (Dittmer, 2010). The cultural industries in Turkey have shown 'strong growth' recently, however they are not studied systematically and comprehensively yet (Barrowclough and Kozul-Wright, 2008; Lazzeretti et al., 2016). There are not even complete official statistics collected about all cultural and creative activities while some activities are part of the informal economy (Barrowclough and Kozul-Wright, 2008).

We must highlight that differences between Turkey and Northern Europe in terms of cultural industries are classified as 'technology related' (Lazzeretti et al., 2016). For instance, in the UK, the cultural industries in Turkey is considered to have similarities with the 'Mediterranean creativity', because of being 'cultural and heritage driven' (Lazzeretti et al., 2016).

Turkey has many fast growing entertainment companies such as *TIMS Productions, Global Agency, ITV-Inter Medya* and leading commercial TV stations as *Kanal D*, *Star TV* and *ATV Television* that appeal to 400 million audiences in around 75 countries including Middle East, Balkans, Africa, the Far East and the South America.

In terms of social media, Intel Capital and WPP are among the international companies responding to data forecasts positioning Turkey as one of the world's fastest growing markets for online and mobile media entertainment. The estimated number of internet users is 45 million of the country's population of 78 million citizens and this number is expected to grow to 56 million by 2019 (www.emarketer.com). According to official statistics, as the half of the population is under the age of 30, that makes plenty of room for growth in digital adoption (www.emarketer.com/).

Turkey, similar to Brazil, Israel, Japan, Korea and Mexico, is a major exporter of TV dramas and is mostly known for that particular type of media content. I first discuss the literature on global media flows and the paradigm shift to explain the framework of the study. Then I discuss, within the context of global drama market (economic value,

import/export) notions such as 'cultural/religious proximity' and 'soft power' in order to further examine Turkish TV drama as a local industry structured as part of the global media market. Following the description of Iranian communicative spaces, I discuss insights garnered from the qualitative material I have collected through in-depth interviews in Vienna, Austria. Respondents comprise of 19 male and female viewers/consumers aged 22-47. The touristified image versus dramatic image of the country is explored with reference to transnational migration and the ways in which perceptions are shaped by sense of belonging.

Interviews were carried out over two periods (July 2014 and January 2015). After identifying a few initial participants purposively, I snowballed from there to conduct semi-structured interviews. I have decided to end conducting further interviews when the narratives became repetitive and nothing new was heard from the participants (Charmaz, 2006). Interviews were conducted in Turkish, English and German. To protect the anonymity of the participants, the participants were identified with the letter P followed by a two digit number.

While the study focuses on Turkish TV drama (*dizi* in Turkish), the analysis is, in large part, informed with interpretive empiricism. The main purpose here is to move away from primarily text-based approaches and get closer to the transnational consumers in different cultural settings. As noted, the multilayered ways in which transnational consumers engage with TV drama is far broader and varied than a text analysis would allow us to understand.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Huntington's famous "new axis of global politics" referring to the West versus the rest has been challenged by increasing de-Americanized (i.e. de-Westernized) media and cultural flows (Iwabuchi, 2007). Studies of global connectivity and audience reception have concentrated on the ways in which the global (Western and mainly U.S. produced content) interacts with the national (non-Western). Similarly, the idea of globalization as cultural homogenization or as a process of domination by Western (i.e. mainly US) media no longer holds. As Servaes (2008: 42) states viewing a television program is rather a complex process of appropriating cultural meanings that can best be explained by a 'model of production, dissemination and consumption of media outputs whose axis is globalized diffusion and localized appropriation' of cultural product.

Thereby, the 'one way flow of communication and influence from the West' (Schiller, 1976) has been challenged by 'multi-directional'

(Robertson, 1992), 'global flows' and 'contra-flows' that circulate from peripheral to the core countries (Biltereyst and Meers, 2000). Japanese anime, India's *Bollywood*, Brazilian *bossa nova*, Latin American *telenovelas* are conceptualized as the 'global counter-flows', 'multiple flows' or 'non-mainstream media flows'. Likewise, Thussu (2007) argues that nationality rarely matters in commercially driven market-oriented media environment where citizens are principally seen as consumers.

To begin with an audience of a TV drama that does not emanate from the global (as it means Western or American), it is important first to understand the basic nature of the industry both from the micro and the macro-level of transnational production and circulation structures as the economic context sets the limits and boundaries of production, consumption and reception (Wasko and Meehan, 2013). Otherwise, as Morley (2003: 287) states the consumption of global television products without reference to the broader cultural, social and political issues, focused on an understanding of the 'micro-processes of consumption in this or that domestic context' is going to be ultimately of only limited value. The political and economic pressures of local/global media production business are linked to the expansion of markets and maximisation of profits. They also dominate the three intertwined facets: markets of programs, audiences and ratings which determine what is going to be broadcasted globally (Meehan, 2000).

Although TV drama series have always been important within television scheduling, they have never been resided at the heart of global public sphere discussions, unless the economic value of the global media industry is approaching trillion dollars. While the current situation underlines the 'culturalisation of the economy' (Hall, 1988: 28), it also exemplifies why 'culture and economy cannot be theorized separately anymore' (Flew, 2013: 308).

From this perspective, it is important to mention herein Turkey's participation to the *MIPCOM* 2015 as the "country of honour" with its relatively young TV production business. *MIPCOM* is one of the most prestigious global entertainment content market held every year at the *Palais des Festivals* in Cannes, France. This mention is utmost important as the motto of *MIPCOM* is to 'expand internationally'. As cited on its website, *MIPCOM*'s purpose is to help exhibitors to make new connections with TV industry's key decision-makers and content creators so then they could stay at the cutting edge of the latest entertainment trends in order to acquire best TV and online content in every genre (www.mipcom.com). More than 2000 exhibiting companies participate each year to this international festival to get

more people to see their content, to see what others are doing and what technology they are using (www.mipcom.com).

  As Garnham (2011: 46) indicates, argument against free flow and US cultural imperialism that assumes a domination of those markets on the basis of a dumping strategy founded upon control of its large domestic market, no longer holds. As it is explicit in the case of the Turkish market, the richer countries get the more they want to support indigenous national TV productions but within the limits of global trends (Garnham, 2011). In the next section, we look at the growth of the Turkish TV drama industry and its importance for the country.

Turkish TV Drama Series as an Industry

Turkish TV market comprises of 678 TV channels; 25 national, 16 regional and 205 local channels free-to-air and 139 cables and 293 satellites that make 432 paid channels (www.rtuk.gov.tr). The law no. 3984 (dated 13 April 1994) on the establishment of radio and television enterprises and their broadcasts, liberalized television and radio broadcasts that were only permitted by the state, allowing an explosion of private media. Starting from the mid-2000s, Turkish television drama series have begun to be exported to several international markets and attracted an unprecedented transnational audience. Their global popularity started first in the MENA (22 Arab-speaking countries from Middle East and North African region) and the Central and Eastern European countries. This continued in Asia, Russia and Latin America and then slowly spread in Western European markets.

To become part of the global drama market, low price policy was adopted in the beginning. Consequently, the prices used to be lower than $300-500 per episode; a number that has reached today up to $120,000 per episode (Pekman and Tüzün, 2012). As primetime homegrown series, Turkish dramas air on all Turkey's main national television channels weekly, sometimes even daily, while a standard episode runs for two hours. The country, after having imported considerable amount of American soap operas and *telenovelas*, now exports its own drama series to the tune of $250 million per year and eventually aiming to export $1bn worth of content by 2023 (Waller, 2016). The total volume of exports to 75 countries reached US$200m in 2013 (up to 20% at the end of 2013) and for the total filmed entertainment revenue will be worth $543m in 2019, up from $396m in 2014, a CAGR of 6.5% (PwC Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2015-2019 cited in *MIPCOM News* 2015).

Turkish television drama series has similarities with the soap opera or telenovela format from Egypt (Abu-Lughod, 2005), Brazil (Brown-

Beljuli, 2011) or India (Munshi, 2010) as part of melodrama tradition (Yanardağoğlu and Karam, 2013). Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi (2013) classify Turkish series in two major genres as social and political dramas based on stories about the Istanbul elite and their problems with love, sex, marriage, family, money, violence, social class, and organized crime. It is argued that their high production values and men and women's style, beauty and fashion are scored better than the Arab counterparts in their portrayal of the characters (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi, 2013: 18).

Although, they are held responsible for 'increasing divorce rates' and 'the weakening of faith among the youth', Turkish dramas are popularly watched in many Muslim countries (Al-Hiajem, 2012). In the same vein, these series triggered conservative reactions in Arab countries and Pakistan (Jawad, 2013) and perceived as a 'threat to Islamic values' (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi, 2013; Mohamed, 2012). In Iran, Turkish TV drama series are highly popular among both women and men, who watch them via illegal satellite dishes such as GEM TV banned in the country (Hürriyet Daily, 2011). GEM TV was first established in London in 2006, mostly to serve Persian and Middle East market. Since 2010, Turkish dramas are available on GEM Online TV both with dubbing or subtitles in Persian. As a result of that viewership, some argue for the re-evaluation of Turkish culture by Iranian audiences fascinated by the reconciliation of 'Islam with social freedom' (Khalaj, 2013).

Before we jump to Iran and communicative spaces, herein the literature leads to investigate some popularly cited notions such as 'cultural proximity' and 'soft power' thesis.

Notions and Beyond

Iranians and Turks feel 'cultural proximity' in many respects such as about food, music and dance, markets/bazaars and ways of communal living and values, norms and close family ties, common words or expressions. However, the 'cultural proximity' argument (Straubhaar, 1991) that has come to dominate the discourse on the global popularity of TV dramas has left several questions unanswered as the appeal of Turkish modernity mostly in Arab countries and beyond (i.e. they reach beyond the Ottoman geography) (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi, 2013). Similarly, it does not take into consideration the series of opportunities arising from regional conjuncture as the war in Syria and political turmoil in Egypt and Lebanon; countries who were traditionally producing TV dramas in the Arab/Muslim world before the Turkish drama expansion and/or the economic crisis in Greece (Dajani, 2006; Yörük and Vatikiotis, 2013). Further, these cultural products have been popularly consumed in new markets such as

Latin American countries or Japan since the last years. Whether they centre on cultural, historical, genre or thematic affinities, the proximity theses still fail to address the flow of Turkish dramas in its full complexity (Yeşil, 2015: 45).

Moreover, alongside cultural proximity, the 'soft power' is a popularly used concept, which is mainly wrapped inside a national political narrative as an alternative to and complementary of hard power (i.e. military and economic power) (Fisher Onar, 2009). According to Mohebi (2015), 'soft-power' status can be seen through some facts and figures related to the international tourism and dynamics in Turkey. Contrary to this argument, Iwabuchi (2007: 81) argues that the globalization process made impossible to single out the absolute symbolic centre of a particular country or region. Therefore, it is difficult to describe Turkish drama expansion as the country's 'soft power' in neighbouring region.

It is tempting to interpret the unprecedented popularity of Turkish dramas in a region consisting primarily of the Ottoman geography (as for instance Balkan and MENA countries and/or Iran) and to conclude it as a manifestation of Turkey's expanding influence in this region. However, within the limits of this study, the 'soft power' thesis is neither enough to ascertain traces and elements of consumption, nor to claim potential empowerment and subjective meaning makings of consumers in their act of consuming Turkish dramas. Therefore, first, I explore Iranian media sphere and transnational consumers' sense of belonging in the next section.

Iran and Uncontrollable Communicative Spaces

Iran is an unchanged neighbour of Turkey for almost four hundred years, although the main divide between Iran and Turkey date back to the 16th century when Persia converted to Shiite Islam in part to distinguish itself from the Sunni caliphate of the Ottoman Empire (Barkey, 2013). Further, despite Islam being the dominant religion in both countries, state structures and modernization processes of the two neighbouring countries differ radically. Iran is a theocracy in which Islamic law rules and clerics play decisive roles with the control over the military, whereas in constitutionally secular Turkey the military is the self-appointed guardian of secularism (Barkey, 2013).

In brief, Iran suspects Turkey is acting as a surrogate for Western interests, thus carrying into the minds of the so-called innocent citizens via TV dramas series some Western/American values (Barkey, 2013). Turkish dramas are blamed for rising divorce rates and destabilizing the institution of family in Iran as they have eroded the taboos

surrounding 'risqué topics' such as adultery, love triangles and premarital sex and the like (The Times of Israel, 2013).

Global/local nexus, satellite and new technologies, regional factors and multi-national cultural trade make the control of communicative spaces progressively difficult for the state. Those online and offline spaces of communication are whether established forms of media, public squares and public physical spaces or the internet, varying from mass media to smaller organized spaces (Sarikakis, 2009). In Iran, citizens' daily use of media is very rigidly structured according to the Islamic rules, as there is any private TV or radio channel in the country where the state broadcaster Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) holds the monopoly of all TV and radio channels.

IRIB has 8 domestic and 6 satellite TV channels targeting international audiences, 4 international news channels and 30 provincial TV channels available nationwide and some of which is available in local languages and dialects. Additionally, all blog and social media platforms are banned with the exception of Instagram, the most popular social media that is not filtered in the country. As one participant of this study notes; 'even the officials of the government have *Instagram*'. According to another participant, the reason of this specific freedom lies in the government's intention 'to let something free, very small window they purposively do not check, because if they wanted, they could'.

In order to explain the reasons of the state ban for Turkish dramas, let's look at some extracts from a well-known pro-government Islamic website suggested by participants of that study. These can be considered reflective of the government's stance. According to the *Farhang News Islamic Revolution* website, Turkish TV drama series assign leading roles to female characters described as part of the 'matriarchal soaps' (Geraghty, 1994):

> The female character is a traditional woman on the way to modernism, she tries to showing off and gaining physical privileges as beauty, fashion, slim. Female characters are portrayed as always competing one another, following closely fashion and luxurious life style and spending lots of money on wedding and parties. Although they do not like betrayal in love, they cheat their family or husband to reach to the love. In critical moments, female characters drink alcohol and smoke and those practices are normalized in parties. Turkish female characters try to become like American women (…), having a *Facebook* account is rather welcome (…)

This extract sheds light to the context within which Turkish dramas are discussed and criticized on *IRIB TV* channels by religious state authorities. According to our respondents, Turkish dramas are often condemned in state TV channels with comments similar to that presented above.

Transnational Sense of Belonging via Turkish TV Dramas

Transnational consumers who participated in this study are defined as transnationals who have "dual lives by speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders" (Portes et al., 1999: 217). I have stayed away from concepts that still draw from national imaginary such as 'ethnic minority', 'diaspora', and 'identity' to focus on the subjective meaning makings of the participants (Robins and Aksoy, 2005) and to avoid speaking on their behalf.

Although participants settle in the capital Vienna on various periods, long or short, they define themselves as 'Iranian' and they often use statements such as 'I am not from here', 'in Austria', 'here and in Iran', 'at home' and the like. Participants explain their choices for consuming these particular content by saying 'they are well-known at home', 'it is heard from friends', 'people speak about them in Iran'. As we see in this specific case, local context is very important and decisive in determining the consumption choices of transnationals.

Further, the shift on transnational media audiences conceptualizes transnationals within their 'multiple positions' (Mankekar, 1999), 'plural belongings' (Moores, 2005), 'multiple identities' (Rizvi, 2006), 'international frames of reference' (Robins and Aksoy, 2005) with their 'cultural versus critical proximity' (Georgiou, 2012a). In the same vein, Georgiou (2012b) draws attention to the need of 'ontological security' to explain transnationals' consuming habits of television. Having said that, some interpretations of the participants draw parallelism with suggestions of the earlier theoretical conceptualizations. However, given the expansive literature in transnational media studies and audience reception, I do not review these theoretical issues, but point to new technologies that facilitated the transnationalization of Turkish dramas while discussing the reflections in consumers' daily lives and the relationships they establish with these dramas.

In the next session, a brief background about the three selected TV dramas including the story, main characters and specific features making them symbolic and popular among consumers are presented. This would help especially the international readers who are not familiar with these dramas.

The Background of Three Popular TV Series

As already mentioned, Turkey has many leading production and distribution companies that wish to become global TV series exporters. Alongside these major distributors and producers, leading broadcasters and production companies have also entered the export sector. Since the late 2000s, some TV channels have launched their own sales units and major production companies and have struck exclusive deals with global distributors.

So, the first similarity between these three popularly cited drama series is their big budget production and 'glocal' or "transnational" (Sirkeci, 2013) distribution networks that provide them their titles with an international recognition and a proven track record. That's how these three series has become available for the transnational consumers in and outside Iran. For instance (1) *Forbidden Love* (*Aşk-ı Memnu*, 2008-2010) is the hidden love affair and adultery of a beautiful and young woman with her husband's nephew. It was produced by *Ay Yapım* and broadcast in Turkey by *Kanal D* for two seasons comprised of 79 episodes, and then sold to around 50 countries by *Calinos Entertainment*, the first Turkish company marketing drama series, movies and television programs in the international platform. *Calinos* sold the rights for *Forbidden Love* to *Telemundo*, which adopted the series as a remake under the name *Pasión Prohibida* (January-June 2013) and broadcasted it in the United States and Latin America.

Similarly, (2) *Magnificent Century* (*Muhteşem Yüzyıl,* 2011-2014) based on the life story of *Suleiman the Magnificent* and his beautiful concubines living in Topkapı Palace, is produced by *TIMS Productions* and distributed since 2012 to more than 80 countries by *Global Agency, which has* acquired the title of 'the most marketed Turkish drama' (*Cumhuriyet Pazar* (Turkish daily) January 6, 2013). Besides their global popularity, the series open wide range of political issues to public discussions such as fratricide, filicide, Christian-born Janissary soldiers, converted Muslims of Turkey and their identity construction, Christian-born women as concubines/wives/political advisors occupying high-rank positions inside Ottoman dynasty, slave system and Islam, holy wars/Crusades, multi-ethnic and multi-religious past of Ottoman Empire, relationships with Europe and the like.

The third series (3) *Kuzey Güney* (2011-2013) is the story of two brothers who fight for the love of the same woman. The series produced by *Ay Yapım,* was broadcast and distributed by *Kanal D* in Turkey and abroad. The content of all three series are based upon a love triangle between two men and one woman. The protagonist male characters are handsome, charming and loving *Don Juan*(s) in rivalry with another male character whether brother, son, nephew or best friend.

So, in these Shakespearian tragedies, protagonist female characters as young and beautiful women, are implicitly or explicitly the cause of this rivalry. Although they share different social, political and historical background, the series show the world of the rich and the poor in harmony. The poor does not blame the rich for anything but he (and she) really wants to succeed, that make the cause of the poor legitimate and the rich's self-protection understandable for all. Thus, in the series, everybody wants to be successful and they all work/fight/intrigue to reach their goal that is mostly described as getting a better position and status in life.

So, this love of money, wealth and power is very welcome in all three series, and love is something uncontrollable like in real life, as one participant says 'when it happens, it happens'. In the next section, we will reflect on Iranian transnational consumers' familiarity with the content, in order to understand what is new and interesting in their viewing experiences.

Consumers' Familiarity with Turkish dramas

In the case of Turkish dramas that do not come from the putative West imposing a Christian-bound culture to the Iranian transnationals, consumers found lot of similarities with Western and Iranian cultures simultaneously. Most of the participants can easily relate these three dramas content to the 'real life' or to their 'daily life' as they explain the stories 'that can happen to anyone; a forbidden love, the success story of a man/woman who wants it all, the poor who tries to become rich'. The series are described as 'life stories and life styles' thus rendering participants' consumption practices as a sort of 'life lessons', serving sort of answers and experiences for how to do to succeed in life, to reach to the target and to the main goal (love, marriage, career) to keep an eye on the close surrounding and the like.

When participants were asked what they liked in the series, they offered a similar set of responses:

> People like colourful women and their appearances with different style, fashion (...) and culture, tradition and food is very similar to Iran (P8)

> In Kuzey Güney, it is really middle class life style and family, we don't really have differences between us, life style is exactly the same comparing Istanbul to Tahran but not Iran to Turkey (P16)

> In Turkish dramas, the actors and actresses are really handsome, dresses and the make-up, fashion, the clothes and they explicitly show richness, nice cars, costumes (P10)

In addition to this, participants say they translate the series' main characters in their cultural understandings very easily with a sense of humour, thus making them Persian as shown in below examples:

> Sultan Süleyman is Zan Zalil; a man who obeys whatever his wife says; too cheap for a king to become Zan Zalil (P13)

> In Forbidden Love, we call Mohannad (Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ) as Dokhtar Kosh; a woman killer, he is such a character, selfish, handsome who likes women (…) In Kuzey Güney he was so macho, there is an Iranian comedian who imitates him; when he was speaking on the phone (P4)

> In Kuzey Güney, the translator used a lot of sense of humour; (Barış) Ba-rish character means 'with beard' in Persian, when he shaved himself for the first time he said; I use to be Barish now I am Bi-rish that means without beard (…) Everybody was laughing (P3)

> In Forbidden Love, Nihal is Sirish; someone who tries to have someone even if the person does not want her, she just tries (P1)

The participants explained what is "new" in Turkish dramas as follows:

> In Iran, we don't have rich people's forbidden love stories on TV, in Iranian cinemas you can find things about poverty, social problems to catch the international attention, Iranian directors can show themselves in international institutions, festivals, they believe that when you talk about the problems and bad things international institutions and festivals like it more (P9)

> I like the character of the mum in Forbidden Love, that person she likes money, nothing is important for her just money; she tries to fight with everything just because to save this kind of life style. For us this is very interesting, TV series that show only luxurious life style, in Iran we do not have this (P11)

> I sometimes watch Austrian dramas but this is something completely different, jokes, daily life etc… but they do not show money, richness as well, German series are better (P2)

> I like seeing this kind of life style in the series, because all the time they exclude them   everywhere, they don't speak at all about them, they are rich, they have luxury life and in the series you sympathize with them (P7)

> Here (in Vienna/Austria), they don't have much series, even Austrian do not watch them, people watch American series like *The Mentalist, Game of Thrones*… (P12)

While the study reveals the series are seen as consumer-driven and entertainment based per participants' comments, it also shows the power of the series' narratives which are easily adaptable to the everyday life of the viewers. The participants comment on the happiness depending on class structures in Turkish dramas; 'romantic, wise and happy people belong to the middle class' and 'the cheater, mentally and/or physically sick, unhappy and depressed belong to the upper middle class' and 'the poor is the happiest' in the series.

On the other hand, participants are critical of that 'modern life style as an imitation of European/American version and window dressing focused on rich people's private life' as 'they know Turkey'. In other words, participants both enjoy and criticize simultaneously what they translate as 'this focus on rich people's lives' and 'this description of rich life style'.

In the next session, participants' knowledge about Turkey is discussed to understand what touristified image of the place is in the minds of these transnational consumers I interviewed.

Touristified versus Dramatic Image of the Country

The touristified image of a country is exposed to the potential tourists through narratives that describe places by giving reference to its uniqueness, gastronomy, history, "three S gateways: sea-sun-sand", cultural sites, multifarious sightseeing possibilities, luxury or all-inclusive resorts and the like (Urbain, 1991). They had a number of similar conceptions or names that can be cited as coastal tourism, faith tourism, winter tourism, health tourism, gastronomy tourism, nature and ecotourism and the like.

For participants, Turkey is 'neighbour', 'a traditional society', 'place that relatives, friends and family visit since many years and most importantly Istanbul', 'an already known place due to neighbourhood relations', 'another Muslim society'. So, as the country is already known, participants' critiques are mostly structured around 'non-existent richness portrayed in a modern life style' just like Mexican TV series participants commented; 'they are not rich but they show themselves like this'. The statements below show us the importance of local (and transnational) context.

> Turkish dramas show modern life, a life style (…) modern means Western to us, Turkish TV dramas series try to show Western/American life style but actually it is a very traditional society, like us, they do not live like in the series (P5)

Turkey wants to be part of European Union; Turkey is trying to imitate European life style, to be part of Europe, that's why they present the country as modern (P6)

Turkish series focus on rich people, why they are just talking about rich people? They want to show yes ok it is a kind of life style, honestly I cannot believe that. Because when I think about the percentage of these people, %10 maybe maximum (P12)

With visual things they want to promote luxury life style, sometimes it is good   because   you   encourage   ordinary people to have this kind of living (P2)

The consumers are in the same wave length with the home country consumers who do not agree with the ideology of the state, as they comment 'the one who shares state perspective, do not watch these series at all'. The findings unfold the symbiotic relationship between TV dramas and the tourists/consumers giving rise to the number of TV dramas, as well as the complex relationships of the viewers with their home country through their favourite TV programmes.

Paradoxically, although the participants are critical and distant with the so-called 'rich life style' portrayed in the series, they still enjoy their viewing experiences. This does not mean that TV drama consumers/viewers are "easy-to-manipulate masses". I argue that their viewing enjoy come from the series' melodramatic, humorous and Cinderella storyline thus universal elements proven to be popular in soap opera and telenovelas (Martinez, 2005). As is seen, those elements help to build up an enjoyable drama-tic image of the country.

Drama Tourism as Consumer Practices
International TV dramas and blockbusters are 'catalysts' for 'drama tourism' and has social/cultural/economic consequences for each country as they affect international market, regulatory bodies of media   and   communication   systems,   transnational   business relationships, international logistics and audiovisual tax incentives for international production, co-production and the like (Kim et al., 2009).

Drama tourism, as one of the consequences of the globalization process, means the offers of various public/private places by some guided tours/trips and visits to the filming locations to re-consume dramatic spaces of the globally popular TV drama series. For instance, known as *J-drama*, Japanese TV dramas have audience and fans throughout Asia, therefore addressing the international audiences within different cultural settings. Now the Japanese capital Tokyo is represented by travel agencies, hotels, and tour operators as *Drama-*

tic Tokyo accompanied by numerous *Tokyo Filming Location Map and Handbooks*.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy, produced in New Zealand, not only has boosted tourism in the country, but also it became part of the cultural policy discourse consequently (Lawn and Bronwyn, 2006). The historic walled city of Dubrovnik on the coast of the Adriatic Sea made swell tourist numbers in Croatia by virtue of the notably popular *Game of Thrones* (Wasko and Shanadi, 2006). In the same vein, the popularity of the Korean TV dramas in the MENA increased the number of tourists to Korea from those countries (www.korea.net).

Besides, this symbiotic relationship between TV dramas and the rise in the number of tourists/TV dramas audience has not gone unnoticed by state authorities and the audio-visual market. Local governments and ministries of culture and tourism from different regions now woo big-budget film production; look for collaboration with film makers, TV producers/distributors simply because of the enormous power of drama series/blockbusters to generate foreign exchange and to contribute to the country's economy (Wasko and Shanadi, 2006). Similarly, Turkish authorities have simplified the film and TV permitting processes in the last couple of years and, a tax incentive of 25 percent was announced for international film and TV producers by Culture and Tourism Ministry (Mipcom News 2015: 38).

Among the participants, 9 of them made short term visits to Istanbul and to the south coast of Turkey following their drama consumption. Participants commonly reported that 'there is a big middle class who does not share such a luxurious and glamorous life style shown in the series'. The rest of the participants who did not yet visit the country, note that 'if they could find the occasion, they want to go to Turkey (Istanbul) and some want to buy some dresses/jewellery/fashionable objects of the protagonist female characters referred as 'Bihter or Hürrem's dresses' for instance, or buy 'some tissues and ornaments from Grand Bazaar similar to one they saw in Magnificent Century' or visit the series' shooting locations as part of touristic activities within the organized trips.

Furthermore, an Exhibition Museum has recently been opened (December 2014) in Istanbul in the name of *Magnificent Century* in order to attract transnational consumers deriving from the direct relationship between TV dramas and the rise in the number of tourists-consumers. Yet, the presence of this Exhibition Museum epitomises respectively, an ancillary artefact as a museum that can exist independently from the TV series, for an entry fee equal to the *Topkapı Palace* museum. One of the participants, who had visited the

museum, expressed his experience as 'enjoyable' and 'beautiful wardrobe'.

According to the official figures of the Culture and Tourism Ministry, Turkish TV drama exports had created a 'drama tourism' that oriented travel agencies in East and West to offer organized travel to the places where TV dramas are shot (The Balkan Chronicle, 2010; Mohebi, 2015). However, 'the soft belly' of this 'drama economy' is the sector's vulnerability in the face of economic fluctuations and global crises (Pekman and Tüzün, 2012). Despite the rapid success and expansion, Turkish drama economy has its weaknesses and structural problems that prevent it to become a bigger competitor in the market to challenge *Hollywood* or *Bollywood* products (Pekman and Tüzün, 2012: 101).

Conclusion

In this article, a small contribution is made to an under-researched issue. It is clear that Turkish TV dramas have an impact on 'drama tourism'. Nevertheless, to further elaborate its implications more empirical work is needed to unpack the complex web of national cultural policies as well as dynamics of the media as a sector. On the one hand, state monopoly in broadcasting in Turkey had ended two decades ago and now the policies seem to be geared towards the interest of neo-conservative claims on how television, and cable programmes, cable channels, cable system ownership ought to be organized.

On the other hand, participants' consumption practices and their viewing experiences are transformed and the expansion of tourism, trade and other related businesses between the two countries benefits the country of origin of these dramas. Findings add further evidence that drama tourism is growing. However, we ask, to what extent, drama tourism as part of cultural policy can serve to the public interest given the close collaboration between the TV drama market and the government.

Drama tourism and its different forms are designed for "space consumers" or "consumers of space" and not citizens. When we imagine these shooting locations; if it is an indoor space as a school, villa or house then we talk about an empty space, a representation of representation that with some waxwork of drama artists could have been fulfilled, just like some accompanying luggage. If it is an outdoor space, audience/consumer/tourist can take pictures and consequently contribute to the consumption of spaces that have no history or culture but just a lucrative ambition.

Of course, it is not possible to explicitly elaborate all the problems related to the transnational consumers' engagement with TV dramas in a single article. However, this was one of the early attempts with acknowledged limitations.

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